

Nutrition on the Rise

The RENEW Project



In recent years, the world has undergone a revolution on many fronts. More people are using family planning, children are healthier, maternal mortality has dropped, and girls are better educated.¹

However, malnutrition remains a great challenge, particularly for mothers and children. It contributes to the deaths of millions of children each year—or more than 1 out of every 3 child deaths—and causes a staggering cost worldwide.²



Global data from the past 20 years demonstrates the relationship between malnutrition and life expectancy. Since 1988, countries such as Brazil and Chile have made investments in policies and programs to reduce malnutrition. These investments have resulted in decreased stunting levels, which is associated with longer life expectancy.

A well-nourished child will grow into an adult with fewer chronic diseases that can end life prematurely, so investments early in life are essential.



Research on nutrition interventions has demonstrated that nutrition is a smart investment.

Investments in nutrition help children reach their full potential, accelerate progress on key global health targets (including reducing death and illness in mothers and children), and advance progress on key economic development targets. In addition, nutrition interventions add value to other investments in health, education, and poverty reduction.³



There is a 1,000-day window of opportunity during pregnancy and a child's first two years when nutrition investments are critical for giving a child the “best shot” in reaching his or her potential.⁴

A child's healthy development begins during pregnancy and depends on the mother's adequate intake of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients. Once the baby is born, exclusive breastfeeding is necessary for the first six months. From six months on, the addition of nutritious solid foods is absolutely critical to ensure the child grows correctly.



The cost of malnutrition during this 1,000-day window is almost always irreversible. It can result in brain damage and poorer educational performance, growth and development problems, and an increased risk of developing chronic and potentially debilitating diseases later in life.

Another challenge is that the effects of malnutrition are not always visible. For instance, the three girls in this photo are the same age. However, the two girls on the left suffer from stunting and underdevelopment due to malnutrition and may never reach their full height, weight, or potential.⁵



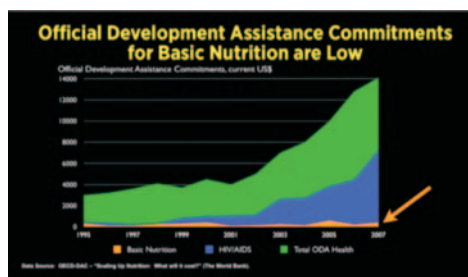
Malnutrition is cyclical; the intergenerational cycle of growth failure shows how it is transferred from generation to generation.⁶

A malnourished woman is at a greater risk of obstetric complications and delivering a low-birth-weight baby. This baby girl, who is at a higher risk of illness, death, and delayed development, will be more likely to suffer from growth failure during her early, critical years. She is likely to grow into a stunted or underweight woman, which brings us back to the beginning of the cycle. Adolescent pregnancy also heightens the risk of low birth weight and makes it harder to break the cycle.



Investments in nutrition during the 1,000-day window of opportunity pay for themselves and produce a lifetime of benefits for individuals, families, and nations.

Well-nourished children perform better in school. This can add at least 10 percent to their personal lifetime earnings and contribute to a more productive labor force—translating to a 3 percent annual GDP boost for the country.⁷



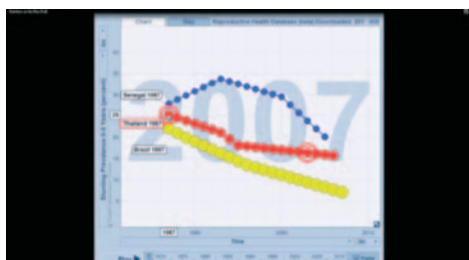
Key nutrition interventions also produce returns up to 16 times greater than the initial investment, or a saving of \$16 for every \$1 spent.⁸

Despite this favorable cost-to-benefit ratio, development assistance for nutrition is still very low. Although contributions for health and HIV/AIDS have increased in recent years, nutrition remains grossly underfunded.



Three basic, well-tested interventions can help protect mothers and children:

- Ensuring they have access to essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.
- Ensuring that parents and caregivers get information on improved feeding and care practices and the support they need to apply that knowledge.
- Guaranteeing that mothers and children have access to the right variety of foods and the right amount of foods as well as therapeutic foods to treat malnourished children.⁹



Over the past 20 years, Brazil, Thailand and Senegal are examples of high-flying performers who have successfully instituted nutrition interventions that have decreased stunting levels.

The government of Thailand, for example, implemented a community nutrition program in the 1980s and early 1990s that reduced stunting rates by 3 percent a year. In 2007, only about 15 percent of children were stunted.¹⁰



Today, we have unprecedented opportunities to scale up nutrition interventions. They include:

- New health initiatives that create opportunities to implement nutrition-based community interventions.
- Food security and agriculture development program investments that provide opportunities to bolster key nutrition interventions.
- Innovative public/private partnerships between agencies and the food processing industry, which could expand the consumption of essential vitamins and minerals.
- The introduction of new products, such as Sprinkles, which provide vitamins and minerals directly to children at risk of micronutrient deficiencies.¹¹



The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement aims to bring country and global leaders together to combat malnutrition.

More than 25 countries from 3 continents have banded together with over 100 international organizations and donors to mobilize broad commitment to advance the nutrition agenda.¹²



Malnutrition is a global problem. Finding a solution is a shared responsibility.

There are several key actions we can take to strengthen commitments to eradicate malnutrition:

1. Build on the SUN movement to scale up nutrition interventions by working together to build public understanding and political will.
2. Mobilize additional resources and better align assistance from development partners, including those in the private sector.
3. Ensure that key nutrition interventions are integrated into development strategies across all sectors, namely health, agriculture, education, rural development, and social protection programs.

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