

Expanding Whole-Child Development Programs

Current programs are not adequately supporting kid’s nurturing and growth. The holistic development of our children is our overarching goal, however, feasibility wise, it is crucial to prioritize our focus to implement well-rounded programs. To do this, we will prioritize the intersection of sectors working together to address the needs of children. While sectors range in focus from health to nutrition, education, relationships, and health concerns, we call for a prioritization of a synergistic program that focuses on education and nutrition.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

It is known that “for all children to thrive, we need equitable early development worldwide, entailing that every girl and boy should have the same opportunities to fully develop their potential, which is only achievable if they have good nutrition, good health, and a rich and stimulating home environment” (Barros 2).

The negative link between malnourishment and both education and overall child development is clear. As Black and Dewey write in their 2014 article, “Promoting equity

through integrated early child development and nutrition interventions,” “Stunting early in life has been associated with consequences that threaten equity throughout the life span, including delayed school entry, early school termination, and poor school performance, resulting in reduced work capacity and human capital” (25-27).

On a larger scale, “in education, the impacts of years of underinvestment and learning losses are such that, by 2030, some 84 million children or young people attending school will leave unable to read and write” (Guterres 2). Further, recent reports found that only one in six countries will achieve the universal secondary school completion target by 2030 (20). It is clear that our current practices are failing our children. Studies show that a shift in approach is necessary. This is similarly evident in the diagram below, illustrating the necessary shift in slope to meet the targets of the 2030 goals.

Figure 1a. Percentage of children with stunting 2000–2022 and projections to 2030

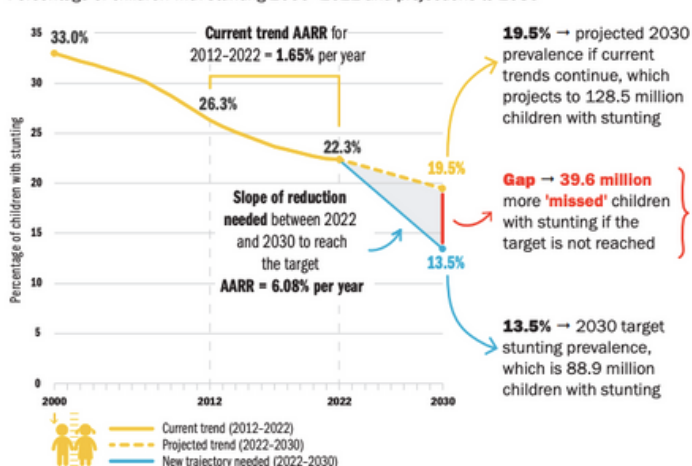


Figure 1b. Breakdown of share of 'missed' children in 2030

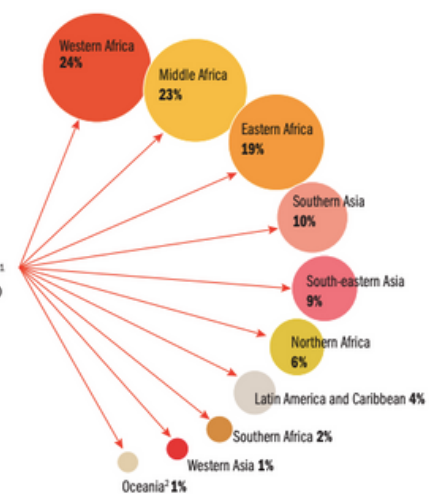
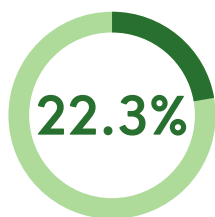
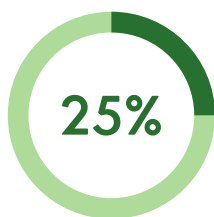


Figure 1. (a) Percentage of children with stunting 2000–2022 and projections to 2030, global (left); and (b) regional breakdown of share of ‘missed’ children in 2030 if current trends continue (right). Note: AARR = annual average rate of reduction, UNICEF 2



Of children under age 5 were affected by stunting in 2022, amounting to 148 million kids (United Nations 15)



Of primary schools globally lack basic services like electricity, water, sanitation, and handwashing facilities (United Nations 21)

Evidently, our children are struggling under our current policies and offerings of health and educational initiatives. In order to reduce disheartening statistics like those above, programs that reach across the aisle of both health and education are important to target to achieve sustainable improvements and growth.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Studies illustrate the direct link between health and education. If a child is hungry or otherwise unhealthy, they will not be able to attend or will attend but won't be able to concentrate. It is shown that early in life stunting is associated with delayed school entry, early school termination, and poor school performance, causing many long term effects (Barros 4). Therefore, "improving child nutrition can contribute to improvements in other development targets like increasing school attendance and completion, enhancing cognitive development and learning, reducing poverty among children and adults, and increasing a country's overall wealth" (4). This link exists beyond primary school, in all levels of education, as it is seen that "a child who does not complete high school is more likely in adulthood to have employment problems, lower health literacy, higher rates of illness, and earlier deaths compared to those who graduate from high school" (Griffith and Slade 28).



An example of this synergistic approach is the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program that focuses on supporting education, child development, and food security.

One of these initiatives is school feeding activities. By giving school meals and take home rations to children and households in need, both child health and educational success sees progress. This approach focuses on the assumption that this program will incentivize children to attend school regularly, that the nutritious meals will improve kid's attentiveness and learning capacity, show children and



International financial institutions emphasize the importance of ending malnutrition as a means to improve **economic and human development** outcomes as they relate to better **health, education,** and overall **long-term human capital**

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families the short and long term benefits of education, encouraging kids remain in the schools, and that there would be an increased demand and larger market that would encourage community participation and boost local economies (Mendez 9).

KEY FINDINGS:

There is a profound relationship between the health and education of kids in low-income settings. This interconnectedness means addressing these problems cannot be done in a siloed program. Therefore, programs like the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, that has introduced programs in over 40 countries, help to address these complex challenges. "Findings from the nine studies included in the review suggested a positive correlation between school feeding programs and educational outcomes" (Mendez 18). Studies also found that students with stunting benefit from school feeding programs that "emphasize providing the nutrients they may be most at risk of consuming suboptimal amounts of" (Mendez 19).

GOING FORWARD
Prioritize funding for synergistic approaches with a whole child development focus on nutrition and education
Expand programs that emphasize inclusion of nutrition offerings on personal and communal levels
Implement accountability systems and metrics to evaluate success in working towards SDG and program goals

CONCLUSIONS:

The prevailing siloed approach to child development is insufficient in transforming the life trajectories of kids growing up in adversity. In place, there is need for a whole-child development plan that offers a holistic strategy on the nutritional and educational well-being of the child. This approach recognizes that children's lives, as well as the risk and protective factors they encounter, span across sectors. By utilizing a comprehensive approach that expands sectors and spheres, efficiency and coordination can be improved. Three key recommendations moving forward are outlined in the box on the left, serving as a roadmap for policymakers and donors who are committed to take action. These allow for feasible and sustainable outcomes in child development. Further, embracing this whole child approach aligns with the European Union's commitments to sustainable and inclusive development. The evidence presented in this report responds to both the need and the hope that the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved, and children can be empowered and supported. It is imperative that immediate action is taken to invest in the holistic development of children living in adversity.

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