

Forum:	Health and Youth Commission 1 (HYC 1)
Issue:	Eradicating malnutrition amongst children
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Introduction

Malnutrition is one of the most significant and persistent global challenges. Malnutrition amongst children poses a major threat to their health, growth, and overall development. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), nearly half of all deaths among children under 5 years are caused by undernutrition, which is a form of malnutrition [1]. Additionally, in 2022, an estimated 149 million children under the age of five were stunted, and a further 45 million children were wasted [2]. These statistics underscore the urgent need for international cooperative efforts to ensure a healthy life for future generations and prevent the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty.

Malnutrition is not merely a consequence of a lack of food but a complex factor fueled by interconnected issues. Childhood malnutrition is a result of systemic poverty, limiting a family's ability to access nutritious food, clean water, and adequate healthcare [3]. These vulnerable children lack safe sanitation and hygiene, leading to frequent medical challenges. In long-term circumstances, if a child survives, chronic malnutrition within the first 1,000 days of their life can lead to irreversible physical and cognitive damage [4].

Definition of Key Terms

Malnutrition

Malnutrition occurs when an individual's diet fails to provide the necessary nutrients required for proper growth and overall health [3]. For example, individuals may rely on calorie-dense foods with poor nutritional value, leading to malnutrition. These foods, such as rice, wheat, and maize, may be more accessible and available, providing energy but lacking the essential nutrients needed for development and health. Malnutrition could lead to significant long-term physical and cognitive impairments and increase the need and cost of healthcare [4].

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 aims to combat the issue of world hunger caused by the pandemic, ongoing global conflicts, and climate change. By 2030, SDG 2 hopes to target and end hunger, ensure access for all people, especially vulnerable populations; end all forms of malnutrition; double agricultural activity and incomes of small-scale farmers; ensure a sustainable food production system; and maintain genetic diversity of all species [5].

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to when an individual or a household lacks access to enough safe and nutritious food to meet their basic dietary needs. Food insecurity can be either chronic or temporary and is driven by poverty, conflict, environmental changes, and economic instability. Chronic food insecurity is the persistent lack of access to basic food, typically characterised by individuals consistently lacking sufficient food over extended periods. Chronic food insecurity is usually caused by issues such as poverty, lack of resources, and social or political instability. Temporary food insecurity, on the other hand, also referred to as “acute” food insecurity, occurs due to a sudden shortage of food for a short period of time that disrupts access to food, usually caused by natural disasters or economic shocks that lead to immediate hunger [6].

Micronutrient deficiencies

Micronutrient deficiencies, commonly referred to as “hidden hunger” occur when an individual lacks the essential vitamins and minerals required for basic functions, development, and health, leading to health problems like blindness, brain damage, anaemia, and increased risk of infection. These deficiencies are a major form of malnutrition, even if an individual gets the required amount of calories, as these micronutrients are essential [4].

Poverty

Poverty is the state of not having enough money or resources to meet basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Poverty is a major underlying cause of malnutrition due to limits within a household's ability to provide or access nutritious food, safe living conditions, and adequate healthcare. Individuals in poverty may turn towards cheap, calorie-dense food that often lacks the required nutrients, leading to nutrient deficiencies [3].

Stunting

Stunting refers to the condition in which a child is below the average height for their age due to chronic or long-term undernutrition [4]. It indicates a child's lack of health and well-being, often associated with limits to physical and cognitive growth. Stunting can be caused by many aspects throughout childhood, but primarily during the first 1,000 days, the period just before conception to the child's second birthday. Stunting can cause irreversible damage both physically and cognitively, and

can not be cured [7].

Wasting

Wasting refers to the condition in which the child's weight is far lower for their height, indicating significant or rapid loss in weight and is one of the most immediate and life-threatening forms of malnutrition. Children with wasting result in weak immune systems, leaving them extremely vulnerable to diseases, a delay in physical and cognitive development, and sometimes even death [4] [8].

Background Information

Childhood malnutrition is a complex issue driven by a multitude of interconnected aspects. Food insecurity also poses a major factor, along with the inability to access nutritious food. However, the most significant factor that contributes to malnutrition is poverty [3]. Studies have shown that poverty and malnutrition are interconnected, with poverty being both the cause and consequence of malnutrition, creating a never-ending cycle. According to the World Bank, an estimated 2%- 3% of a country's GDP is lost annually due to increased healthcare costs linked to malnutrition [9]. In some low-income countries, these percentages can reach as high as 11% [9]. Aside from financial distress, lack of knowledge and awareness, socioeconomic inequality can further fuel malnutrition. Limited access to proper education prevents families from acknowledging the lack of essential nutrients and the significance of a balanced diet [3][6]. Additionally, rural and marginalised communities lack infrastructure to provide healthcare, a safe water supply, and support [6]. In many cases, cultural practices and gender inequality also play a role, with women and girls often eating last and receiving less nutritious food [3][6].

Furthermore, with an increasing amount of concern over the double burden of malnutrition, which refers to the coexistence of malnutrition and obesity within individuals, households, and populations [10]. Individually, this typically refers to experiencing a form of malnutrition in the early stages of life, but then becoming overweight in adolescence. On a larger scale, this refers to the prevalence of both undernutrition and obesity in the same geographic region. In 2022, an estimated 2 billion people will experience moderate to severe food shortages, with 735 million facing chronic hunger, which is a 391 million increase compared to 2019 [10]. Over the past three years, global hunger levels have remained stable after a sharp increase during the pandemic, underscoring the severity and persistence of this growing issue [10].

Malnutrition also carries intergenerational effects; undernourished mothers are more likely to give birth to underweight babies who are at higher risk of experiencing stunting, wasting, and poor health conditions later on in life [4]. This creates the ongoing cycle of poor nutrition, weak educational outcomes, and generational poverty. The consequences of malnutrition are severe and irreversible,

significantly affecting a child's cognitive and physical growth, decreasing their overall quality of life [4].

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) aims to combat malnutrition through treatment and prevention, with the world's leading effort of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) for children suffering from malnutrition. UNICEF hopes to address the key causes of malnutrition by strengthening healthcare systems, promoting education regarding proper nutrition courses, and ensuring access to sanitation and clean water [2].

World Food Programme (WFP)

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the largest humanitarian organisation in the world that mainly focuses on hunger and food insecurity. The WFP helps to provide life-saving food assistance to people in emergencies when they are unable to access proper food, clean water, etc. Additionally, the WFP also focuses on long-term solutions to world hunger and food insecurity. They aim to build resilience in vulnerable communities through supporting smallholder farmers, implementing development programmes and curricula, providing nutritious meals for students in schools to improve education and nutrition, and stimulating local markets [11][14].

World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) serve as the global authority that sets international standards and provides technical guidance to member states. The WHO has been involved in the development of the Child Growth Standards used worldwide to measure the healthy development of children and in creating clinical guidelines based on evidence [10].

India

India continues to face the highest rate of malnutrition worldwide, with millions of children and women suffering from malnutrition and related health challenges. According to the 2025 UN State of Food Security and Nutrition in the world (SOFI) 18.7% of under five children in India around 21 million are wasted, proportionally highest in the world, with 37 million children stunted [9]. India has implemented programmes such as Poshan Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), to provide supplementary nutrients, growth monitoring technology, and awareness campaigns [9].

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has made significant progress towards reducing stunting rates over the last few decades through a strong government commitment and multi-sectoral strategies. However, Ethiopia still continues to face a high burden of malnutrition due to recurring droughts, conflict, and economic

instability. The Northern part of Ethiopia has experienced severe food insecurity due to armed conflict. The government, with the support of international partners, is working on improving food security and nutrition through various programmes, including the national nutrition strategy and a safety net programme [11].

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a country plagued by conflict between local armed groups and unstable political affairs management, facing one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, with widespread malnutrition. The country's rich resources are overshadowed by decades of conflict, political instability, and weak governance. This ongoing violence has forced millions of people to flee their homes, disrupting agricultural production and making humanitarian access difficult. High poverty rate and lack of basic access to resources have further contributed to the crisis [12].

Viable Solutions

Addressing Poverty

With poverty acting as the single greatest driver of malnutrition, addressing it is crucial [3]. And put many messages such as Nutrition-Conditioned Equity Funds, and conditional cash transfers can power families economically what ensuring that the Children's Health remains the top priority [6]. A social safety net, such as targeted food allocations and emergency relief during economic or environmental shocks, can protect the most vulnerable households from suffering from even more food insecurity [13].

Genetically Modified Crops

A solution that has been widely addressed has been the genetic modification of crops, which are designed to withstand pests, droughts, or poor soil conditions [15][16]. Major food producer member states, such as the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, have utilised genetically modified crops to enhance yields and reduce the reliance on chemical pesticides or fertilisers, thereby making farming more efficient and minimising crop losses. However, many countries in the European Union have banned or strictly regulated genetically modified crops due to concerns about the environmental impact, the safety of the food, and the farmers' dependence on these patented seeds, which are more costly. However, genetically modified crops could help combat malnutrition; for example, golden rice is genetically modified to produce vitamin A as a strategy to address nutrient deficiencies [15][16].

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