
POLICY BRIEF- TACKLING CHILD MALNUTRI- TION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Governance, Institutions and the Global Political Economy

Policy Brief

2125811

Word Count: 2493 (excluding reference list)

TACKLING CHILD MALNUTRITION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

. Malnutrition affects every part of the body and, to an extreme, it causes death. According to a 2006 World Bank analysis, it costs poor countries up to 3% of their annual GDP. Malnourished children are at danger of losing over 10% of their lifelong earnings potential (Relief web, 2006).

. In 2020, it was estimated that 149 million children under the age of five were stunted (too short for their age), 45 million were wasted (too thin for their height), and 38.9 million were overweight. (World Health Organisation, 2021). Undernutrition is connected to 45 percent of mortality in children under the age of five.

. These figures tremendously push countries to address starvation and avoid their populations from becoming a liability.

. Since developing countries perform poorly in the global hunger index, this policy brief suggests that multi-sectoral approaches (different organisation and bodies cooperate), reformulation (redesigning food products), bio-fortification (genetic modification), and countries' investment in research are critical in reducing the number of malnourished in the country.

. It places at most importance in global collaboration and bringing the private players to the discussion to ensure food marketing regulation and nutrition sensitive agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

“Malnutrition is a complex issue, but it is the main cause of death and disease in the world,” says Branca (Director of the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development in the World Health Organization) (www.who.int, 2019).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (www.who.int, n.d.) describes malnutrition as “*Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions. One is 'undernutrition'—which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals). The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer)*”



Source: (AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES, 2021)

Figures emphasise the seriousness of the problem. In 2020, **149 million children** under the age of five were expected to be **stunted** (too short for their age), **45 million wasted** (too short for their height), and 38.9 million overweight (World Health Organization, 2021). Children under the age of five **die** at a rate of **45 percent** because of malnutrition.

Malnutrition has serious effects on the globe, a country, and an individual. As the number of cases of malnutrition rises, the country's population becomes more vulnerable to non-communicable diseases and viruses such as Covid, which cause significant harm to people with low immunity, every country must do its part to reduce malnutrition in order to prevent the world from experiencing another global health crisis. Thus, malnutrition cannot be combated on an individual level; it requires countries to come together.

It has the following ramifications for an individual (Bapen, 2018):

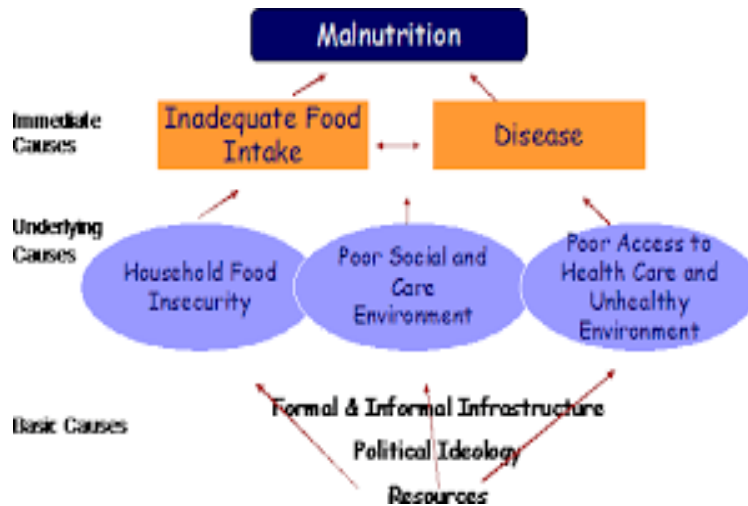
1. Risk of death
2. Low cognitive development
3. Vulnerable to non-communicable diseases (low immunity)
4. Loss of any organ or multiple organs
5. Delayed sexual development

Malnutrition effects economic development and perpetuates poverty. It also results in the depletion of human capital and productivity.

• DETERMINANTS OF MALUTRITION:

There is no single factor that explains malnutrition. Multiple reasons cause malnutrition and also these reasons vary across time and region. To better understand and simplify the causes, let's take 3 determinants explained in '*Explaining child malnutrition in developing countries: a cross-country analysis*' (Smith and Haddad, 2000). The 3 determinants are divided as immediate, underlying and basic.

- Immediate: Dietary intake and health status.
- Underlying: Food security, care for mothers and children, and health environment.
- Basic: Economic resource availability and political environment.



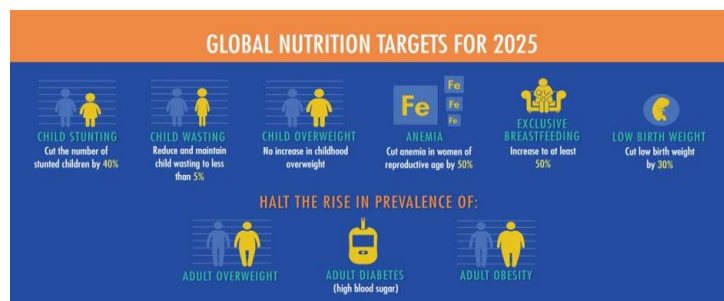
Source- (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)

These factors are measured by four variables: **national per capita food availability, women's education, women's position in relation to males, and safe water access.**

Some variables are more prevalent in contributing to malnutrition than others, depending on the local situation. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the first goal is to provide food per capita because the country still lags, whereas in Asia (India), the focus is on women's education and food accessibility because the country is food secure (ibid).

• WHY FOCUS ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES?

The WHO announced six targets to be achieved by 2025 in 2012 (Aguilera Vasquez and Daher, 2019). The 6 targets are depicted in the image below. According to the most recent data, no country has met all eight global nutrition targets, and only eight have met four. No country is on track to reach the anaemia or adult obesity targets (Global Nutrition Report, 2020).



source: (Twitter, n.d.).org

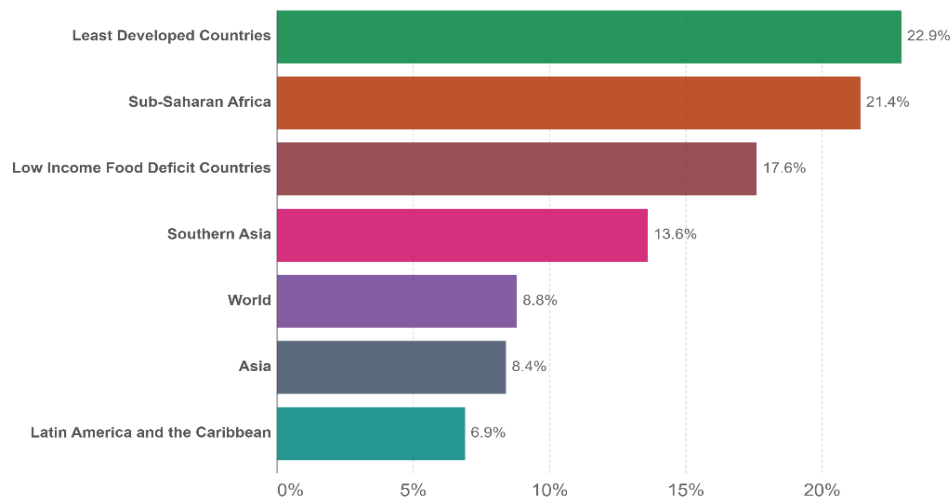
However, studies show that developing countries perform the worst on these goals, demanding a global intervention in these areas.

The graph below depicts data from developing and underdeveloped nations in 2017. Compared to the global average of 8%, these countries perform the worst.

The recent pandemic has deteriorated the situation further in these countries. The pandemic followed by lockdown and poor service delivery, has increased the vulnerability of malnourished individuals, especially pregnant women, young mothers, and children. Losing livelihood and associated decline in actual income during the epidemic is projected to result in a significant increase in malnutrition. According to one estimate, even a 9.5 percent decline in India's GDP may cause an additional 3.946 million infants being wasted (Shukla, 2020).

Share of people who are undernourished

Undernourishment measures the share of the population that has a caloric intake which is insufficient to meet the minimum energy requirements necessary for a given individual.



Source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

OurWorldInData.org/hunger-and-undernourishment • CC BY

• THE REGIONAL SITUATION

- ❖ **South Asia-** Chronic malnutrition is prevalent in this region. According to a World Bank research (Pswarayi-Riddihough, 2018), South Asia has 62 million stunted children out of 155 million children, accounting for more than half of the world's wasted children. Most countries have only shown a modest average drop in stunting, and they continue to score poorly in all other kinds of malnutrition (wasting, anaemia, obesity and so on). The most noticeable fact is that, despite significant economic growth, the number of hungry people grows every year. This suggests that these countries should work to achieve equal wealth distribution and other goals, such as educating women.
- ❖ **Sub-Sahara Africa-** The number of persons who are undernourished has risen from 181 million in 2010 to approximately 222 million in 2016. Although the prevalence of stunting among children has decreased from 38.3% in 2000 to 30.3 percent in 2017, the number of children affected has increased from 50.6 million to 58.7 million because of population growth. In 2017, the rate of child waste was 7.1 percent, or 13.8 million children, with 4 million of them badly wasted (WHO | Regional Office for Africa, n.d.). Malnutrition is widespread in Africa because of several factors, including poverty, a high prevalence of diseases, a lack of social services, and conflict and armed violence, which result in

massive population displacement with no guarantee of a livelihood or food security (www.unicef.org, n.d.). As a result, the government should concentrate on reducing violence and strengthening services.

- ❖ **Latin America-** In 2018, 4.8 million children under the age of five were stunted, 0.7 million were wasting, and four million were overweight in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to UNICEF's State of the World's Children report. Three out of ten Latin America youngsters, according to the Inter-governmental Organization (IGO), do not consume enough protein. One person in every five does not eat fruits and vegetables (Long, 2020). Here, the factors are unemployment, food insecurity, and poor household income (ibid).

• MAJOR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL EFFORTS

1. The **WHO** announced **six targets** for countries to meet by 2025. The organisation provides guidelines for each of these goals that countries can use to help them achieve their objectives more quickly.
2. **Sustainable development goal 2-** established by the United Nations General Assembly and set to be completed by 2030, offers countries specific indicators to focus on in the fight against hunger.
3. **Nutrition for Growth** is a global initiative that brings together countries, funders, businesses, NGOs, and others to speed up progress against malnutrition. It was launched in 2020 by the governments of Canada and Bangladesh. It aims to boost funding for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive treatments. In addition, it encourages the adoption of stronger, evidence-based nutrition policies. (Nutrition For Growth, n.d.)
4. **Scaling up nutrition (SUN)-** a movement led by countries to scale up nutrition. Most of the members are from underdeveloped countries. Aside from direct causes, the group investigates how agriculture may be utilised to boost nutrition in developing countries. (sustainabledevelopment.un.org, n.d.).

• RECOMMENDATIONS:

Before moving on to recommendations, it's crucial to acknowledge that decades of UN initiatives to reduce hunger have had little influence. What's needed is global governance that includes private companies that control the food supply chain and marketing in discussion boards. The food supply is very important in delivering micro and macro nutrients to the country's population (the more goods with high amounts of sugar and low-vitamin ingredients, the more micro nutrients would lack in the population). Yet we still don't have a worldwide mechanism in place to hold these private players responsible. This raises further questions, such as whether global governance is functional or whether private entities continue to have a say and take over legislative authority. This also falls right in the centre of the debate about whether neoliberalism and globalisation are locking the poor in and leading to proletarianization (Expansion of working class surviving on mere wages as the capitalist class wants to accumulate more and more wealth through large-scale production) (Cammack, 2004). Considering this, the following are some ideas that developing countries should implement to avoid private actors' dominance and power:

- 1) **MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATIONS-** Malnutrition has multiple causes, and for this reason it requires multi-level collaboration. For instance, Planning and finance

provide the processes and financing for nutrition; local government is vital for scaling up nutrition in districts and communities; and prime ministers' and presidents' offices provide political leadership and commitment to nutrition reform. Depending on the country's circumstances, other sectors have varied degrees of impact on nutrition (Effectively Engaging Multiple Stakeholders, 2021). As a result, long-term solutions need multiple levels of government – as well as stakeholders who affect agriculture, health, education, and the food system – to work together in a coordinated and consistent manner to enable a nutrient-driven and resilient food system.

NGOs, businesses, think tanks, and other international organisations must all be involved in the creation of a nutrition strategy, in addition to cross-sector collaboration as this method has been demonstrated to work in SUN network. Existing successful instances can be used to learn how to foster cooperation. In Maharashtra, India, a SUN Movement partner, efforts are currently being undertaken to engage the private sector in a positive and cooperative effort to promote nutrition. Malawi has been successful in bringing together different groups by building a coordination framework that links nutrition to HIV/AIDS (ibid). The faster developing countries embrace such frameworks, the sooner they would be able to address their malnutrition problems.

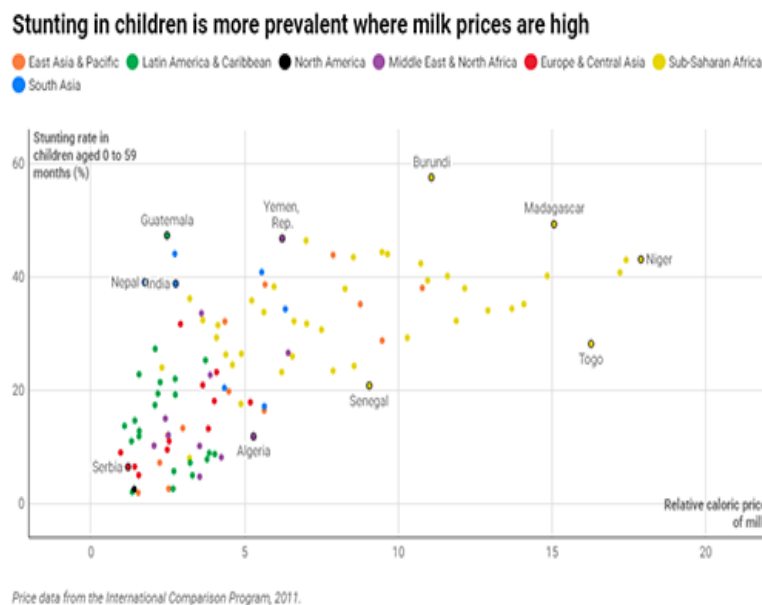
- 2) **REVISTING FOOD SYSTEM:** Food supply chain and agriculture apart from supporting the economy, play a crucial role in feeding the population and keeping them healthy. There have been inconsistent efforts throughout the world in using agriculture to increase the nutrient intake of the population. A featured article in the Standing committee (United Nations) on Nutrition issue gives recommendations on improving nutrition through agriculture (2021) along with these measures following actions are recommended:
 - a. **Reformulation:** to put it another way, it means redesigning a food product to make it healthier. Processed foods, which are heavy in sugar, salt, and trans-fatty acids (cheese, tin-foods, microwave meals, etc), are formulated to produce nutritious foods. Diet-related non-communicable diseases are on the rise more than ever before, thanks to these processed foods. As a result, for developing countries undergoing rapid urbanisation, reformulation is the optimum solution (Raikos and Ranawana, 2019). Even the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) advise countries to establish policies that encourage the reformulation of processed foods (Buttriss, 2020).
 - i. The big private players who profit from mass consumption of processed foods are a key imminent factor in this. They will obstruct any policy move that is not in their best interests. Pressure groups can exert pressure on the government and make their voices heard in this situation. In addition, an education system is established in which children are taught about healthy eating habits (Raikos and Ranawana, 2008).
 - b. **Biofortification:** improving the nutritional quality of food crops by agronomic methods, traditional plant breeding (improving genetic patterns), or modern biotechnology (WHO, 2019). This method can help ease hidden hunger (food that is low in micronutrients) and is the most financially viable and long-term option for African and South Asian countries.

Fortifying a plant has many advantages, and the onetime investment pays off for decades by giving the population with the nutrients it needs (www.harvest-plus.org, n.d.).

290 new varieties of 12 bio fortified crops, including maize, wheat, and potatoes, are now being grown in 60 countries, reaching about 10 million farming households (Cowan, 2018). However, in order to profit from this scientific process, developing nations will need to work closely with rich countries to learn about bio-fortified crops and to progress beyond bio-fortification of a few crops to include nutrients in all relevant agricultural pipelines (Bouis and Saltzman, 2017)

- 3) **Own research** - Each country and each region have its own demand and local environment. This also becomes the reason there is a slight difference in causes for malnutrition. Each state should do its own research to determine what communities require and how they react to interventions. It's important to know why an intervention works and whether provider and consumer behaviours have changed in a way that's compatible with the intervention (Victora, Habicht and Bryce, 2004).
- 4) **Increase the prices of unhealthy food:** Unhealthy food is inexpensive in most poor countries, while healthy food is expensive (Headey and Alderman, 2019). With such a high number of people living in poverty, it's only logical that they eat unhealthy food. However, the government can intervene and use subsidies to make unhealthy food more expensive and healthy food more affordable

The graph below depicts the relationship between stunting and expensive milk.



Source: [Derek Headey and Harold Alderman, IFPRI](#)

This is one approach, but it should be supplemented with nutrition education and supply side regulation, such as proper food labelling (ibid)

- **FINAL THOUGHTS:**

Malnutrition is a global problem linked to agriculture, the food supply chain, health, and climate change (the changes in climate affect agriculture, which affect the food security of the country). To address these global concerns, cooperation and coherence are essential. However, we live in a world where, as David Held put it, “challenges are becoming trans-boundary, but the stubborn nature of identity and representative politics rooted in regions is still intact” (Global policy journal, 2010). This mismatch makes it difficult to address issues such as malnutrition. It is vital that rich countries aid in transferring information and put pressure on large corporations to work ethically in order to address malnutrition in both developed and developing countries.

REFERENCES

Aguilera Vasquez, N. and Daher, J. (2019). Do nutrition and cash-based interventions and policies aimed at reducing stunting have an impact on economic development of low-and-middle-income countries? A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1).

AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES, 2021. [image] Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/12/half-of-yemen-children-face-acute-malnutrition-un>> [Accessed 16 December 2021].

Bapen (2018). *Introduction to Malnutrition*. [online] www.bapen.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.bapen.org.uk/malnutrition-undernutrition/introduction-to-malnutrition?start=2>

Bouis, H.E. and Saltzman, A. (2017a). Improving nutrition through biofortification: A review of evidence from HarvestPlus, 2003 through 2016. *Global Food Security*, [online] 12, pp.49–58. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211912417300068>.

Buttriss, J.L. (2020). Why food reformulation and innovation are key to a healthier and more sustainable diet. *Nutrition Bulletin*, 45(3), pp.244–252.

Cammack, P. (2004). What the World Bank means by poverty reduction, and why it matters. *New Political Economy*, 9(2), pp.189–211.

Cowan, C. (2018). *Reflections on the global impact of biofortification*. [online] CIMMYT. Available at: <https://www.cimmyt.org/news/reflections-on-the-global-impact-of-biofortification/> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2021].

Global policy journal (2010). *Prof. David Held on Challenges to Global Governance*. [online] www.youtube.com. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8Y4f1c6VSI&feature=youtu.be> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2021].

Global Nutrition Report. (2020). *Inequalities in the global burden of malnutrition*. [online] Available at: <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2020-global-nutrition-report/inequalities-global-burden-malnutrition/>.

Headey, D. and Alderman, H. (2019). *The high price of healthy food ... and the low price of unhealthy food*. [online] blogs.worldbank.org. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/high-price-healthy-food-and-low-price-unhealthy-food>

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2009. *UNDERLYING CAUSES*. [image] Available at: <http://conflict.lshtm.ac.uk/page_138.htm> [Accessed 16 December 2021].

Long, J. (2020). *Malnutrition in Latin America: The Importance of Nutrition*. [online] BOR-GEN. Available at: <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/malnutrition-in-latin-america/> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2021].

Nutrition For Growth. (n.d.). *Home*. [online] Available at: <https://nutritionforgrowth.org/>

Pswarayi-Riddihough, I.Z. (2018). *It's time to end malnutrition in South Asia*. [online] End Poverty in South Asia. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/its-time-end-malnutrition-south-asia>

Raikos, V. and Ranawana, V., 2019. *Reformulation as a strategy for developing healthier food products*. 1st ed. Springer, Cham, pp.127-149.

Scalingupnutrition.org. 2021. *Effectively Engaging Multiple Stakeholders*. [online] Available at: < <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sun-in-Practice-issue-1.pdf> > [Accessed 9 December 2021].

Shukla, A.K. and R. (2020). *Commitment to Action: Ensuring Nutrition Financing in India / Outlook Poshan*. [online] <https://poshan.outlookindia.com/>. Available at: <https://poshan.outlookindia.com/story/poshan-news-commitment-to-action-ensuring-nutrition-financing-in-india/366548> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2021].

Smith, L.C. and Haddad, L. (2000). *Explaining child malnutrition in developing countries : a cross-country analysis*. Washington, D.C.

Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. (n.d.). *Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) - United Nations Partnerships for SDGs platform*. [online] Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=7483>

Twitter. (n.d.). <https://twitter.com/who/status/742728100291739649/photo/1>. [online] Available at: <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/742728100291739649/photo/1> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2021].

Unscn.org. 2021. [online] Available at: < https://www.unscn.org/files/Publications/SCN_News/SCNNEWS40_final_standard_res.pdf > [Accessed 9 December 2021].

Victora, C.G., Habicht, J.-P. and Bryce, J. (2004). Evidence-Based Public Health: Moving Beyond Randomized Trials. *American Journal of Public Health*, [online] 94(3), pp.400–405. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448265/> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2019].

www.harvestplus.org. (n.d.). *Biofortification: The Nutrition Revolution Is Now / HarvestPlus*. [online] Available at: <https://www.harvestplus.org/biofortification-nutrition-revolution-now>.

www.who.int. (2019). *Malnutrition is a world health crisis*. [online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/26-09-2019-malnutrition-is-a-world-health-crisis>.

World Health Organization (2021). *Malnutrition*. [online] Who.int. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition>.

WHO | Regional Office for Africa. (n.d.). *Strategic plan to reduce malnutrition in Africa adopted by WHO Member States*. [online] Available at: <https://www.afro.who.int/news/strategic-plan-reduce-malnutrition-africa-adopted-who-member-states>.

www.unicef.org. (n.d.). *West and Central Africa: More than 15 million cases of acute malnutrition expected in 2020*. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/west-and-central-africa-more-15-million-cases-acute-malnutrition-expected-2020>.

www.youtube.com. (n.d.). *Prof. David Held on Challenges to Global Governance*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8Y4flc6VSI> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2021].