



# TACKLING UNDERNUTRITION: ONE OF DEVELOPMENT'S BEST BUYS FOR THE EU

ALL EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS HAVE IDENTIFIED FIGHT AGAINST UNDERNUTRITION AS A PRIORITY FOR THE EU'S DEVELOPMENT POLICY. HOWEVER, ONLY WITH CLOSE MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EC ACTION PLAN ON NUTRITION WILL THE EU'S TARGETS BE MET.

**GENERATION** • **N**  
**NUTRITION**

## WHAT IS UNDERNUTRITION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**MALNUTRITION** is a physical condition, which is a direct consequence of having an inadequate amount of nutrients in one's body (either nutrient consumption or absorption related). Malnutrition refers to both overweight/obesity and undernutrition.

**UNDERNUTRITION** stems from the inadequate quantity and/or quality of food being consumed, and/or repeated infection or disease resulting in improper absorption of vital nutrients. It manifests itself through wasting, stunting, and micronutrient deficiencies.

**WASTING (OR ACUTE MALNUTRITION)** is a condition where a child's weight is too low for his/her height, and his/her body wastes away. It is associated with a high risk of mortality in young children.

**STUNTING (A SIGN OF CHRONIC MALNUTRITION)** is a condition where a child's height is too low for his/her age as a consequence of long-term nutritional deprivation. It is associated with long-term developmental and health risks.

**HIDDEN HUNGER OR MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES** is the direct outcome of inadequate intake of vital vitamins and minerals, which results in sub-optimal immune function while undermining growth and development.

In 2013, 6.3 million children died before the age of five. It is estimated that about 45% of these deaths were related to malnutrition.<sup>2</sup> Malnourished children are more likely to succumb to, as well as die from, the leading causes of child death such as pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria.

Poor nutrition weakens children's immune systems and renders them more vulnerable to deadly diseases, which further deteriorates their nutritional status. Hence children get stuck in a cycle of undernutrition and infection, which adversely affects their health, development, and increases the risk of mortality.

Nutrition is underpinned by intake, absorption and use of nutrients. There are many, often concurring, socio-political, economic and environmental factors that directly and indirectly impact on nutrition. These include health infrastructure and lack of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 50% of malnutrition is associated with repeated diarrhoea or intestinal worm infections as a result of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation or insufficient hygiene.<sup>3</sup>

A lack of nutrition can result in a life-threatening condition: severe **acute malnutrition** or what is most commonly called severe wasting. Once this state has been reached, under-fives are 12 times more likely to die than healthy children pertaining to the same age group.<sup>4</sup> However, this is not the only way undernutrition can manifest itself. "Hidden hunger" - a form of nutritional deprivation resulting from a lack of adequate vitamins and minerals in the diet, can exist without any visible early warning signs - but has long-term implications for a child's cognitive and physical development, and resistance to infection. Poor nutrition during the first thousand days (starting from the women's pregnancy) can also result in children being **stunted (chronic malnutrition)**, which means that they are below the international standard for height for their age.

1 Liu, L et al (2014) Global, regional, and national causes of child mortality in 2000-2013. The Lancet

2 WHO (2014) Children: Reducing mortality factsheet

3 World Health Organisation (2008c) Safer water, better health: Costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health. Available at: [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596435_eng.pdf)

4 Reference: Olofin, I. et al, "Associations of suboptimal growth with all-cause and cause-specific mortality in children under five years: a pooled analysis of ten prospective studies," 2013 PLoS One 8(5).





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## WHAT HAS THE EU DONE SO FAR TO TACKLE UNDERNUTRITION?

### POLICY

While the EU previously had no stand-alone nutrition policy, this changed with the 2013 Communication on “**Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in external assistance: an EU policy framework**” in which the EU vouched to fight both stunting and wasting. This document was followed by an **EC ACTION PLAN (July 2014)** which identified specific actions to enable the EU to reduce stunting rates for under-fives by seven million before the 2025 deadline set by the World Health Assembly (WHA).<sup>5</sup> This commitment was reiterated at the ICN2 conference in November 2014 in Rome and marked an important step towards the EU showing global leadership on nutrition. Malnutrition was further mentioned by the European Parliament in a resolution in November 2014 and the December 2014 Council Conclusions equally stressed the centrality of undernutrition in the EU’s policy.

### FINANCING

In June 2013, the **Nutrition for Growth Summit** – which was attended by Heads of States, international organisations and governments- allowed for €3.8 billion to be pledged for nutrition-specific interventions and another €17.6 billion for nutrition-sensitive investments between 2013 and 2020.<sup>6</sup> The EU Institutions made a total pledge of €3.5 billion, with **€400 million being dedicated to nutrition-specific programmes in the health sector, and €3.1 billion to nutrition-sensitive programmes** in other areas such as food security, agriculture, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and social protection between 2014-2020. This was the first big step the EU made towards becoming a major actor in nutrition financing globally. At the same time, it committed to developing instruments to track investments in nutrition and a methodology to measure impact and outcomes of efforts to combat undernutrition.

Civil society will play a key role in monitoring and measuring disbursements and ensure the EC abides by its pledge. Progress in reaching the stunting target of the EC will be measured by looking at outcomes in the EU’s priority countries, which have the highest global stunting rates.

### NUTRITION-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

help to tackle the immediate causes of undernutrition. They include the promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices, elimination of micronutrient deficiencies through fortification and supplementation, the community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM), and the encouragement of handwashing.

### NUTRITION-SENSITIVE INTERVENTIONS

span several sectors and address the underlying and structural causes of undernutrition. They encompass interventions in the areas of agriculture, education, public health, water and sanitation, and gender equality, among others.

5 1000 days “Global targets to improve maternal, infant and young child nutrition” <http://thousanddays.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/WHO-Targets-Policy-Brief.pdf>

6 Nutrition for Growth “Nutrition for Growth Commitments: Executive Summary” [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/207274/nutrition-for-growth-commitments.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/207274/nutrition-for-growth-commitments.pdf)

# TACKLING UNDERNUTRITION:

## ONE OF DEVELOPMENT'S BEST BUYS FOR THE EU

### WHAT IS MISSING?

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Nutrition is currently underfunded in international aid programmes. Despite the severity of its consequences, **only 0.4% of global development aid is spent on the nutrition sector. The result is a 9.6 billion USD annual funding gap in nutrition financing.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the interventions currently in place targeting nutrition only meet 1.4% of total needs.<sup>8</sup>**

The biggest weakness of the European Commission Action Plan is that it fails to include under-five wasting in development contexts. In doing so, the EU is missing an opportunity to considerably improve child nutrition as it will only address stunting and wasting in silos within its development and humanitarian policies. This is despite the fact that wasting is not solely a humanitarian issue but occurs in non-crises contexts – for instance, over half of the global cases occur in South Asia.<sup>9</sup> Wasting currently affects over 10% of children in Africa and close to 15% in Southeast Asia. These numbers fall squarely under the WHO's definition of a “public health emergency”, and are therefore not limited to situations of crisis or famine.<sup>10</sup> In many countries with high burden of wasting, governments have adopted national protocols for the management of wasting within the primary health care system. These governments need donor support for long-term, stable funding mechanisms for the management of acute malnutrition. The current humanitarian-driven funding model for wasting is a huge roadblock in making meaningful progress to address wasting in a sustainable way. Moreover, **global progress on wasting has been sluggish, the WHA's 2025 goal of limiting wasting to 5% will not be met if this aspect of undernutrition is ignored. Other internationally agreed targets on nutrition – anaemia, exclusive breastfeeding, low birth weight and overweight - should be also be part of any nutrition strategy, if the EU is to address the issue in a holistic manner.**

### UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NUTRITION

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There are a number of opportunities, which should be seized by the EU in order to join forces with other organisations and countries in the battle against undernutrition. These key initiatives are the following:

**THE ROAD TO RIO** in 2016 the Brazil government will organise an international Summit on Nutrition around the time of the Rio Olympic Games. This will not only be a key milestone to evaluate progress made since the Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2013, but potentially an opportunity for countries to pledge more resources for nutrition.

The **NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** will determine how nutrition is addressed in the coming decade and allow us to build on the progress made to date. Having a stand-alone goal for nutrition and food security, including a 2030 target and accompanying indicators for stunting and wasting, as well as strong indicators on nutrition-sensitive interventions (e.g. WASH, healthcare) will be key to ending preventable deaths related to this scourge.

The launch of a **GLOBAL FINANCING FACILITY FOR REPRODUCTIVE MATERNAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH (RMNCAH)**<sup>11</sup> was announced in September 2014 at the UN General Assembly and will be launched in July 2015 at the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa. The financial mechanism, which is likely to be hosted by the World Bank, will strive to unlock funds to reach global targets related to child and maternal health. With a financing target of a total of 4 billion USD, the Global Financing Facility has the potential to substantially support those countries currently struggling to meet agreed global targets for 2015 and 2030.<sup>12</sup>

**UNITLIFE** is a potentially new facility inspired by UNITAID's mode, which foresees the levying of a tiny tax on each barrel of oil sold in participating African countries in order to finance stunting projects. The initiative has the capacity to amass over a billion dollars per year if successfully expanded.<sup>13</sup>

**THE POWER OF NUTRITION FUND:** a broad partnership of investors committed to unlocking up to \$1 billion of financing for transformational nutrition programmes from both the private and public singular sector. Every 1\$ of grant funding invested in the Power of Nutrition unlocks up to 5\$ of new public and private funds. The fund first matches investors' money and then uses it to encourage more funding to be allocated to nutrition at country level.<sup>14</sup>

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7 Results UK “Nutrition Aid Architecture” <http://www.results.org.uk/sites/default/files/Nutrition%20Aid%20Architecture.pdf>

8 The Lancet (2013), Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, “Nutrition: a quintessential sustainable development goal”, p.3

9 The Lancet (2013) “Maternal and Child Nutrition” <http://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition>

10 <http://data.unicef.org/resources/2013/webapps/nutrition>

11 <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/HDN/Health/Business%20Plan%20for%20the%20GGF%2C%20final.pdf>

12 United Nations “Global Financing Facility Announced for Maternal and Child Health; Up to \$4 Billion Mobilized” <http://www.mdghelthenvoy.org/global-financing-facility-announced-for-maternal-and-child-health-up-to-4-billion-mobilized/>

13 Results UK “Nutrition Aid Architecture” <http://www.results.org.uk/sites/default/files/Nutrition%20Aid%20Architecture.pdf>

14 <http://www.powerofnutrition.org/>

A woman wearing a headscarf and a patterned dress stands in a vast field of tall, green grass. The field stretches to the horizon, and the woman is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

- MAKE THE DISBURSEMENT OF THE **€3.5 BILLION NUTRITION FOR GROWTH PLEDGE PUBLIC** & DESIGN AN ACCURATE **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK** TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF FUNDS.
- FORMULATE A WASTING TARGET IN ORDER TO MEET **THE WHA'S 2025 OBJECTIVES** & ENSURE THAT THE EU HELPS COUNTRIES TO REDUCING WASTING RATES IN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS.
- STREAMLINE **EU POLICIES & PROGRAMMES** ON STUNTING, WASTING & MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES AS THESE ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED.
- SET UP AN **INTER-DG DIALOGUE ON NUTRITION** WITHIN THE EC INVOLVING DG DEVCO, DG ECHO, DG ENV, DG CLIMA, & OTHER RELEVANT DGS IN ORDER TO INTEGRATE NUTRITION-SENSITIVE INTERVENTIONS INTO ALL EU POLICIES & ADDRESS THIS MULTI-FACETED ISSUE FROM ALL ANGLES.
- ENSURE THAT NUTRITION IS **PROPERLY ADDRESSED** IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INCLUDING THROUGH **A 2030 TARGET** & INDICATORS FOR STUNTING & WASTING.

## FOR MEMBERS OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

- ENSURE THAT THE **€3.5 BILLION NUTRITION FOR GROWTH PLEDGE** IS DISBURSED THROUGH CLOSE INTERACTION WITH THE EC.
- EXECUTE ITS POWERS LAID DOWN IN THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO **SCRUTINISE THE ALLOCATION OF FUNDS** THROUGH THE COMMITTEE OF BUDGETARY CONTROL (CONT) & THE ANNUAL DISCHARGE PROCEDURE.
- **TRACK EU PROGRESS** IN REACHING ITS STUNTING TARGET BY PUSHING FOR THE APPLICATION OF EFFECTIVE DISBURSEMENT METHODOLOGIES & DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES.
- WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER WITH THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS (ECA) IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT **DISBURSEMENTS ARE ALLOCATED CORRECTLY & ECONOMICALLY.**

THE **GENERATION NUTRITION** CAMPAIGN BRINGS TOGETHER A DIVERSE AND GROWING GROUP OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS WHO WISH TO SEE AN END TO CHILD DEATHS FROM ACUTE MALNUTRITION. **GENERATION NUTRITION** IS A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN, CALLING ON GOVERNMENTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE URGENT ACTION TO PRIORITISE THE FIGHT AGAINST ACUTE MALNUTRITION, AND SAVE THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE.

WE BELIEVE THAT, WITH STRONG POLITICAL WILL, OUR GOAL OF A WORLD FREE OF CHILD DEATHS FROM ACUTE MALNUTRITION CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHIN A GENERATION. A FULL LIST OF COALITION MEMBERS IS ON OUR WEBSITE.

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[www.generation-nutrition.org](http://www.generation-nutrition.org)

