

Nutrition: A Critical Pathway to the Achievement of the New Global Goals

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Ray Chambers: "The MDGs have shown us that investing in nutrition brings about high returns."

As the world transitions from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) toward the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have a responsibility to reflect on what has been learned during the MDG era to help inform our path toward achieving the next development agenda.

Over the past 15 years, the eight MDGs have brought about an unprecedented level of commitment and focus on saving lives

across the globe. In the quest to achieve MDG4, the deaths of over 34 million children were prevented – which is estimated to return over US\$3.8 trillion to economies in the developing world. MDG6 garnered attention to specific infectious diseases – malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The world saw immense successes in these areas: over 6.2 million malaria deaths were averted during the MDG era – most of these in children under five years of age in Sub-Saharan Africa; the tuberculosis mortality rate fell by nearly half from 1990 to 2013; and antiretroviral therapy for HIV was scaled up immensely – from reaching only 800,000 people in 2003 to reaching 13.6 million by June 2014. We also witnessed remarkable reductions in maternal deaths (MDG 5). Between 1990 and 2013, maternal deaths declined by 45%, to an estimated 289,000 deaths per year.

These numbers represent real people – healthy mothers seeing their pregnancies to full term, newborns developing optimally, children celebrating their milestone fifth birthday, and stronger communities poised to thrive with the growth of a healthy and productive workforce.

“Nutrition will continue to be a key factor in the success of the SDGs”

Nutrition has been a critical pathway to success during the MDG era, and will continue to be a key factor in the success of the SDGs. Nutrition is an underlying factor in nearly half of all child deaths, and the prevention of chronic undernutrition – stunting – is included in SDG2 but will also be important for the achievement of SDG3, which calls for an end to preventable deaths of newborns and under-five children.

It will be nearly impossible for the world to reach the SDG3 target without accelerating progress in the fight against under-

nutrition. While the number of children suffering from stunting declined from 255 to 159 million from 1990 to 2014, the problem has actually worsened in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is much more work to be done during the SDG era to reduce the number of stunted children to the target level of less than 100 million by 2025, contributing to the achievement of both SDGs 2 and 3.

Lessons learned during the MDG period

As we consider how progress in the fight against malnutrition links to the achievement of many of the SDGs, we should consider some of the major lessons learned during the MDG period:

1) Leadership is crucial: The establishment of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2010 brought global-level leadership to the nutrition space, supporting 55 member countries and establishing four core networks for donors, business, civil society organizations, and UN agencies to better engage in nutrition. The SUN movement aimed to heighten awareness of the importance of nutrition to improving maternal and child survival, and succeeded in elevating this issue on the global development agenda. It is imperative that leaders across the SUN movement should build upon this success to mobilize action across all of its stakeholder networks to deliver on the promises of better nutrition at scale in the post-2015 era.

2) Roadmaps and innovative funding models are needed: My first-hand experience with malaria during the MDG era showed what could be done when roadmaps and plans were created and shared. Countries with well crafted, quarter-by-quarter plans that were shaped with regional input were far more successful at securing the needed funding, driving complex operations and holding leaders accountable in the quest to save more lives. We very much need these roadmaps to achieve our nutrition goals – globally, as well as country-by-country.

Traditional forms of development assistance have been critical to the achievements realized under the MDGs, and these levels must be maintained in the SDG era. Yet, in order to advance progress on this even more ambitious development agenda, we must partner more closely with the private sector to explore and execute innovative funding approaches and business models to finance health and nutrition. In the final year of the MDGs, we've worked with select governments and partners at the World Bank, UNICEF, the Power of Nutrition, the Micronutrient Initiative, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), UNITLIFE, GBC Health, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), DSM/*Sight and Life* and more to identify opportunities to inject

more funding for health, including through innovative finance tools such as leveraging agreements, impact bonds, debt buy-downs, and more. New financing approaches can positively disrupt “business as usual,” and in turn, advance progress on the SDGs.

3) Integration across sectors is essential: Nutrition is a cross-cutting issue, which can have an impact on health, education, women's empowerment, and many other sectors. Multi-sectoral approaches to development should be the new normal, not the exception. There are countless opportunities to build on existing platforms to deliver additional interventions and commodities, such as providing better nutrition through school feeding programs, or reaching adolescent girls with iron and folic acid supplementation through reproductive health and family planning platforms. The proactive identification of integration opportunities, and the implementation of integrated programs, will help to ensure that vulnerable communities are truly offered opportunities for sustainable development – this is an opportunity that they deserve. The fact that there are no “ministries of nutrition” in most countries complicates in-country plan generation and multi-sectoral collaboration, and I would suggest we give real consideration to how the coordination at country-level across sectors might be better pulled together.

“Multi-sectoral approaches to development should be the new normal”

The MDGs have shown us that investing in nutrition brings about high returns – and with an increased focus on nutrition as part of the achievement of the SDGs, the world will see these tangible returns, both in human and economic capital, by the next generation.

I would like to close by thanking the multitude of committed health and nutrition champions around the world who have brought us to where we are today. I am confident that they will build upon the successes and lessons learned from across the MDG period, and lead the charge over the next 15 years to achieve the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

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