



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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CONCEPT NOTE

Proposal for Regional Parliamentary Seminar on the Promotion of Child Nutrition in Asia

OVERVIEW

The prevalence of stunting and what it does to a child

Over 180 million children under age five are not meeting their development potential due to nutritional deficiencies, which affect their learning outcomes and earning capacity as well as the economic prosperity of their communities and their nations. Poor nutrition and the stunting it causes, trap the child, the community and the nation in a cycle of poverty.

Stunting is the outcome of chronic deficiency in nutrition during the first 1000 days of a child's life - from conception, through pregnancy, to the age of two. The damage it causes to a child's development is irreversible. A stunted five-year old is inches shorter than he or she could have been. Chronic malnutrition makes that child more vulnerable to disease. A stunted child is as much as five times more likely to die from diarrhoea than a non-stunted child. And, most important: a stunted child will never reach his or her full cognitive capacity, never able to learn as much nor earn as much throughout life.

The economics of stunting

The World Bank estimates that countries blighted by under-nutrition lose at least two to three per cent of their gross domestic product, as well as billions of dollars in salaried employment and avoidable health care spending.

Encouragingly, 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, based on cost-benefit analysis, that combating undernutrition is the best development investment. They agreed that 5 of the top 10 highest return solutions to global challenges closely relate to combating undernutrition. The science is clear and the returns are high. Governments must invest now in programmes to prevent stunting or risk diminishing the impact of other investments in education, health, and child protection.

World-wide push to tackle child malnutrition: the critical role of parliaments

As the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, which was established in 2010 to support countries as they take action to prioritize food and nutrition security in their national programmes gains momentum, several high burden countries are in a position to ramp up their efforts to tackle child malnutrition. Parliaments can make a critical contribution to those efforts. They possess the power to make laws and regulations, to influence the shape of national development plans, to determine the design and allocations of national budgets, to monitor and oversee the Government's (i.e. Executive branch) implementation of commitments to children and hold it to account, and to use their platform as community/opinion leaders to

draw attention to key development challenges such as nutrition and educate constituents on healthy practices.

Concretely, this means that to fight malnutrition, parliaments can pass legislation restricting the marketing of breastmilk substitutes or providing maternity protection; boost its micronutrient programming; scale up programmes to promote, protect and support infant and young child feeding; or take stock of its stunting and wasting rates against benchmarks.

Regional meeting to mobilize parliamentarians in support of nutrition

In order to galvanize targeted national parliaments around nutrition interventions and to enhance their capacity to advance nutrition goals, the IPU and UNICEF (with support from the SUN Secretariat) will bring together parliamentarians and relevant civil society actors (that can furnish MPs with relevant data and work with MPs to foster greater accountability) with a view toward raising awareness and educating MPs on the urgent need for action.

The aim of the seminar is to enhance the understanding of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff of issues related to malnutrition, stunting, and the deleterious effects these blights can have on their countries, and to enhance their capacity to support nutrition interventions. The seminar will pay particular attention to parliament's role in tracking and earmarking budgets for scaling up nutrition, but also focus on the other powers (law-making, oversight, and representation) parliamentarians can deploy to help reduce malnutrition rates.

Parliamentarians in the region will hear and benefit from each other, and additionally UNICEF and the IPU will invite experts to share perspectives and expertise on the role of parliamentarians in contributing to the reduction of malnutrition and stunting rates. Throughout the seminar, emphasis will be placed on the strategies and tools parliamentarians can leverage to scale up and strengthen nutrition programmes and policies.