MALNUTRITION: NIGERIA’S SILENT CRISIS

A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION

SCRIPT

LONG VERSION

(20 MINUTES)
The presentation starts with a black screen.

► Slide 1: Click Forward (pause in silence while the picture comes on; hold the picture for about 5 seconds)

► Slide 2: Click Forward (pause in silence until the picture fades away)

► Slide 3: Click Forward

As we look back across the decades in Nigeria, we have witnessed some remarkable achievements……

► Slide 4: Click Forward (music starts)

More children are surviving…… with child deaths dropping from 22 percent of children under 5 in 1980, to 13 percent in 2013.¹

Our economy is growing…… with income rising from about 150,000 Naira per person to 350,000 Naira per person in 2011.²

And we are better connected…… with about 115 million subscribers, or about 68 per cent of the population, using cell phones today.³

WE…are a nation on the move!

But there is one challenge where we are sadly behind……

► Slide 5: Click Forward

……MALNUTRITION in mothers and children, which continues to impose a staggering cost to the nation—despite having the solutions.

► Slide 6: Click Forward

Today, malnutrition contributes to the deaths of an estimated half a million children under the age of 5 each year in Nigeria…………………or about 1 out of every 2 child deaths.⁴

► Slide 7: Click Forward

So what has the experience on nutrition programs taught us over the years?

► Slide 8: Click Forward

It’s taught us three reasons why it’s important to invest in nutrition.⁵

The first, is that nutrition is a smart investment, because it helps children survive and reach their full potential, providing a lifetime of benefits!
Secondly, nutrition is a smart investment because it accelerates progress on key national health targets— including reducing deaths and illnesses in mothers and children.

And thirdly, nutrition is a smart investment, because it accelerates progress on key economic development targets for the country.

It’s rare that one investment can achieve this many goals.

Nutrition interventions add value to all of our other investments, taking them up to the next level.

So how do nutrition investments help achieve these three goals?

Well, the story starts in the 1000 day window of opportunity between pregnancy and a child’s second birthday— this period becomes the “best shot” at helping a child reach his or her potential— and sets the stage for life.

Let’s take a closer look at just how critical this period is...

Starting in the womb, before birth, the fetus is at risk if the mother lacks essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients needed for brain, bone, and organ development. Many pregnant women in Nigeria suffer from anemia during pregnancy, which can cause health problems for the baby.

Once the baby is born—from birth to the first 6 months— early and exclusive breastfeeding without adding any other foods or liquids is the very best way to ensure a healthy baby.

And after the first 6 months of life, adding sufficient quantities of nutritious solid foods along with continued breastfeeding is absolutely necessary to make sure that the child grows correctly— most stunting happens in this critical period.

The cost of malnutrition during this 1000 day window is almost always irreversible…
Slide 15: Click Forward
- damage to the brain, leading to poor educational performance and lower IQ,
- poor growth and development, and...remarkably...
- this early deprivation increases a child’s risk of developing chronic diseases as an adult.

Slide 16: Click Forward
Chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, all requiring medical attention later in life.................

Slide 17: Click Forward
Another huge challenge is that malnutrition in children can happen and persist for years.........and we can't always see it.

These two little boys are both from the same village ........can you guess how old each boy is?

(Pause)

Both boys are the same age.......they are both eight years old.........but, they show very different levels of development.

The little boy on the left is stunted. This means that he has short stature for his age due to chronic malnutrition. And it’s unlikely that he will ever catch up and reach his full height, or his full potential like his taller village playmate on the right.

Slide 18: Click Forward
The invisible nature of chronic malnutrition also sets up a pattern that we see happening generation after generation.

This Intergenerational cycle of growth failure...

Slide 19: Click Forward
...starts with a malnourished woman. When mothers are malnourished or stunted, they are at greater risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. They also have a greater risk of delivering an infant with low birth weight.8

Slide 20: Click Forward
......like this baby girl here, who is at higher risk of illness and death, and at higher risk of delayed emotional and intellectual development, and....

Slide 21: Click Forward
........also more likely to suffer from growth failure in those important, early developmental
years ............ which....

► Slide 22: Click Forward
... in turn lead to low weight and stunting in the teen years...... those teen years that are critical for growth and development, and the time when adolescents gain almost 50 percent of their adult body weight, and 20 percent of their adult height.\(^9\)

► Slide 23: Click Forward
And that takes us back to the malnourished woman............And the cycle of poor nutrition perpetuates itself generation after generation.

► Slide 24: Click Forward
Adolescent pregnancy also increases the risk of low birth weight and adds to the difficulty in breaking the cycle.\(^10\)

Unfortunately, we see this cycle of growth failure happening over and over with families across the country.

► Slide 25: Click Forward
Why does Nigeria continue to have such a serious malnutrition problem?

► Slide 26: Click Forward
One big reason is that many mothers and caregivers simply don’t know how to feed their infants and children appropriately. There is not a good understanding of when to start solid foods or what kinds of food to prepare to help the body grow correctly.

► Slide 27: Click Forward
Another reason the country is plagued with so much malnutrition is the lack of food security in the household. Many families do not have access to food or sufficient quantities of food.

And this is not just a phenomenon that we see in the north!

► Slide 28: Click Forward
Turning now to our Google Earth Satellite map, we’re going to zoom in on Nigeria and start our tour in the bustling city of Abuja. Here we are looking into the National Stadium located on the eastern side of the city.

As we move toward the Central Area, we get a sense of how much Abuja has grown. Although people often think that here, in the seat of power, malnutrition is not really a problem...... they are wrong. Recent reports show that one out of five children in Abuja are stunted.\(^11\)

TELEPORT
Panning over to Lagos, we’re going to focus our attention on the slum area of Mushin, a densely populated area which is home to over half a million people.

Full of informal settlements and poor living conditions......malnutrition affects the lives of most families, with more than one-third of children stunted.\textsuperscript{12}

Although the rate of malnutrition definitely increases with poverty, it is \textit{not} a problem that is unique to the poor.

\textsc{Teleport}

If we move to Ikoyi—one of the wealthier locations in Lagos—we can see some of the big houses and luxurious swimming pools. It’s easy to assume that wealthy families do not suffer from malnutrition. How could there be malnourished kids in \textit{this} neighborhood? Yet, 13 percent of children born to the \textit{richest} families in Nigeria also suffer from stunting.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsc{Teleport}

As we continue our tour, we learn that there is no part of the country that is immune to malnutrition.

\textsc{Teleport}

Here we are along the river in the Niger Delta Region, where the land is rich in petroleum.... and many families rely on fishing or farming for their nutritional needs. But the area’s abundant supply of natural resources is not enough to ensure proper nutrition for those living in this area.

Malnutrition is a major problem in the Delta, especially among children, where we find that one out of every five children are stunted.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsc{Teleport}

And finally, we discover that malnutrition exists even in places where agriculture is the main livelihood.

Like here in Northern Nigeria—an agricultural hub, where a lot of the country’s produce is grown. A large part of the North can support year round production making it a steady supplier of food for both the North and other parts of the country. Yet, despite the abundance of food, including nutrition-rich fruits and vegetables, malnutrition is widespread here as well.

(Pause)
The other bad news, is that if we look back over the years, we don’t seem to be making progress very quickly.

► Slide 29: Click Forward
For more than a decade...

► Slide 30: Click Forward
…the rate of chronic malnutrition or stunting has stagnated at around 40 percent, with little improvement across the years. And while we do see some improvement in the most recent survey in 2013...

► Slide 31: Click Forward
….still, more than one third of children across the nation are stunted.

► Slide 32: Click Forward
In this map of the regions, we have a bird’s eye view of stunting levels across the country. We can see that even in the areas with the lowest rates, such as the South South and the South East, nearly 1 out of 5 children are stunted. And in the North West and the North East, about HALF of all children are chronically malnourished.

► Slide 33: Click Forward
According to the World Health Organization’s recommendations, after the 6th month of life, children must be fed a variety of foods to make sure they receive all the nutrients they need.

► Slide 34: Click Forward
But, a national survey shows that 2 out of every 3 children are not receiving the right foods. Many are eating only starches like cassava and rice, and they are not eating those vitamin rich fruits and vegetables, or animal source foods like meat, fish and eggs—that provide the body’s basic building blocks.

► Slide 35: Click Forward (TRENDALYZER)
Let’s now turn to our trend graph, or bubble chart, and focus on the rate of exclusive breastfeeding over time in Nigeria, and compare that to Ghana.

► Slide 36: Click Forward
On the left axis, we have the percent of infants under six months who are exclusively breastfed. This axis goes from zero to eighty percent.

► Slide 37: Click Forward
On the bottom axis, we have time, which goes from 1994 through 2013.
In 1994, both Nigeria and Ghana had about 7% of infants who were exclusively breastfed, which is very, very low.

Let’s play this forward now and watch what happens over the course of time in each country.....and we see right away....that the percent...

…of children exclusively breastfed in Ghana starts to go up dramatically..........and it goes higher.........and then even higher.........

...until by 2013, 63 percent of infants, or almost 2 out of every 3 infants in Ghana, are exclusively breastfed...

… while in Nigeria, only 17% of infants, or about 1 in every 6 infants, are exclusively breastfed.

So what did Ghana do to improve their breastfeeding program?

In 1992 they adopted a policy on exclusive breastfeeding...

...and since 1995, they have been implementing the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, which promotes successful breastfeeding through designated health facilities.

In 2000, Ghana adopted the Breastfeeding Promotion Regulation, a legislative instrument to prevent aggressive marketing of breast milk substitutes.

Meanwhile, an ongoing community initiative brings information and counseling to mothers’ doorsteps.

And various national programmes use provider training, behavior change communication, and the media, to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding.

If Nigeria could scale up its successful programmes and mobilise a similar combination of political will, sound policies, and community programmes, we too could make more rapid progress in this area.
We know we can overcome these challenges because………. 

► Slide 48: Click Forward
We know what makes a difference!

Four well-tested sets of interventions can protect mothers and children.....beginning with.....26

► Slide 49: Click Forward
Making sure that babies are put to the breast in the first half hour after birth and are breastfed exclusively for the first six months without any other foods or liquids, not even one drop of water!

(Pause)

► Slide 50: Click Forward
And secondly, that mothers start giving a variety of healthy foods after the first 6 months of life, in sufficient quantities, along with continued breastfeeding through 2 years or beyond.

► Slide 51: Click Forward
Thirdly, making sure that mothers and children have access to the right amount of foods…

► Slide 52: Click Forward
….and ........the right variety of foods.

► Slide 53: Click Forward
So that all family members are consuming essential vitamins and minerals regularly.

► Slide 54: Click Forward
And lastly, making sure that parents and caregivers get the information and support that they need to feed their children in the best way possible.

(Pause)

► Slide 55: Click Forward
Going back now to that third reason why nutrition is a smart investment—research has found that nutrition is a “best buy” in today’s financially strapped environment...because investments in nutrition pay for themselves.

► Slide 56: Click Forward
Healthy nutrition during the 1000 day window produces a lifetime of benefits for individuals, families, and nations. [And that includes producing stronger football players!!]
Healthier children complete more years in school and have better performance, which leads to increased personal income and can add at least 10 percent to lifetime earnings.\(^{27}\)

Since healthy nutrition in the 1000 day window can increase educational performance, well-nourished children grow into a more productive labor force as adults..........and that can mean a boost in GDP growth by as much as 11 percent annually for the country.\(^{28}\)

And if we look at the cost-to-benefit ratio—the cost of key nutrition interventions compared with the benefits—investment in nutrition produces returns up to twenty-five times greater than the initial investment.\(^{29}\)

In other words, for every 100,000 Naira spent on key nutrition interventions...

...we would generate 2.5 million Naira in economic returns. So scaling up nutrition interventions can go a long way toward generating broad-based wealth in Nigeria.

As we look ahead to see how we might progress more rapidly, we recognize that today……there are unprecedented opportunities to make a difference and scale up nutrition interventions……more than ever before.

We have revised our national policy on food and nutrition……….to focus our objectives and guide us in scaling up the most effective interventions.

We have new initiatives like Saving One Million Lives, which is expanding nutrition interventions across the country to reach more of those in need.

And we have exciting new movements like the “SUN,” which stands for “Scaling up Nutrition”—a global effort aimed at bringing country and global leaders together to fight against malnutrition.

Nigeria has joined more than 45 countries and over 100 international organizations and donors to...for the first time...rally around a common agenda and solutions, with the goal of mobilizing broad commitment and resources to advance our nutrition agenda.

Malnutrition is a national problem..........(Pause)...............finding solutions must be a shared responsibility.
We have the evidence and we know what works.

We ask that you speak out and help us advocate for reducing malnutrition, drawing attention to the urgent nutritional needs of pregnant women and their unborn children... and supporting mothers in proper breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices.

We ask you to ensure that key nutrition interventions are integrated into development strategies across all sectors, including finance, planning, agriculture, education, women affairs and social development, environment, and water.

We ask that you help us coordinate programs and policy efforts for nutrition among the different ministries and stakeholders. One first step is to support the National Committee on Food & Nutrition headed by the National Planning Commission to ensure that all nutrition interventions support and reinforce one another.

And lastly, we ask you to help mobilize more funds for nutrition interventions. We need EXPLICIT budget line items devoted to nutrition in the Health budget, in the Agriculture budget, and in state budgets if we are truly serious about making a difference with malnutrition.

We can’t afford to lose any opportunities.

By investing in simple, cost-effective interventions....

We can ensure that every child reaches his or her full potential;

Reduce illness and deaths in mothers and children;

And help ensure stronger economic growth in the future.

By staying positive and working together...

(Pause until next set of words come on screen)

............we can build on our past achievements
We can **stop** the silent crisis of malnutrition……...and scale up interventions for those most in need……

And we can **wipe out** malnutrition in Nigeria once and for all.

► **Slide 75: Click Forward**

(Stay silent)
References


2 Index Mundi, “Nigeria: GNI per Capita,” accessed at: www.indexmundi.com/facts/nigeria/gni-per-capita, on Nov. 10, 2014. The latest value for GNI per capita, PPP (current international $) in Nigeria was 2,290.00 as of 2011.


