

Addressing Undernutrition in Nigeria: What Next?

The following Priorities for Action emerged from an online discussion amongst experts from central and sub-national government, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, and research institutions operating in different sectors and levels in Nigeria, and who share the same goal of ending undernutrition in Nigeria.

Those advocating within and outside government for commitment and action to address undernutrition in Nigeria are encouraged to adopt and use these Priorities for Action to inform and guide their advocacy efforts.

1. Increase Capacity at all Levels and Across Sectors:

- Identifiable nutrition technical capacity must be established in all relevant government bodies.
- The National Planning Commission's (NPC) structure and capacity need to be strengthened for it to be more effective in its role coordinating nutrition efforts.
- Inauguration of the National Nutrition Council to address central coordination.
- Capacity mapping should be conducted to identify gaps and skills which could be reallocated.
- Training should be given to focal persons working in different sectors and tiers of government who can then cascade the training to their localities, to strengthen and standardise implementation.

2. Identify and Harness Nutrition Champions:

- Identify and engage nutrition champions at state and local levels.
- Build leadership skills to strengthen and increase Nigeria's pool of nutrition champions working at different levels of the federal system.

3. Budget:

- The creation of budget lines for nutrition in government agencies is essential. The scale up of nutrition interventions in Nigeria will not happen without government investment of public funds.
- Implementation of the revised Nutrition Policy and National Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition will only be possible if there is a structure on ground in all these sectors and there are qualified and capable personnel to provide technical support. An effective monitoring and evaluation of the policy and plan of action will be important for measuring progress of implementation.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Accountability mechanisms should be created to track the implementation of the Government's commitments from the Nutrition for Growth Summit.
- Multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation systems need to be developed to collect up-to-date nutrition data.

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5. Evidence Based Advocacy:

- Powerful advocacy tools, which portray undernutrition in an emotive or shocking way, whilst highlighting a solution to the problem, are needed to mobilise high level commitment.
- Current evidence on the scale of undernutrition, consequences, and what works to reduce undernutrition need to be harnessed.
- Civil society organisations are essential partners. The establishment of a National Nutrition Coalition is a positive step for growing CSO ownership and a coordinating role for nutrition advocacy.

“ There is a strong need for governments at all levels in Nigeria to prioritise the issue of nutrition, to budget for it, and to be better coordinated. ”
Online discussion participant

How were these Priorities for Action identified?

This brief reflects the views of 33 participants working on nutrition-related issues in Nigeria. The views were shared and gathered during a two day online discussion, entitled 'Addressing Undernutrition in Nigeria: What Next?', facilitated by the Institute of Development Studies, UK, in July 2013 on the Eldis Communities web platform.

Participants were purposefully selected and invited as experts from central and sub-national government, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, and research institutions – all of whom are working directly or indirectly on nutrition. Participants were identified through existing links with research partners, stakeholders and networks.

The structure of the discussion was based on the framework for the creation of an enabling environment for accelerated undernutrition reduction from paper 4 of the June 2013 Lancet Nutrition Series. The discussion was guided by the following overarching questions: what are the priorities for action for Nigeria? What is needed to stimulate and support action for nutrition? Who should be mobilised and how do we make this happen?

The synthesis of the consultation involved thematic grouping of the comments and a quantitative analysis of the frequency of themes to generate the final list of priorities. This brief was then circulated to all participants for review and approval.

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The challenge of undernutrition in Nigeria

According to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2008, one in four children is underweight, and 9% are severely so. Nigeria's large population means that the magnitude of its undernutrition problem is huge. After India, Nigeria has the second largest number of stunted children in the world: 7% of the global burden. Undernutrition is most severe in northern Nigeria. In this region, a third of children under five are underweight, half are stunted, and a fifth are wasted. Nigeria, due to factors including a lack of political and resource commitment and a weak and fragmented health system, has yet to respond effectively to the crisis.

Credits

The priorities expressed are those of participants from the online discussion, and have been collated and presented by the IDS Knowledge Services Health and Nutrition team. These views do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or any of the other institutions involved.

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