



Nutrition on the Rise: Raising Kenya's Future

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition is a condition that occurs when people consistently do not consume or absorb the right amounts and types of food and essential nutrients. Globally, it contributes to nearly half of all child deaths—that is more than 3 million children each year.¹

The main indicator of childhood malnutrition is stunting—when children are too short for their age due to inadequate intake of the required nutrients over a long period of time. Stunted children have poor physical growth and brain development, preventing them from thriving and living up to their full potential. With an estimated 2 million (26%) stunted children under the age of 5, Kenya is facing a crisis of malnutrition.²

Is there a window of opportunity to prevent malnutrition?

Yes! The first 1,000 days—from the start of a woman's pregnancy until her child's 2nd birthday—represent a critical window of opportunity. Adequate nutrition during this period can avert malnutrition, ensuring that children have the best possible opportunity to grow, learn, and rise out of poverty. When nutrition is not optimized during the 1,000 day window, the effects are often irreversible.

What is the situation in Kenya?

Malnutrition among Kenya's children is a serious problem and exists throughout the country:

- Each year, more than 70,000 Kenyan children die before their 5th birthday. Malnutrition contributes to about HALF of these deaths.³
- About one quarter of children under five are stunted in Kenya today.⁴
- Eleven percent of children are underweight, meaning they don't weigh enough for their age, while 2 percent of children are severely underweight.⁵
- Four percent of children are wasted, or too thin for their height.⁶
- About 2 out of every 5 Kenyan children do not meet the World Health Organization's recommendation for exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months of life.⁷

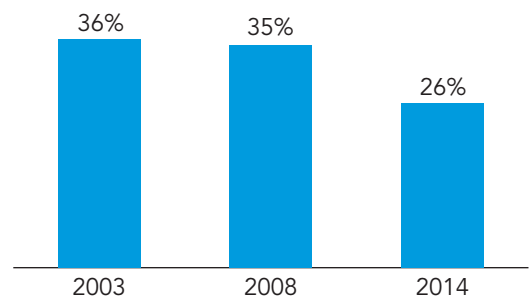
- An estimated 80 percent of children ages 6 to 23 months are not receiving the minimum acceptable diet.⁸
- Many children are not receiving adequate micronutrients, such as Vitamin A, iodine, and iron, which are necessary for healthy growth and development.

What are the benefits of addressing malnutrition?

Adequate nutrition during the 1,000 day window produces a lifetime of benefits for individuals, families, and nations:

- **Health:** Well-nourished children will have improved brain and physical development; they will develop good motor skills, have stronger immune systems to fight off infection and disease, and have sharper mental abilities.
- **Education:** Healthier children will be better able to focus and learn, and will thus have improved school performance and complete more years in school.
- **Earnings:** Improvements in school performance and completion will lead to increased job opportunities and personal income, adding at least 10 percent to lifetime earnings and helping families step out of the cycle of poverty.⁹
- **Economy:** Well-nourished, well-educated children will grow into a more productive labor force as adults; thus, improvements in nutrition can lead to a boost in GDP growth by as much as 11 percent annually.¹⁰

While Chronic Malnutrition (Stunting) Is Decreasing, About One in Four Are Stunted



Source: World Health Organization, "Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition" (2012), accessed at www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/database/countries/ken/en/, March 2014; and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey Key Indicators*, 2014 (Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Also, investments in nutrition produce returns up to 16 times greater than the initial investment—for every 100,000 KES spent, we generate 1.6 million KES in economic returns!¹¹

Which strategies work to improve malnutrition?

The following four proven strategies can protect mothers and children from malnutrition:

- Pregnant women should be ensured access to essential vitamins, minerals and nutrients through iron and acid supplementation and consuming a healthy and diverse diet.
- Mothers should put babies to the breast in the first half-hour after birth and breastfeed them exclusively for the first six months without any other foods or liquids—not even one drop of water!
- After the first 6 months of life, mothers should start giving their children sufficient quantities of a variety of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, and meat, along with continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years or beyond.
- Parents and caregivers should be given up-to-date information on infant and young child feeding practices, as well as the support that they need to feed their children in the best way possible.

Other important interventions to reduce malnutrition include food fortification, salt iodization, deworming, and disease prevention.

What can you do to combat malnutrition in Kenya?

There is a role for everyone in combatting nutrition. You can:

- Raise awareness of the importance of mother and child nutrition to achieving Kenya's Vision 2030.
- Reach out to other sectors such as health, agriculture, treasury, education, devolution and planning, and environment, water and natural resources, and work together to fight malnutrition.
- Take every opportunity to integrate nutrition into national policies.
- Advocate for an adequate and dedicated budget line for nutrition in the health and agriculture budgets, and in the county budgets.
- ACT NOW! Fund or implement programs that use proven strategies to reduce malnutrition.

Acknowledgements

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