



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Inter-regional parliamentary seminar co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with the collaboration of alive&thrive and the support of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso

27-29 June 2017, Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)

CONCEPT NOTE

OVERVIEW

The Health, Social and Economic Impacts of Stunting

Globally, undernutrition is one of the most serious and most neglected problems in public health and development. It causes 45 per cent of all deaths among children under the age of 5 in low- and middle-income countries. For children who survive, the damage it causes to their physical and cognitive development is irreversible. A stunted five-year old is inches shorter compared to a well-nourished peer. Stunted children are more vulnerable to disease—they are as much as five times more likely to die from diarrhea than a non-stunted child. And perhaps most importantly, a stunted child will never reach his or her full cognitive capacity, with fewer IQ points, fewer years of school completed, and as much as 10 per cent less in earnings over the course of their lifetime.

When multiplied across the population, poor nutrition and stunting can trap families, communities and entire nations in a cycle of poverty. That is why addressing stunting is understood as being fundamental to achieving national commitments to global agendas, including at least eight Sustainable Development Goals and the World Health Assembly (WHA) Nutrition Targets. In many countries, addressing stunting is also seen as a fundamental step in realizing commitments to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The World Bank estimates that undernutrition costs many countries at least 2 to 3 per cent of their gross domestic product, and billions of dollars in salaried employment and avoidable health care costs. Yet fighting malnutrition is one of the most cost-effective investments a country can make. The 2008 Copenhagen Consensus—reached by a group of leading scientists and economists, including several Nobel laureates—found that combating undernutrition is the best development investment based on a cost-benefit analysis. Five of the top ten highest-return solutions to global challenges closely relate to combating undernutrition. Additional evidence has emerged more recently (*The Cost of Hunger in Africa; How Much Will it Cost?* by the World Bank, 2010; *Hunger and Malnutrition* by Hoddinot et al, 2012) and has reinforced the high return on investment of nutrition programmes.

Child Nutrition Situation in West and Central Africa (WCAR)

Each year in the WCAR region, an estimated one million children under the age of five die from undernutrition-related causes. Among the 15 countries in the world with the worst under-five mortality statistics, 11 are in WCAR. The prevalence of child stunting equals or exceeds 40% in eight countries in the region.

The latest estimates indicate that the stunting rate declined from 36.6 in 2010 to 34.9 in 2016 (UNICEF/WHO/WB global estimates), as substantiated by success stories in countries such as Ghana and Liberia. Nevertheless, only three of 24 countries are on track to meet the World Health Assembly target for stunting (40 per cent reduction in the number of stunted children by 2030) while the entire region has shown an increase in the overall number of stunted children over the last two decades. Similarly, slow progress was reported for other WHA targets.

Worldwide Push to Tackle Child Malnutrition: The Critical Role of Parliaments

Parliaments play a critical role in addressing stunting. They have the power to enact laws and regulations, influence national development plans, determine national budgets and allocations, monitor and oversee the implementation of government (i.e. executive branch) commitments to children and hold it to account, and use their platform as respected opinion leaders to educate constituents on healthy practices.

Concretely, this means that parliaments can pass legislation to restrict the marketing of breastmilk substitutes; provide maternity protection entitlements; boost micronutrient programming; scale up programmes to promote, protect and support infant and young child feeding; and measure stunting and wasting rates against benchmarks.

Over the last few years, many actions have been taken by Parliamentarians in countries to support and influence nutrition programme performance. Nutrition Network within Parliaments have been set up with very clear objectives, specific actions have been undertaken, like but not limited to special preparatory meetings ahead of budget discussion in Chad, high level advocacy by Roots of Life (Nutrition network within Parliament in Cameroon), direct engagement of parliamentarians to tackling the leakage of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) in Sierra Leone and Chad, highly relevant questions to Government by Parliamentarians in Burkina Faso.

Regional Seminar to Mobilize Parliamentarians in Support of Nutrition

The science is clear and the returns are high: to prevent stunting and its impacts on investments in education, health and child protection, governments must invest in nutrition.

To galvanize national parliaments into taking action, the IPU, UNICEF, and Alive&Thrive propose a two-and-a-half-day seminar – from 27 to 29 June 2017 in Ouagadougou – with parliamentarians from WCAR countries to review the latest evidence on stunting and its impacts, the latest evidence on policies and programmes that are proven to address stunting, and to build capacity with strategies, practical tools and actions that parliamentarians can use to urgently drive action in their countries.

The seminar will also aim to sensitize the parliamentarians and their staff on issues related to malnutrition, stunting, and the deleterious effects they can have on their countries.

Participants will hear and benefit from each other’s views and those of global experts, share perspectives and expertise on how parliamentarians can most effectively contribute to reducing malnutrition and stunting. Besides the parliamentarians, participants will include key partners, namely civil society actors, who can furnish MPs with relevant data and work with them to foster greater accountability.

By the end of the meeting, delegates will have a clear understanding of their role and of opportunities to build support for nutrition, and will be encouraged to select two actions to take forward with partners to advance the nutrition security agenda in their respective countries. The seminar will focus on the responsibilities (legislation, oversight and budget) that parliamentarians should deploy to help reduce malnutrition rates. Potential actions include:

Legislation	Planning	Budget
Adopt or enforce the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (or similar)	Organize relevant parliamentarians and committees (Finance; Health; Women and Children; Agriculture, Social Affairs) to mobilize action and a process for change	Advocate with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Investments and relevant line Ministries to adopt nutrition budget lines within their department
Adopt national maternity entitlements	Employ and support national data and information systems to trigger and track progress, including toward WHA nutrition targets and related SDGs	
Adopt legal measures to support and improve locally fortified complementary food	Scrutinize performance against nutrition benchmarks and indicators and probe allocation of resources	
Support latest recommendation on the commercialization of unhealthy food for children		

Additional considerations for the agenda include a study tour of local infant and young child feeding promotion activities in or around Ouagadougou; parliamentary engagement via live video recording and social media; and a possible outcome document (e.g. regional declaration, action plan) to distil the results and commitments made during the meeting.

The IPU would invite parliaments from the region to send delegations of parliamentarians to participate in the seminar in which the representatives of approximately 20 national parliaments and of the two regional parliaments are expected.