

FORUM:	The World Health Assembly
ISSUE:	Efforts to Improve Childhood Nutrition and Combat Stunting in Vulnerable Communities
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Introduction

Malnutrition is referred to as deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/ or nutrients, addressing three broad groups of conditions: undernutrition, micronutrient-related malnutrition, and overweight. Around the globe, malnutrition in children causes the issue of stunting, which is the impaired growth and development in children, especially characterized by low height-for-age, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO, the child malnutrition estimates for the indicator of serious stunting issues, measuring 23.2% of all children under 5 years in 2024 statistics. Its high prevalence around the world and slow mitigation call attention to all member states. Furthermore, Our World in Data (OWD) indicates that half of child deaths in the world are directly connected to the issue of malnutrition, with 2.4 million children out of 4.7 million children dying due to a deficiency in their nutrition. Consequently, malnutrition is sometimes indirectly related to the casualties of poverty, conflict, and a huge income gap among the civilians in developing countries, which are highly vulnerable to these kinds of problems.



One of the mal-nourished children in India

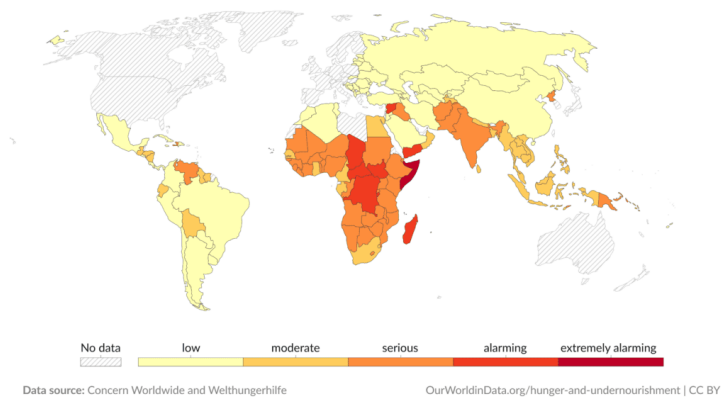
Background

Various developing countries, which are potentially vulnerable to the nutritional issue, are currently experiencing significant variations in their demographics, following the consequences of internal/ external conflict, poverty, and gender inequality. According to AP News, the civilians in the Northern Nigeria region are suffering from severe poverty, which eventually leads to 1.3 billion people suffering from climate change and increasing food prices. Not only in the Northern Nigerian region, but the Sahel Region (West and Central Africa) also encounters serious malnutrition issues, including approximately 6.9 million children under the age of five suffering from the lack of secure food, comprising 1.4 million at risk of death.

On top of that, Haiti's irreversible economic instability led to the pervasive food insecurity for young children, slowing the process of alleviating the children's malnutrition problem. As the magazine Guardian remarked, the fast food and sugary drinks became the "entrenched" factor of putting many children at risk of unbalanced nutrients, leading to the potential cause of stunting in many vulnerable communities. Overall, the countries with high levels of food insecurity tended to have higher levels of stunting, where children's growth process is immensely slower than their expected age.

Global Hunger Index, 2021

The Global Hunger Index¹ tries to capture the multidimensional nature of hunger by calculating an index score from four key hunger indicators. It is measured on a 100-point scale where 0 is the best score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst.



¹ Global Hunger Index: The Global Hunger Index (GHI) tries to capture the multidimensional nature of hunger, by combining four component indicators into one index score. The GHI is calculated from four indicators: undernourishment (the share of people that do not get enough calories to meet their energy requirements); childhood wasting; childhood stunting; and child mortality. An increase in a country's GHI score indicates that the hunger situation is worsening, while a decrease in the score indicates an improvement in the hunger situation. Learn more from the Global Hunger Index's methodology.

Global Hunger Index, 2021

Problems Raised

Impaired Physical Growth and Increased Mortality Rate

The increasing prevalence of food insecurity in various vulnerable communities negatively affected the children's physical conditions, reducing their ability to fight against infection, which ultimately increases vulnerability to illness. Also, it exacerbates the muscle's ability to recover from the severe injury, increasing complications. The growth failure and stunting also caused the children's bodies to be impaired, delaying their sexual development and reducing muscle mass and strength. These potential negative impacts on children can contribute to their future when they become adults, leading to chronic diseases.

The issue of malnutrition is also associated with the increased mortality rate, adjusting 0.90 per 100,000 people. During the mother's pregnancy, the possibility of being infected by a disease or being malnourished rapidly leads to an increasing mortality rate, putting higher risk of mortality and health

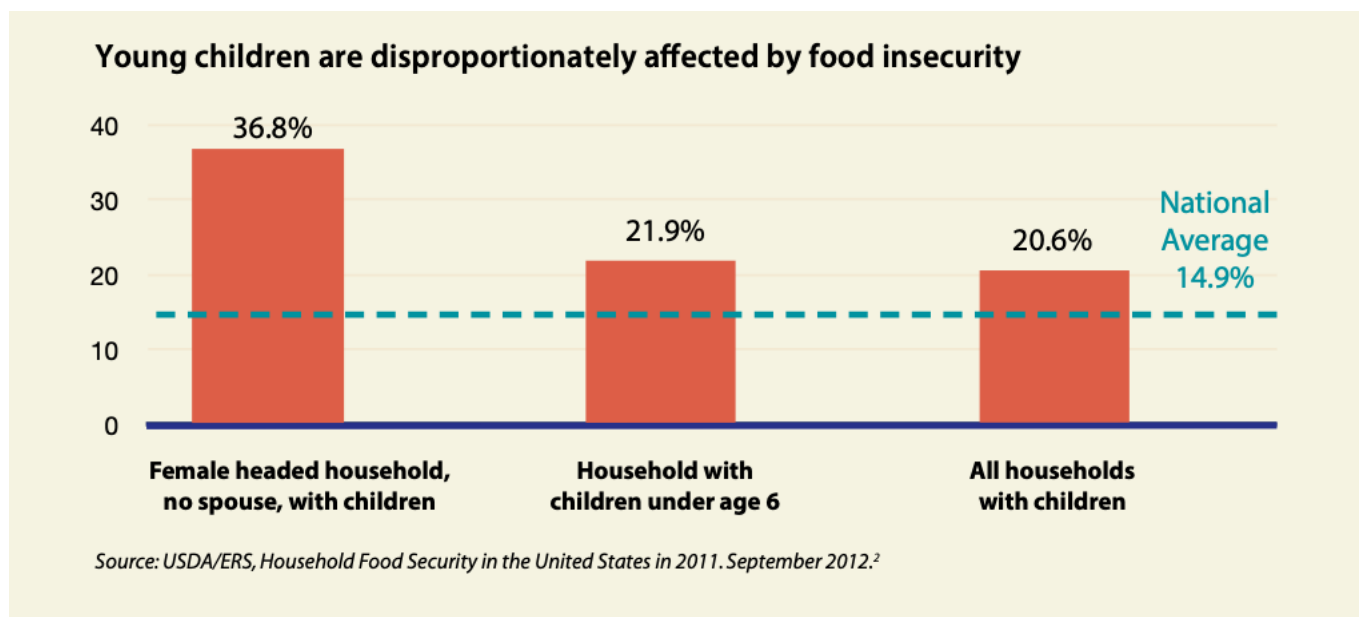


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complications. The Death rates from the mortality rate are significantly higher in low-income countries, where children do not receive the complete nourishment, they need at their expected age. As a result, their vulnerability to infectious diseases is common, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, gathering immense attention from various international organizations.

Severe Educational and Economic Consequences

Food insecurity is now a common problem that the world should resolve. The inadequate amount of food received by the children can undermine their brain development, leading to a deficiency in their educational levels. In the United States, one in five children is malnourished, which can threaten a child's health and cognitive ability to improve in his/ her academic success. Referring to Feed The Children, good nutrition is essential for brain development and learning from infancy onwards, which can undermine children's school readiness if there is not enough nourishment for them. There are also school-related emotional and social drawbacks that a child with malnourishment can feel, with not having enough food, which a study in North Carolina found that a student with food insecurity is less likely to graduate the high school.



The Impact of Food Insecurity on a child's emotional and cognitive development

Food insecurity not only negatively impacts the educational consequences, but it also directly impacts the economy. Since it abates a worker's productivity, who doesn't receive enough nourishment, it may incur stunted growth and destroyed cognitive ability, resulting in decreased physical and intellectual capacity. The undermined intellectual capacity of civilians with malnourishment may lead to higher healthcare expenditures, overloading national healthcare systems, and diverting finances from other

essential services. Then, the continuation of poverty may make individuals under a bad economic status, gradually aggravating the process of economic development.

International Actions

The UN's Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025)

The 10-year initiative by the WHA and UN set a global standardized agenda to pacify the process of malnutrition. It promotes multisectoral policies that build sustainable food distribution, underscore health systems with universal nutrition services, and improve social protection, trade, governance, and accountability for enhancing children's nourishment. By requiring the Mid-term Review, the UN's Decade of Action on Nutrition mainly focused on improving the nutrition of children in vulnerable communities, affording an opportunity to construct the framework of a fundamental food distribution system, nutrition education, social protection, and healthcare administration for young-aged civilians.

UNICEF — Child Nutrition Fund

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) allocates over US \$900 million for services and supplies to prevent malnutrition in the early stages and detect potential side effects of this issue. Since 1990, the UNICEF child malnutrition framework has been initiated to secure the children under a poor standard of living, such as undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight. To efficiently address the issue of undernutrition in children and women, a well-structured food supply system has significantly improved local and sustainable access to basic nutrition, thereby improving the nutrition of 320 million children and women. This has reduced the annual maternal mortality rate and prevented undernutrition in children. Especially targeting the vulnerable communities of the developing countries, the UNICEF's Child Nutrition Fund effectively addressed the issue of malnutrition of children and women, strengthening the nutrition systems in regions with a lack of food.

THE CYCLE OF HUNGER

There are many ways hunger can trap people in a cycle of poverty and need. Here is how it can burden someone for a lifetime, and pass it on to the next generation.



The Indication of the Cycle of Hunger throughout the lifespan



The Picture of UN Decade of Action on Nutrition

Key Players

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) plays an important role in mitigating global malnutrition by promoting sustainable food and agriculture distribution systems to vulnerable communities, improving agricultural conditions in local regions, and enhancing diets. Primarily addressing global food insecurity issues, the FAO assists countries in ensuring that people have

sustainable and reliable access to sufficient, safe, and healthy food. It also combats hunger and malnutrition by running projects that underscore the children's and mothers' nutrition, providing emergency response and policy advice to the local governments as well. FAO recently released the book titled *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*, addressing the local regions that are under the state of severe food insecurity, encouraging many people to find a method of

nourishment and its side effects. It further provides the 2025



FAO, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO's participation of the effort to address child malnutrition

World Hunger map to increase public awareness about malnutrition in children and mothers, promoting various collaborative campaigns and making advertisements around the world.

Possible Solutions

Prioritize the First 1,000 Days & The Provision of Proper Nourishment to Infants

The 1,000-day window, known as interventions during the pregnancy and the first two years of an infant's life, may effectively mitigate the issue of child malnutrition. According to The Times of India, the initial period during pregnancy is pivotal for young infants, as it increases the likelihood of receiving sufficient nourishment from their parents. Focusing on the first 6 months of breastfeeding is crucial to the health of young infants, contributing to enhanced nutrition and the immune system.

By establishing a well-structured food distribution system for proper nourishment, the strengthened immune system may assist vulnerable populations significantly. For instance, the school lunch programs with balanced nutrition should protect young kids from being stunted, affording the foods with plenty of vitamins, minerals, and high-calorie foods. Especially for the vulnerable communities due to the internal/ external conflicts or wars, the collaborative efforts of the international organizations and the civic volunteers will efficiently mitigate the seriousness of malnutrition in children, with the



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following consequences of stunting. Not only in school, but the public provision of nutritional supplements to the susceptible communities may improve the ongoing issue of malnourishment. Even if there are many international organizations trying their best to improve the status of malnutrition in various countries, a lack of civic volunteers and finances due to not investment and donations worsens this issue, requiring further efforts to address this issue in a short period.

Promotion of Education and Health



The promotion of health and nutrition education to young children

In order to increase the awareness of malnutrition in young children, educating parents/guardians about nutrition is essential to promote healthy food consumption. By addressing the importance of breakfast, the period to introduce nutrient supplements, and systemized balanced nutrient provision, the augment of parents' awareness of the child nourishment problem will be effectively pacified. The community workshop led by the provincial public health center and NGO may improve the status of issue recognition. Also, the public campaigns such as radio, TV, and online advertisements may increase the public perception regarding the severe malnourishment around the globe, motivating many people

to do something benevolent to resolve this global issue.

In parallel, directly educating children at school is pivotal. By learning about the basic concept and habit of hygiene may give long-term benefits to the children. Including the basic nutrition and hygiene course can enhance the children's recognition of malnutrition, connecting with the meal composition course after introducing basic nutrition studies. For instance, the "Garden-based learning", which allows children to grow the plants and animals themselves and consume them, is one of the effective ways to emphasize the importance of healthy diets, enabling them to learn about the nutrients and agriculture at the end.

Socio-economic support

In most of the vulnerable communities that led to malnourishment of young populations, the lack of financial ability to afford the healthy diets are common. By providing the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), which gives the constant amount of financial support to a family to make a child go to the school or get examined by the public health center, it may increase the school attendance of young populations, vaccination, and nutrition screening participation rate. Specifically, the Brazil national government implemented the Bolsa Familia, reducing thousands of children malnourishment and poverty, efficiently



preventing the stunted growth in vulnerable communities. The Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) provides the vast amount of assistance to the vulnerable communities as well, by providing the financial assistance to the families without any conditions, significantly increasing the access to the food in short-term goals, pacifying the emergency situations that may decrease the participation of education and public health promotions.

Glossary

Stunting

A condition where a child's growth is impaired, resulting in a height that is significantly lower than the expected height for their age

Wasting

A condition characterized by a weight that is too low for a person's height, indicating recent and severe weight loss

Micronutrient Deficiencies

A lack of essential vitamins and minerals required in small amounts by the body for proper growth and development

Protein-Energy Malnutrition (PEM)

A nutritional disorder caused by insufficient intake or absorption of energy and/ or protein, which impairs normal physiological functions

Failure to Thrive (FTT)

An infant or child with inadequate growth, defined by a weight that is lower than the third or fifth percentile on standardized growth charts, or a significant downward shift in weight percentiles over time.



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