

Nutrition

The Background

A good nutritional status is both the result of sustainable development and an important prerequisite for it. All forms of malnutrition have both health and economic consequences. Some 795 million people are undernourished¹. The majority of them live in rural areas, but because of the rapid urbanisation that is taking place in developing and newly industrialising countries undernourishment is also a growing problem in cities. Malnutrition in the form of overnourishment is also becoming increasingly common: worldwide around 1.9 billion adults are overweight. The number of overweight people has more than doubled since 1980². Economic and social change has altered traditional eating patterns in some countries: as part of this 'nutrition transition' meat consumption is increasing, as is the consumption of energy-rich and often heavily processed foods, while physical activity is declining. Excessive weight and obesity are frequently regarded as a problem of industrialised countries, but two thirds of overweight people now live in developing and newly industrialising countries.

Both undernutrition and overnutrition correlate with poverty. People who are forced to live on less than USD 1.90 per day spend up to 80 per cent of their income on food³. However, rising food prices mean that fewer and fewer people can afford to buy food in the quality and quantity needed for a varied and healthy diet. While many forms of malnutrition are obvious, some two billion people worldwide are affected by 'hidden hunger': that is, they lack an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals, such as iodine, iron and vitamin A. Micronutrient deficiencies result in stunted growth, increase the risk of infection and restrict both physical and mental development and capa-

city. Awareness of the consequences of these deficiencies has shifted the focus away from simply increasing the availability of calories towards promotion of a balanced diet. It is now becoming increasingly common for undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition to coexist within countries, societies and even families. This is referred to as the 'triple burden of malnutrition'. Individuals can suffer simultaneously from underweight or overweight and micronutrient deficiency. Among the principal health consequences of the triple burden are an elevated risk of certain cancers, diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. This results in high costs to health systems and lowers the productivity of affected individuals, thus also reducing the productivity of the economy as a whole.

Food security as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) encompasses both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of nutrition. It also includes food safety, thus emphasising the importance of food that is both nutritious and safe. Food and nutrition security goes further than food security: it also encompasses access to adequate health and social care, including a healthy environment, clean drinking water and appropriate sanitation. These are the conditions that enable the human body to utilise food properly. Undernourishment and poverty frequently go hand-in-hand. The consequences of undernutrition in the first 1,000 days of life (from the start of pregnancy until the child's second birthday) are often irreversible and impair development and life opportunities throughout a person's life. Good nutritional status in the first 1,000 days can prevent developmental disorders and reduce the likelihood of disorders being passed on to subsequent generations.

Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) is an international movement that operates in precisely this time window. Its strategy for reducing undernutrition and malnutrition is supported by more than 100 stakeholders worldwide, including national governments, UN and civil society organisations, universities and the private sector. SUN's strategy identifies general measures that promote nutrition-sensitive development and should be included in development objectives in all relevant areas of policy. It also specifies nutrition-specific interventions for pregnant women and infants.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), formulated in 2015, highlight changes that are needed not only in developing countries but also in industrialised and newly industrialising countries. SDG 2 calls for the ending of hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. It thus addresses not only the need to tackle a lack of food energy but also the qualitative dimension of food and nutrition security, which involves an appropriate range of food as well as food quality and food safety. Appropriate nutrition is not just the responsibility of individuals: it is defined as a human right and thus imposes obligations on states and governments. FAO's voluntary guidelines on the right to food help countries implement this human right.

Our position

In this context, GIZ takes the following positions:

■ **Investment in nutrition is worthwhile.** Malnutrition and the disorders that result from it carry very high health costs, but even these are outstripped by the loss of productivity and capacity in affected individuals. Investment in nutrition results in better health, better intellectual development and better educational attainment in children and young people and hence in improved productivity in their subsequent working lives. It thus makes an important contribution to economic development and poverty reduction. It is more economical to prevent malnutrition than to treat it (estimated return on investment is 1:16).

■ **A diverse range of foods is the most important basis for good nutrition.** The qualitative aspect of nutrition is often neglected. It is not just the quantity of food that must be right, however, but also its diversity and quality. The more varied the diet, the more likely it is that micronutrient needs will be met. In many contexts, though, nutrition is too heavily based on carbohydrate-

rich foods (such as rice, wheat, potatoes or cassava). These foods are usually cheap and they make people full, but they do not contain the necessary nutrients. Nutrient-rich foods such as vegetables, fruit and animal products (milk, eggs, meat) must be available in sufficient quantity throughout the year and must also be affordable for poor families. Adequate and balanced food is also an important aspect of transfers in the context of emergency and transitional aid, for example after natural disasters or in theatres of war and conflict. These transfers not only ensure survival but also prevent deficiency disorders in the long term.

■ **Health care, sanitation and clean drinking water are essential.** Common diseases (including diarrhoea and parasites) put nutritional status at risk. Access to adequate healthcare and to sanitation and clean drinking water creates a situation in which the body is able to take in sufficient food and utilise it.

■ **Nutritional knowledge is a basis for the future.** Informing young people early about the importance of a nutritious diet and pointing out the dangers of malnutrition to them helps prevent undernutrition and malnutrition being passed on to the next generation. Mothers, in particular, need to know how to nourish their children properly, especially in the first 1,000 days.

■ **Women play a key part in good nutrition.** As a result of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, women have a greater need for particular vitamins and minerals. During pregnancy and in the first months after giving birth they also have particular responsibility for nourishing their children. Improving women's social position and the range of actions open to them also impacts positively on the nutritional status of women and children. Empowering women in the agricultural sector has major potential for improving the nutritional situation of women and children.

■ **Fortified foods can prevent malnutrition.** Fortifying foods with vitamins and minerals is relatively cost-efficient. It provides a broad-impact method of preventing or tackling malnutrition, especially if the population is not always able to access the nutritious and locally available food necessary for a balanced and healthy diet. Local producers play an important part in this. Among the most commonly used fortification measures are the addition of iodine to table salt and the fortification of vegetable oils with vitamin A.

Our recommended actions

GIZ considers the following the most important recommendations for action:

- **Take nutrition issues into account in various sectors.** The stakeholders in relevant sectors (including agriculture, health, education and social security) must work together to identify trans-sectoral approaches to nutrition.
- **Ensure that a range of diverse and high-quality foods is available.** Ensuring that a range of diverse and high-quality foods is available involves taking steps to conserve agrobiodiversity. Such steps include improving access to high-quality seed and encouraging the cultivation and consumption of neglected and underutilised crops. Measures to promote the diversification of agriculture should be promoted to expand the range of produce on offer. House or community gardens can increase the range of foods, especially in remote areas.
- **Ensure appropriate nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life.** During this window of opportunity, measures to enhance nutritional status are particularly effective and long-lasting. To improve the life chances of neonates and break the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition, nutrition education and measures to raise awareness of the importance of appropriate nutrition should be targeted at women of reproductive age and important decision-makers (husbands/partners, grandparents, community authorities, etc.) using a variety of coordinated channels (agricultural advisors, health services, (mass) media).
- **Make value chains nutrition-sensitive.** The criteria for selecting the value chains to be supported and the support measures themselves should take account of the nutritional importance of particular foods. The value chain can then help to improve the availability of high-quality food and access to it. Food safety along the value chain is also important in maintaining the quality of food and preventing contamination, for example with aflatoxins.

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Definitions

- **Hunger** is the subjective feeling that people experience after a certain time without food. It is usually equated to lack of food or chronic calorie deficit (undernourishment). In chronic calorie deficit there is insufficient food energy available to meet the human body's minimum energy requirements.
- **Malnutrition** is an umbrella term that covers undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiency.
- **Undernutrition** is the consequence of insufficient food intake and/or poor health and hygiene conditions that prevent the body making proper use of the food consumed.
- **Overnutrition** occurs if calorie intake consistently exceeds the amount required.
- **Micronutrient deficiency** or hidden hunger is the result of an insufficient supply of vitamins and minerals, either because food intake is insufficiently diverse or because of an elevated need for micronutrients in people such as children, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Literature

- ¹ FAO, IFAD, WFP 2015: State of Food Insecurity in the World.
- ² WHO 2016: Obesity and overweight, Fact sheet.
- ³ FAO, IFAD, WFP, 2011: State of Food Insecurity in the World.

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