

# G8 & G20: TWO SUMMITS TO TACKLE THE HIDDEN MALNUTRITION CRISIS

## A call to action to end global hunger and malnutrition

### INTRODUCTION

As world leaders have been grappling with one economic crisis after another, a hunger and malnutrition crisis affecting millions of children has gone unchecked. Pervasive long-term malnutrition is eroding the foundations of the global economy by destroying the potential of millions of children.

The G8 and G20 both have an opportunity to achieve a major breakthrough on food security in 2012. We already know the solutions to tackle the global malnutrition crisis, but political commitment and strong leadership are required. The global economic and malnutrition crises require complementary investments in nutrition interventions, nutrition-focused agriculture and social safety nets. Urgent action and strong leadership by the G8 and G20 could lay the foundations for an historic global push to end hunger and malnutrition.

### The challenge

The malnutrition crisis is not new. Slow progress has been made: malnutrition rates have dropped by an average of 0.6% each year for the past 20 years<sup>1</sup> and recent years have brought breakthroughs in terms of building consensus on the solutions and growing political will to tackle the problem.

A combination of global trends – climate change, volatile food prices, economic uncertainty and demographic shifts – is putting future progress on tackling malnutrition further at risk. If these trends continue, Save the Children estimates that over the next 15 years 450 million children will suffer irreparable damage to their brains and bodies – a condition known as ‘stunting’.<sup>2</sup>

Continued global economic decline in 2012 and 2013 would exacerbate the crisis further. The last global economic crisis, combined with record high food prices, plunged a further 100 million people into poverty and meant a nutritious diet became unaffordable for these families.<sup>3</sup> Although many developing countries recovered relatively quickly from the 2008–09 crisis, the responses required at

the time mean they now have less monetary and fiscal space, leaving their budgets – and their ability to protect poor families – vulnerable to a further sharp deterioration in the global economy.<sup>4</sup>

The G8 and G20 must play a critical role in steering the global economy through this period of turmoil. They must protect the poorest and most vulnerable people from the effects of the global economic crisis and deliver a sustainable approach to global food security that addresses the hidden malnutrition crisis. Doing this makes sound economic sense, as malnutrition is estimated to cost developing countries 2–3% of gross domestic product.<sup>5</sup> Tackling malnutrition is also a core part of the G20's mandate to deliver strong, sustainable and balanced growth.

### **Maintaining momentum post-L'Aquila**

The historic commitments to global food security made at the 2009 L'Aquila G8 Summit will expire in 2012, before the hunger crisis has been resolved. Donors must fully deliver their commitments under the L'Aquila initiative and provide a comprehensive report outlining how L'Aquila contributions were spent and what outcomes they achieved.

Reversing two decades of underinvestment in agriculture and nutrition requires much more than the three years of support provided by the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative. With food security again at the top of the G8 agenda in 2012, the Camp David meeting is a critical opportunity to secure longer-term efforts and partnerships to deliver lasting food and nutrition security.

Save the Children is calling on the **G8** to:

- **deliver a new global food and nutrition security initiative to maintain the momentum generated by L'Aquila and give greater priority to tackling the malnutrition crisis by incorporating a target to reduce stunting.**

For its part, the **G20** should:

- **direct its agriculture ministers to identify agriculture policies and practices that effectively improve household nutrition, with a view to making recommendations to the 2013 Summit**
- **assist low-income countries to establish, develop and finance social protection systems that can be scaled up to protect poor and vulnerable populations during crises and shocks.**

## **MALNUTRITION: THE HIDDEN CRISIS**

Every hour of every day, 300 children die because of malnutrition. It's an underlying cause of more than a third of child deaths – 2.6 million every year. But it's not recorded on death certificates and, as a result, it's not effectively addressed.

Even for those children who survive, long-term malnutrition causes devastating and often irreversible damage. Lack of nutritious food, coupled with infection and illness, means their bodies and brains don't develop properly. At least 170 million children are affected by stunting.

This means that not only are they too short for their age – they're also likely to enrol at school later and do less well academically. Childhood malnutrition can impact productivity – stunted children are predicted to earn an average of 20% less when they become adults<sup>6</sup> – and undermines economic growth. It is estimated that 2–3% of a country's national income can be lost to malnutrition.<sup>7</sup>

### **What are the solutions?**

Simple solutions delivered to children who are at risk of malnutrition and their families are already well known and well supported by experts. Nutrition interventions in the first 1,000 days from pregnancy until age two represent one of the best buys for child health. Eight of the world's leading economists, including five Nobel laureates, agreed in 2008 that combating malnutrition was the best development investment.<sup>8</sup> The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement provides a focal point for coordinated global action to improve nutrition and its Road Map outlines political, technical and financial ways in which national governments can be supported to develop and implement comprehensive nutrition plans.

As this movement gathers pace it needs the support of major donor governments as well as those with the greatest burden of undernutrition to ensure the SUN Framework is operationalised and coordinated action to reduce undernutrition is taken.

In addition to known direct interventions, such as exclusive breastfeeding, supplements and food fortification, agriculture has the potential to play a critical role in the elimination of hunger and malnutrition. There are 30 countries who already have generated agriculture investment plans and can make immediate, effective use of additional public and private sector resources. One way the G20 and other countries can provide fast and flexible support to national government plans is through the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP), set up at the request of the G20 following the 2007-08 food price crisis. The GAFSP has depleted its available resources due to strong low-income country demand and needs additional resources to continue to contribute to improved food and nutrition security.

All too often, however, the objective of agricultural policies and programmes has been to increase production of a staple crop or high-priced horticultural product. Producing more food alone will not, however, save children's lives. Greater agricultural production does not automatically mean better nutrition.

The potential of agriculture to improve the nutrition of children and families is not yet fully explored, fulfilled or prioritised. Studies show that when improved nutrition is made an explicit objective of agricultural programmes, they can lead to increases in the quantity, quality and affordability of the food families eat. To realise its potential in eliminating hunger and malnutrition, the food and agriculture sector needs to prioritise nutrition-focused policies.

The strategies for integrating agriculture, food security and nutrition are gaining momentum, but much more needs to be done, at global and national levels. Some actions can be taken now – like including nutrition objectives in food and agricultural programmes. But more research is needed to provide robust evidence of the impact of agricultural programmes on reducing malnutrition, and to identify best practice and strategies for implementing successful programmes at scale.

## Time to act

With stunting reduced globally by only 0.6% per year in the past 20 years, what the world needs now is action. At their summits this year, the G8 and G20 can deliver a big push to ensure that agriculture and nutrition go hand in hand to bring about an end to hunger and malnutrition.

There is no global target or common goal around tackling nutrition that can inspire, unite and guide the actions of organisations and governments around the world. A global target to measure the rate of stunted children would enable governments and other stakeholders to align their efforts to generate progress on this important measure of nutrition. It could be a unifying goal that would give all partners – whether global institutions or local civil society groups – something they can work towards together.

Save the Children is calling on world leaders to act now to save millions of children's lives and ensure more stable and sustainable economic prosperity by prioritising nutrition and food security for all.

### **Save the Children calls on the G8 to:**

- **fully deliver the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative**
- **deliver a new global food and nutrition security initiative to succeed L'Aquila that gives greater emphasis to nutrition by:**
  - **incorporating a new global target to reduce stunting, and track progress at country level towards achievement of that target**
  - **rapidly expand the initiative to a wider set of countries**
  - **endorsing the Scaling Up Nutrition Framework**
  - **committing and disbursing a significant proportion of funding for direct nutrition interventions under a new global food and nutrition security initiative**
  - **improving transparency and accountability by tracking and reporting on performance against outcome targets (including stunting), as well as disbursements, on an annual basis.**

The G20 also has an important role to play, with most members supporting the 2009 L'Aquila commitment and providing a forum for dialogue amongst agriculture ministers and officials. In 2011, the G20 committed to “develop a nutrition-sensitive agricultural policy in all parts of the world”.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, the G20 should identify how it will deliver on that commitment and, in doing so, complement the G8's efforts to ensure that agriculture delivers more for improved nutrition.

Save the Children is calling on the G20 to work in partnership with the G8 to maintain the momentum generated by L'Aquila and deliver a greater focus on tackling the malnutrition crisis.

## Save the Children calls on the G20 to:

- **Maintain financial commitments to food security, agriculture and nutrition at least at L'Aquila levels beyond 2012**
  - **Allocate a greater proportion of this funding for direct nutrition interventions**
  - **Top up funding for the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFFP)**
- **Prioritise multi-sectoral approaches to improving nutrition**
  - **Endorse a new global target to reduce stunting (expected to be agreed at the World Health Assembly in May) and commit to track progress at a country level**
  - **Formally endorse the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Framework**
  - **Request G20 agriculture ministers to identify agriculture policies and practices that effectively improve household nutrition and agree a mechanism in 2013 to use this knowledge to assist low-income countries.**
- **Assist low-income countries to establish, develop and finance social protection systems that can be scaled up to protect poor and vulnerable populations during food crises and shocks.**

## THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

With the IMF and others drastically downgrading economic forecasts for 2012, and a double-dip recession looming in Europe, the world simply cannot afford the ongoing economic costs of malnutrition. Developing countries are being advised by the World Bank to prepare for a global economic crisis on a par with that of 2008-09.<sup>10</sup> Record food prices in 2011 may have put the lives of 400,000 children at risk.<sup>11</sup>

Restoring order and growth in Europe and key emerging economies is crucial, but it is anticipated that the crisis in Europe could spread to low-income countries.<sup>12</sup> In a world interconnected by trade, global finance and migration, among other things, just as important are policies and programmes that support low-income countries – still reeling from the impact of commodity price spikes in 2011 – to protect their vulnerable populations from the economic downturn and high and volatile food prices. Otherwise, the significant progress made to date in reducing poverty, improving global health and strengthening the foundations for longer-term economic growth is at risk.

### Protecting the poorest

Mexican President and 2012 G20 President Felipe Calderón confirmed in Davos the importance of the G20 tackling poverty as well as restoring global growth and highlighted the importance of social programmes, such as Mexico's conditional cash transfer scheme *Oportunidades*, as part of the economic adjustments required.<sup>13</sup>

As noted by the Global Agenda Council on employment and social protection at Davos, in the developing world the establishment of a social protection floor is essential to reduce poverty and create the conditions for development.<sup>14</sup> Cash transfers to low-income families can be an effective, low-cost intervention, bringing immediate as well as longer-term improvements in children's nutritional status, boosting domestic demand and contributing to the rebalancing of the global economy.

World leaders acknowledged in the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative that in the long term, government-led, cash-based social protection systems and targeted nutrition interventions are needed to provide long-term food security to the poorest and most marginalised populations.<sup>15</sup>

In the short term, social safety nets are crucial to help communities prepare for and cope with crises. Safety nets, such as cash, vouchers, and/or food transfers, are particularly important in times of rising and volatile food prices to help poor families to continue to access nutritious diets.

### **Social safety nets work**

In the Horn of Africa, millions of people are still affected by the ongoing food crisis. Yet in parts of Ethiopia and Kenya, years of intensive efforts to prepare for a disaster – including investments in social protection and safety net programmes – have paid dividends. While a staggering 13 million people have been affected by the drought, millions more were spared from the worst effects by the joint efforts of national governments and international donors. As US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in August 2011: “The last time a drought of this magnitude struck Ethiopia, in 2002 and 2003, more than 13 million people faced starvation. Today, fewer than 5 million do.”<sup>16</sup>

In order to rapidly scale up safety nets in times of crisis, a national social protection system needs to be in place. But social protection coverage in low-income countries remains low, with the World Bank estimating that only 20% of households in sub-Saharan Africa and just over 30% in South Asia have access to safety nets.

The World Bank's Rapid Social Response programme is specifically designed to help low-income countries to develop social protection systems. The programme is, however, oversubscribed and can't help more countries without additional resourcing. This type of support, to build the foundations for timely response when a crisis hits, is being neglected in favour of setting aside funds to scale up programmes during a crisis.

There are a range of ways that this can be addressed using existing World Bank resources. These include reallocating funds to the Rapid Social Response programme, prioritising social protection within country assistance strategies and directing a greater share of the Bank's net income to social protection for low-income countries. The G20 should seek recommendations from the World Bank on how to effectively prioritise social protection, including through the process of replenishing the concessional arm of the World Bank, the International Development Association (IDA), which will commence in 2013.

The Mexican G20 Presidency provides a unique and timely opportunity to address social protection gaps. G20 countries have invaluable experience with social protection systems, which they can share with developing country governments and the G20 committed in 2011 to establish a knowledge sharing platform and to formalise closer cooperation amongst international organisations on social

protection. All governments and institutions must do more, together, to protect vulnerable communities and improve their livelihoods.

### **Save the Children calls on the G20 to:**

- **Assist low-income countries to establish, develop and finance social protection systems that can be scaled up to protect poor and vulnerable populations during crises and shocks by:**
  - **providing additional funding to the Rapid Social Response trust fund managed by the World Bank**
  - **requesting the World Bank to identify options to expand Bank resources made available through IDA to develop and improve social protection systems in low-income countries**
  - **tasking the new social protection cooperation body to be established at the Los Cabos Summit to urgently conduct an assessment of safety net readiness in all low-income countries, building in assessment of readiness to achieve nutrition outcomes.**
  - **contributing policy guidance for low-income countries, in the form of a case study or guidance note from every G20 member drawing on their own experiences with developing and financing social safety nets.**



## NOTES

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- <sup>14</sup> Global Agenda Council on Employment and Social Protection, *The Case for an Integrated Model of Growth, Employment and Social Protection*, 2012, available at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GAC\\_CaseIntegratedModelGrowthEmploymentSocialProtection\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GAC_CaseIntegratedModelGrowthEmploymentSocialProtection_Report_2012.pdf)
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- <sup>16</sup> US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 'Remarks on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa', speech to the International Food Policy Research Institute, 11 August 2011, available at: [www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/08/170417.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/08/170417.htm)

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives.  
We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.**

Save the Children  
1 St John's Lane  
London EC1M 4AR  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7012 6400  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7012 6963