

IMPROVING GLOBAL NUTRITION

Undernutrition is a significant global health issue, especially for children, and contributes to about 45 percent of deaths of children under age five worldwide, or about 3.1 million child deaths in 2012. The profound effects of nutrition on health throughout life are inextricably associated with physical, mental and social development, especially in early childhood. Poor nutrition perpetuates a cycle of poverty and hunger, leading to poor health, lower levels of educational attainment and reduced productivity and wages in adulthood. These losses cost low- and middle-income countries up to 8 percent of their potential economic growth. Tackling this problem requires strong leadership and high-impact interventions in both health and agriculture.

Feed the Future's Approach

Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative, is committed to reducing stunting rates by 20 percent in the areas where it works, as stunting (or reduced height-for-age) is a well-established child health indicator of chronic undernutrition. Nutrition activities include direct interventions, research, capacity building and policy formulation at national and global levels.

Feed the Future aims to prevent and treat undernutrition, including deficiencies of energy, protein and micronutrients. Taking a comprehensive approach, nutrition interventions focus on the critical 1,000-day window from pregnancy to a child's second birthday. The right nutrition during this time can have a profound impact on a child's health and their ability to grow and learn. The initiative also contributes to the evidence base by demonstrating how agricultural interventions may positively affect diet, nutrition and the health of rural families.

For the rural households targeted, agriculture is the primary way people make a living. The potential for agricultural development and enhanced food systems to improve nutrition is well-recognized—primarily through providing greater access to diverse, nutritious diets. While agricultural growth is associated with greater reductions in stunting than nonagricultural growth, the full potential of agriculture to improve the nutrition of vulnerable farming families, as well as the general population, has yet to be realized.

Feed the Future has an integrated, multi-sectoral approach, which aims to:

- Increase access to nutrition services and behavior change messaging;
- Improve hygiene and sanitation;
- Support the cultivation, storage, post-harvest processing and consumption of nutrient-dense crops; and
- Empower women in agriculture.

Last year, Feed the Future, in collaboration with the Global Health Initiative, reached more than 12.5 million children globally with nutrition interventions. Feed the Future also supported nearly 91,000 women farmers in homestead gardening, improving access to more nutritious foods and increasing income for women and children. Complementing these efforts, the U.S. Government's McGovern-Dole school feeding program strives to improve the nutrition and food security of school-aged children, pregnant or lactating mothers and infants and provides training to community members on child health and nutrition.



In Honduras, mothers learn how to prepare nutrient-rich tortillas using vegetables from their home gardens.
Credit: Fintrac Inc.

Fast Facts

- Globally, **1 in 4**, or approximately **165 million children** under the age of 5, are stunted
- **80 percent** of the world's stunted children live in just 14 countries
- Poor nutrition costs low- and middle-income countries **up to 8 percent** of their potential economic growth

Working Together for Long-Term Success

In the fight to end hunger and undernutrition, effective coordination and partnership is critical, which is why the U.S. Government is taking a comprehensive approach to advancing global nutrition. Following nutrition commitments made in 2013, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched its first Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy in May 2014, laying out a roadmap to reduce chronic malnutrition through coordinated efforts, including the Feed the Future and Global Health initiatives, the Office of Food for Peace development programs, resilience efforts, water, sanitation and hygiene, and other nutrition investments. This approach promotes coordinated planning and programming of effective nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions from multiple sectors, such as agriculture, health and education, and across the public and private sectors and civil society.

The Feed the Future initiative is committed to the USAID resilience policy in complementing humanitarian efforts. The Office of Food for Peace and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance have provided food, nutrition and health services during emergencies and figures prominently in the U.S. Government's strategy commitment to increase access to the most nutritious, cost-effective foods in humanitarian contexts.

Project Highlight

In Cambodia, one Feed the Future project is supporting growth monitoring, a technique for tracking the relationship between a child's weight and age. In hundreds of villages, Feed the Future-supported mobile kitchens have promoted this practice to nearly 21,000 people who have attended nutrition training events. As part of the project, health volunteers use their homes as growth-monitoring stations, equipped with scales and charts.

These efforts are helping to address undernutrition, which causes one-third of child deaths in Cambodia. In the 187 villages that have received two visits by mobile kitchens, the number of children in the "optimum zone" for growth has increased from 85 to 91 percent, while the numbers of children at risk have seen decreases.

Demonstrating Leadership on the Global Stage

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of the 1,000 Days partnership and the global Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, which unites governments, civil society, the United Nations, donors, businesses and researchers in a collective effort to improve nutrition.

In 2013, the United States signed the Global Nutrition for Growth Compact. Signed by 90 governments and organizations, the compact aims to achieve three goals by 2020:

- Improve the nutrition of 500 million pregnant women and young children;
- Reduce, by an additional 20 million, the number of children under five who are stunted; and
- Save the lives of at least 1.7 million children by preventing stunting, increasing breastfeeding and improving treatment of severe and acute malnutrition.

The United States also announced in 2013 that it anticipated providing more than \$1 billion for nutrition-specific interventions and more than \$8.6 billion for nutrition-sensitive interventions between 2012 and 2014.

Feed the Future will contribute to the launch of a government-wide Global Nutrition Coordination Plan later in 2014.