



THE STATE OF
THE WORLD'S
CHILDREN
1998

unicef 
United Nations Children's Fund

Focus on Nutrition

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United Nations Children's Fund



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Malnutrition is rarely regarded as an emergency; the children affected are not facing famine and betray few or no obvious signs. Yet the largely invisible crisis of malnutrition is implicated in more than half of all child deaths worldwide and violates children's rights in profound ways, compromising their physical and mental development and helping perpetuate poverty. More widespread than many suspect — with one out of every three children affected — malnutrition lowers the productivity and abilities of entire societies. This chapter examines the scale of this intractable tragedy, the approaches that are helping resolve it and the new light that scientific research is shedding on it.

The silent emergency: In this section, the scale of malnutrition and the complex interplay of factors that cause it, including poor health services and discrimination against women, are presented. 9

Approaches that work: Community involvement, food fortification, growth monitoring and promotion, supplementation programmes — these are some of the many and often overlapping approaches that are changing, and saving, children's lives. 37

Bringing science to bear: Vitamin A reduced maternal death rates by 44 per cent on average, according to a recent study. This section spotlights some of the breakthroughs that science is making in the fight for better nutrition. 71

Chapter II

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Statistics, vital indicators of the care, nurture and resources that children receive in their communities and countries, help chart progress towards the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children. The eight tables in this report have been expanded to give the broadest possible coverage of important basic indicators for nutrition, health, education, demographics, economic indicators and the situation of women, plus rates of progress and regional summaries. They also include complete data, as available, on less populous countries, covering 193 countries in all, listed alphabetically. Countries are shown on page 93 in descending order of their estimated 1996 under-five mortality rates, which is also the first basic indicator in table 1.

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Foreword

To look into some aspects of the future, we do not need projections by supercomputers. Much of the next millennium can be seen in how we care for our children today. Tomorrow's world may be influenced by science and technology; but more than anything, it is already taking shape in the bodies and minds of our children.

In *The State of the World's Children 1998*, UNICEF — the only United Nations agency dedicated exclusively to children — spells out a simple but most pressing truth. Sound nutrition can change children's lives, improve their physical and mental development, protect their health and lay a firm foundation for future productivity.

Over 200 million children in developing countries under the age of five are malnourished. For them, and for the world at large, this message is especially urgent. Malnutrition contributes to more than half of the nearly 12 million under-five deaths in developing countries each year. Malnourished children often suffer the loss of precious mental capacities. They fall ill more often. If they survive, they may grow up with lasting mental or physical disabilities.

This human suffering and waste happen because of illness — much of it preventable; because breastfeeding is stopped too early; because children's nutritional needs are not sufficiently understood; because long-entrenched prejudices imprison women and children in poverty.

The world knows what is needed to end malnutrition. With a strong foundation of cooperation between local communities, non-governmental organizations, governments and international agencies, the future — and the lives of our children — can take the shape we want and they deserve, of healthy growth and development, greater productivity, social equity and peace.



Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Chapter I

Malnutrition: Causes, consequences and solutions



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