

Forum: Sustainable Development Council (SDC)

Issue: Measures to end all forms of malnutrition [SDG2]

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Introduction

Malnutrition is a truly global issue that harms communities all across the world. It encompasses both challenges of lack of nutrition and problems of overnutrition such as obesity. Overnutrition refers to cases where individuals find it difficult to access nourishing yet healthy foods with balanced nutrient contents. Indeed, the statistics prove this, as shown by the number of overweight and underweight adults in 2022, which stood at 2.5 billion and 390 million respectively. Solutions must be both highly effective and large in scale.

The issue of malnutrition is exacerbated by the fact that it occurs along lines of socioeconomic status. Historically, poverty exponentially increases the probability that individuals will suffer from malnutrition because it means that they have less access to healthcare and are denied the means of purchasing adequate high quality nutrition. Hence, populations suffering from malnutrition are especially vulnerable.

The impacts of malnutrition cannot be clearer. It robs people of their quality of life since they are more likely to suffer from medical issues and low energy. The economy is also slowed as people are unable to work and be productive due to these nutrition-related illnesses.

This research report will provide the key terms related to the issue of malnutrition, outline the various sub-topics that will be addressed in relation to it, list the major actors involved in the issue, and offer some potential solutions for delegates to consider.

Definition of Key Terms

Malnutrition

Malnutrition is defined as a lack or excess of nutrition. A lack of nutrition is referred to as undernutrition and occurs when individuals are unable to consume enough of the necessary substances for a healthy life. Overnutrition occurs when individuals consume more than is

necessary, resulting in them being overweight or obese.

Stunting

Stunting refers to a phenomenon whereby individuals have a height that is low for their age. This is, in the overwhelming majority of instances, the result of severe malnutrition.

Food Security

Food security refers to the ability for people to access not just food, but healthy and adequate food. Furthermore, food security also means consistent access where people are able to fulfill their physiological intake needs every day without having to worry about it as a primary concern.

Wasting

Wasting is a condition in which an individual, usually a child, has a disproportionately low weight in comparison to their height. This condition is typically caused by severe malnutrition and the lack of food.

Background Information

Causes of Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a multicausal phenomenon that has many underlying factors that result in it. Any solution for solving malnutrition must acknowledge this multicausal nature and seek to tackle the problem from different angles (World Food Program USA, “6 Causes of World Hunger - Why There Is Global Food Insecurity”).

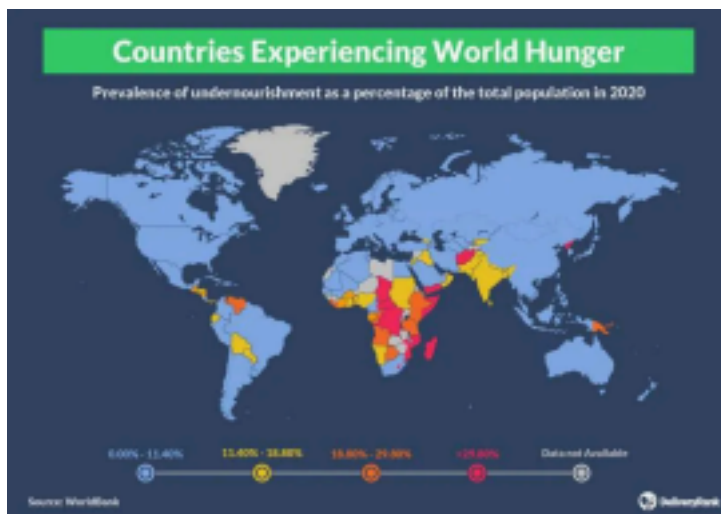
First, the overwhelming majority of instances of chronic malnutrition is caused by conflict. In war-torn and conflict-ridden regions, it becomes incredibly difficult for people to access food due to the lack of ability to carry out agricultural activities. Since infrastructure is destroyed and the environment becomes far too dangerous to farm in, food production grinds to a halt. This has disastrous consequences since there is not enough food to go around for everybody, resulting in particular groups not receiving adequate nutrition.

Secondly, poverty causes malnutrition in two further ways. Primarily, those without sufficient income are clearly unable to afford to eat adequate food, resulting in undernutrition. However, even if they are able to afford food, the food they purchase is not necessarily healthy. Low-income groups are often forced to resort to cheaper, unhealthier options such as junk food, thus resulting in the opposite issue of overnutrition and obesity.

Lastly, malnutrition is extremely connected to extreme weather. Unpredictable weather conditions such as droughts or floods can destroy crop yields and prevent farmers from carrying out agricultural activities. This reduces food production and thus there is not enough food to go around.

Current Trends Relating to Malnutrition

Malnutrition is most prevalent in low-income countries where food security is inadequate. Currently, these countries are primarily located in Sub-Saharan Africa, with Somalia having the highest rate of malnutrition in the world, 51.3% (World Population Review, “Malnutrition Rate by Country 2022”). However, the issue of malnutrition is not limited to low-income countries as recently, middle-income countries have also been experiencing exponential growth in the number of obese individuals. Southeast Asia for example, is projected to see a 300% increase in its number of obese people from 2010 to 2030 (World Obesity, “World Obesity Atlas 2025: Majority of Countries Unprepared for Rising Obesity Level | World Obesity Federation”).



Major Countries and Organisations Involved

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a major participant in the global fight against malnutrition. Established in 1948, it currently acts as a part of the United Nations and serves to handle issues of global health. The WHO sets global targets regarding issues of malnutrition that are seen as the most credible source of what the world should work towards. With regards to nutrition, the WHO has set the targets of 40% reduction in stunting, 50% reduction of anaemia, 30% reduction in low birth weight, no increase in childhood overweight, 50% increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding, and 5% reduction in childhood wasting (“Global Targets 2025”). To this end, the WHO supports food systems, facilitates the fortification of staple foods with essential nutrients, and provides nutrition education.

World Food Programme

The World Food Programme (WFP) is an agency with the goal of ending hunger and malnutrition. It provides food aid in an attempt to allow more people to access the sustenance they require to live healthy and productive lives (Nations, “World Food Programme”).

United States

The United States (US) is a global superpower that is engaged in the fight against hunger. The US donates funds to the World Food Programme and runs the USAID Feed the Future program. The US itself faces malnutrition as approximately 1 out of every 7 American households experience food insecurity. This impacts around 47.4 million people.

India

India is a regional power that has put solving malnutrition at the top of its priority. It has launched the National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan) in 2018 to improve the nutrition of its population (Vajiram Editor, "National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan), Features, Objectives"). However, India also has one of the highest numbers of malnourished, with estimates of the percentage of children under 5 that are malnourished standing at more than 50% as of 2024 (TOI News Desk, "India's Malnutrition Crisis: 17% of Children Underweight, 36% Stunted, 6% Wasted, Reports WCD").

Nigeria

Nigeria is currently facing a food crisis with 30.6 million people in the country facing acute food insecurity. This food crisis is primarily caused by conflict between government forces and Boko Haram in the Northeast. Furthermore, Nigeria faces frequent droughts and floods, affecting its food production capacity.

Viable Solutions

First, delegates can consider solutions to address undernutrition. This may look like getting more food to communities and individuals on the ground. For children, this may come through school feeding programs such as free school lunches. For adults, this may come in the form of direct food deliveries by the staff of international organizations. However, the more progressive solution of direct cash transfers is becoming more popular. Direct cash transfers also have the potential to solve undernutrition by giving people adequate funds to afford sustenance while also giving them increased dignity and freedom to spend it on whatever priority they believe is best.

To address overnutrition, delegates may consider other forms of solutions. Primarily, this includes proposing increased regulations for the processed food industry which compels businesses to limit the volume of substances such as sugar and fat that they are putting into their products. This may lead to less excess consumption of such substances. Furthermore, education of individuals and communities is equally important to empower them to take charge of their own health and reduce obesity. Some countries such as Singapore have introduced clearer labels to indicate the health of particular food products. This incentivizes more healthy purchasing habits.

Lastly, countries and international organizations can also invest in methods to make food supply chains more resilient to exogenous shocks such as extreme weather. For example, they may diversify their food production beyond staple rains and develop drought-resistant crops. This would ensure that food supplies remain consistent regardless of weather conditions.

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