

Nutrition Workstream - Stunting

Stunting continues to be one of the most pernicious and widespread forms of malnutrition, having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable populations compared with other types of malnourishment. It has significant consequences for both human health outcomes, and social and economic outcomes. The effects of stunting last a lifetime: impaired brain development, lower IQ, weakened immune systems, and greater risk of serious diseases like diabetes and cancer later in life. Beyond the individual impacts of this problem, stunting is an enormous drain on economic productivity and growth. Economists estimate that stunting can reduce a country's GDP by as much as 12%.

While the effects of stunting last a lifetime, they can also be passed on from one generation to another. Girls who are born malnourished and become stunted as children often grow up to become malnourished mothers who in turn give birth to malnourished babies and the cycle repeats itself. An estimated 20% of stunting begins in the womb—with a mother who herself is malnourished and is not getting enough of the nutrition she needs to support her baby's growth and development during pregnancy.

Although stunting is almost always irreversible, it can be prevented by improving nutrition for women and children in the first 1,000 days. The CFS should therefore focus its efforts in the scope of the workstream on nutrition on addressing this issue. This could be done through the organization of a special event during the 2016-17 intersessional period, or by the initiation of a policy convergence process to produce a set of recommendations. Both approaches would be in line with 2016-17 Workplan of the OEWG on nutrition, as well as the decision box endorsed at CFS43.

Contribution to the achievement of the SDGs

This topic is directly related to SDG target 2.2:

By 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons.

Relevance and global impact

Stunting, as a key limiting factor in growth and human development, should be considered a top priority for global initiatives aimed at decreasing the prevalence of malnutrition.

According to the WHO: "About 165 million children globally are stunted, according to 2011 figures, resulting from not enough food, a vitamin- and mineral-poor diet, inadequate child care and disease. As growth slows down, brain development lags and stunted children learn poorly. Stunting rates among children are highest in Africa and Asia. In Eastern Africa 42% were affected as of 2011."

CFS value added and contribution to CFS objectives

There can be no higher goal than to focus on the first 1000 days of life and ensure children are off to a healthy start. CFS must prove its relevance by looking at policies to further the fight against stunting including:

- a) Methods to end stunting and wasting
- b) Programs to tackle stunting and wasting at a national and regional level
- c) Greater co-ordination of activities to address stunting

ICN2 cited stunting as an important challenge and should be the first specific nutrition work stream of CFS.