

Children are surviving, not thriving:

Tackling child malnutrition requires a holistic approach that targets health care, water, sanitation, hygiene and gender equality

Ottawa, ON—December 3, 2019 – Recently, UNICEF released their [State of the World's Children 2019](#), entitled “*Children, food and nutrition: Growing well in a changing world.*” It showed that, globally, more children than ever are surviving, but they are not *thriving*. Many young children around the world go hungry, miss meals or lack enough nutrition to grow into healthy adults.

Globally, almost 200 million children under 5 years of age are suffering from stunting, wasting, or both, and at least 340 million are affected by the hidden hunger of vitamin and mineral deficiencies. The suffering these children experience due to malnutrition negatively affects them for the rest of their lives.

The [Feed Her Future](#) campaign, which spotlights the Southern African Nutrition Initiative (SANI) by CARE Canada and its partners, focuses on the complex interrelationship of gender equality and nutrition. Since 2016, SANI has taken a holistic and integrated approach to tackling malnutrition in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. This work focuses on women’s rights-based nutrition programming within the context of new challenges caused by climate change and global population increases.

As the UNICEF report shows, “the world is not on course to meet targets for stunting, wasting and overweight” rates for children. This is particularly worrying for SANI countries (Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia) because the number of stunted children has declined in all continents, except Africa. In fact, data shows that in Eastern and Southern Africa, 33.6 per cent of children under 5 years (or 1 in 3 children) are stunted. Globally, we need to uphold children’s rights to food and nutrition. Chronically malnourished children suffer life-long consequences in cognitive ability, school performance and future earnings, limiting the development potential of nations.

The UNICEF report shines a light on the disproportionate quality of life between those in Canada and those in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. In Canada, only six per cent of babies are born with a low birthweight. In Zambia, this number is 12 per cent. Ninety-nine per cent of the Canadian population is using at least basic drinking water services, whereas only 69 per cent of the population in Malawi and 56 per cent of the population in Mozambique is using basic drinking water services. Furthermore, only 8 per cent of children aged 6–23 months in Malawi and only 13 per cent of children aged 6–23 months in Mozambique achieve the minimum acceptable diet.

These statistics prove that while work has been done, there is still a long road ahead to improve the lives of women and girls in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia.

Feed Her Future supports the assessment by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore that children’s nutrition must be a priority in the health, water, hygiene, sanitation, education, social protection and food systems, because “success in each of these supports success in all.” That is why SANI focuses on a holistic, integrated approach, including: training and equipping community health workers; establishing community gardens; training in climate-smart agricultural practices; improving water and sanitation; facilitating gender dialogues; and more.

The key to tackling the issue is to link child nutrition to the *access* to nutrition that women, girls and children have or do not have as a norm.

The fact is that children’s right to food is deeply connected to women’s right to food – in other words, the nutritional status of the child is impacted by the nutritional status of their mother and other caregivers. Stunting and malnutrition is part of an intergenerational cycle of poverty. SANI is breaking the cycle by ensuring that food systems in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia are sustainable, by teaching the importance of women and young child nutrition, and by addressing the harmful gender norms that negatively affect the nutrition of women and girls.

Positive change in child health cannot occur in a vacuum, because child nutrition is not the result of a single factor. Rather, to make sustainable improvement in the health of children around the world, it is necessary to use a holistic approach that considers all the complex reasons why a child is malnourished. This includes the harmful gender norms that structure family life and limit the health, nutrition and status of women – whether women are mothers or not.

SANI purports that gender normative change at the household level creates lasting benefits, which elevate the nutrition of women and girls, men and boys, families and communities.

As the UNICEF report states, it would cost just an additional US\$8.50 per child per year to meet global targets for eliminating stunting in children under five. As a global community, we need to put resources behind improving children’s lives and work together to tackle the many factors that contribute to malnutrition... and we need to do so *now*.

About “Feed Her Future”: Feed Her Future (www.feedherfuture.ca) is a campaign dedicated to building awareness about the importance of giving women and girls access to proper nutrition, through the lens and learning of CARE’s Southern African Nutrition Initiative (SANI). SANI is a 4-year project launched in March 2016, and is being delivered in partnership between CARE Canada, Cuso International, the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD), McGill University, and the governments of implementing countries. SANI is a \$24.6 million CAD project funded by the Government of Canada, CARE and the Canadian public.

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