



## WFP and Nutrition

To get to zero hunger, food is not enough. Providing food assistance in an emergency saves lives, but the right nutrition at the right time can change lives and allow people and countries to reach their full potential. This is why, as the leading humanitarian organization saving lives and changing lives, the World Food Programme (WFP) prioritizes nutrition as a core element of its work.

Despite significant progress over recent decades, poor nutrition remains a universal problem, with one in three people on the planet affected by some form of malnutrition [1]. Undernutrition – inadequate energy or nutrients – affects billions, exacerbated by conflict and natural disaster, while rates of overweight and obesity are also rising in all countries. Malnutrition at its extremes is a matter of life and death, and in the long term can hold back people and countries, undermining economies and development.

### OUR APPROACH

Where malnutrition threatens the world's most vulnerable people, WFP is at the forefront to prevent and treat it. We focus on providing access to healthy and adequate diets and concentrate our efforts on the most at-risk, targeting young children, pregnant and breastfeeding women and people living with HIV.

While our priority has long been addressing undernutrition in emergencies, over the past few years we have broadened our focus to all forms of malnutrition including vitamin and mineral deficiencies and overweight and obesity. While seemingly unrelated issues, these forms of malnutrition stem from the same root causes—poverty, inequality and poor diets—and can no longer be treated in silos.

### Malnutrition in numbers

**45 percent**

of deaths among children under 5 have malnutrition as an underlying cause [2]

**155 million**

children are stunted from chronic malnutrition [1]

**2 billion**

people suffer from vitamin or mineral deficiencies [1]

**88 percent**

of countries face a serious burden of either two or three forms of malnutrition [1]

**16.3 million**

people were reached by WFP's malnutrition treatment and prevention programmes in 2017

### AREAS OF WORK

#### Nutrition in emergencies

Malnutrition and hunger are widespread among refugees and displaced populations, representing 65 million people globally. Ensuring people get the right nutrition saves lives, reduces suffering, prevents long-term health consequences and makes them more resilient to future shocks.

WFP is working to ensure that humanitarian responses and long-term development actions respond to immediate nutrition needs while also addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition. In collaboration with national governments, we are increasing our focus on resilience building and prevention of malnutrition in emergency settings.

#### Acute malnutrition (wasting)

Approximately 51 million children under 5 suffer from acute malnutrition – that is 7.5 percent of all children under 5 [3]. WFP supports the treatment of acute malnutrition: In 2017, we reached 8.5 million children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Despite significant progress over recent decades, poor nutrition remains an immense and universal problem, with 1 in 3 people on the planet affected by some form of malnutrition.

WFP is working to end malnutrition in all its forms. Our efforts focus on preventing malnutrition and treating it where it does occur. We help ensure people have access to nutritious diets in all circumstances.

However, the burden of acute malnutrition is high, and financial resources are limited. We believe that prevention should be the first approach to addressing acute malnutrition, for which people need access to adequate diets and good health. WFP is working with partners to ensure that prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition become an integral part of national health and development policies and strategies, including emergency preparedness and response plans.

### Chronic malnutrition (stunting)

Poor nutrition early on, particularly in the first 1,000 days from conception to two years of age, can cause stunting – a failure to grow, with irreversible damage to children's bodies and brains. Stunting can only be prevented; it cannot be reversed.

WFP focuses on this short window of opportunity, promoting adequate nutrition, good caring practices, and prevention of infectious diseases.



### Nutrition-sensitive approaches

As well as working to address the immediate causes of malnutrition, WFP takes “nutrition-sensitive” approaches to address the underlying causes of malnutrition. This involves working with complementary sectors such as agriculture, health, HIV and AIDS, gender, social protection, and water and sanitation, to make food systems more nutrition focused and to give programmes a nutrition ‘lens’. A nutrition-sensitive approach, for example, would be to encourage small-scale farmers to produce more nutrient-dense crops, or to introduce a nutrition objectives into a school meals programmes.

Since 2004, WFP has also increased its focus on food fortification—adding vitamins or minerals to commonly eaten foods—to fight micronutrient deficiencies.

### Evidence, data and analysis

Evidence-based, cost-effective interventions for nutrition are key to having a sustainable impact. WFP contributes to the global evidence base by conducting operations research on interventions that support improved nutrition. For example, we are working with academic and research institutions and global initiatives to generate evidence and innovation in programming for the treatment of acute malnutrition.

WFP's Fill the Nutrient Gap tool convenes national governments and stakeholders to analyse the nutrition situation in a country and identify the barriers faced by the most vulnerable to accessing and consuming nutritious diets. Results are being used to inform policies and programming in social protection, food systems, health, agriculture, education and other sectors that can contribute to improving nutrition.

### Innovation and technology

In order to accelerate progress in data collection, analysis and sharing for nutrition, and help build the capacity of government systems, WFP is investing in a number of innovative projects.

WFP's SCOPE CODA is a cloud-based innovation which creates a digital identity for malnourished children and tracks services to improve their wellbeing. Our mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) for nutrition project uses mobile tools to remotely collect data on household security and food-related market trends, offering a quick and affordable way to collect nutrition data.

### Partnerships

With today's complex and unprecedented challenges, no one organization can end malnutrition alone. WFP is committed to playing an integral role in initiatives such as the Committee on World Food Security, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, and in government-led partnerships with UN agencies, NGOs, civil society, businesses and academia, as well as local farmers, producers, retailers and communities.

#### References

- [1] [The Global Nutrition Report, 2017](#)
- [2] [The Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, 2013](#)
- [3] [Joint child malnutrition estimates, 2018](#)

Photo page 1: WFP/Edward Johnson

Photo page 2: WFP/Ranak Martin