





# Welcome

## The Double Burden or The New Norm

In his recently published book *Factfulness*, the late Dr Hans Rosling beautifully compares people's different standards of living to levels of a computer game whereby everyone wishes to move from Level 1 (living on US\$1 per day), to Level 2 (living on US\$4 a day) and Level 3 (living on US\$16 a day), all the way to Level 4 (living on more than US\$32 a day).<sup>1</sup> While 200 years ago, 85 percent of the world was living in extreme poverty, on Level 1 today, the vast majority of people are spread out in the middle, across Levels 2 and 3, thanks to remarkable improvements in health, education, water and sanitation, hygiene and economic growth, among many other factors.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is still a long way to go, it is important to celebrate these developments while keeping sight of the challenges ahead. It was only three years ago that the optimist in each one of us applauded the soaring progress by many countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. In recent decades, as low- and middle-income countries made economic advances and underwent the nutrition transition, their undernutrition rates declined (despite the latest increase in the past two years as confirmed in the 2017 and 2018 SOFI report). Yet here we are, grappling with the inconvenient truth that 462 million people are underweight,<sup>2</sup> that over 2 billion people are overweight or obese, and that this latter estimate is used to describe the number of people who suffer from hidden hunger.<sup>3</sup> These different forms of malnutrition can coexist within countries and communities, within households, and even within the same person over their lifetime. The double burden of malnutrition has become the new norm in many parts of the world.

## An unparalleled opportunity

The data is alarming. While more than one in eight adults in the world is obese, one in three women of reproductive age is anemic.<sup>3</sup> We trust that this issue of *Sight and Life* magazine will sufficiently expose our readers to additional and similar data reflecting this trend. Yet, in the midst of all this, optimism screams at us: global attention to addressing the multiple forms of malnutrition is unparalleled.

The nutrition policy arena has made laudable efforts in providing a space to bring all forms of malnutrition onto the policy agenda. Although the double burden remains a largely untapped area for integrated action, there are opportunities to act. The Decade of Action on Nutrition, which calls for coordinated action through coherent and cross-cutting policies, initiatives and programs, represents a unique entry-point to comprehensively address the double burden of malnutrition.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, several major global policy developments – including the G20 meeting in Berlin in 2017, the G7 Agricultural Ministerial meeting in Bergamo and the Global Nutrition Summit in Milan – amplified the opportunity of using a food-systems approach to tackle the multiple challenges of hunger, obesity, climate change, jobs, inequality and growth, and helped to maintain momentum towards creating a sustainable future.<sup>5</sup> Progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development continues, as the United Nations Statistical Commission formally adopted the indicator framework to track progress on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## “Key questions remain unanswered”

Key questions, however, remain unanswered, and a lack of scientific consensus is slowing down governments, businesses and civil society actors who want to take action. In this light, the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health is taking on these challenges and will soon provide a scientific consensus to the global community and offer solutions as to how all actors can provide populations with healthy diets from a sustainable food system. The International Symposium on Understanding the Double Burden of Malnutrition for Effective Interventions organized by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in December 2018 in Vienna is another event that will provide further direction on the epidemiology, biology, assessment, interventions and policy implications for the double burden.

We hope that you will find this issue of *Sight and Life* magazine useful and thought-provoking. The aim of this publication has always been to provide a space to share new knowledge and

insights and to stimulate discussion rather than to solely provide answers and solutions. This special edition on the double burden seeks to bring all actors to the table and, more importantly, to include new voices in the discourse.

### Beyond business as usual

Let us introduce you to Joy. She is 21 and lives with her three children and husband in the fishing village of Nyanyano in Ghana. Her husband is a fisherman who spends most of the month away from the village. Joy works selling fried food on the street. Her three children are malnourished, and her oldest child has suffered from an eye infection for two years without medical treatment. She feels alienated and alone. She cannot afford to take her children to hospital for treatment or get the food supplements the nurse recommends. The local clinic serves a population of 40,000 with just a handful of community nurses. Most children never visit the center because of the stigma it brings.

In the same village, Ana, aged 40, lives with her six children in a two-bedroomed house. Her husband left two years ago, and she is the sole provider. She earns her living by selling fruit at her market stall – fruit she and her family never eat, as it is their main source of income. Long hours and economic constraints result in her buying food that is available, convenient and cheap. Unfortunately, this often means consuming foods high in fat, salt and sugar and low in vitamins and minerals. Due to her increased weight gain, she now struggles to stay on her feet all day, and work is becoming more difficult. She fears for her family's source of income and worries about her future health bills.

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The statistics for both women are bleak, their problems complex. But finding solutions to the multiple burdens of malnutrition that Joy and Ana are experiencing is the new norm. As public health professionals, we must challenge ourselves to work differently, be innovative, make alliances outside the normal sphere and shift mindsets to become more agile and flexible in our approach. Those of us working in under- and over-nutrition are often separated, working in silos and apprehensive about straying too far from our fields of professional expertise. This is a contradiction that inhibits the generation of new ideas, solutions and cross-learning. The many burdens of malnutrition and its consequences are influencing the well-being and economic resilience of regions, countries, communities and individuals. Solutions require concerted action.

Unfortunately, no single solution or ‘one-size-fits all’ approach exists due to the many factors that exacerbate this public health issue. In our ‘Food for Thought’ piece, we reflect on the importance of science in the discussion. Consolidated data on the global landscape to understand its magnitude and extent, the impact of climate change and mass urbanization, food and agricultural systems, legislation, consumer behavior and the role of the private sector are areas we need to understand to ensure the problem is not viewed in isolation.

Engagement with the food industry is often given lip service, but examples of real collaboration are rare. With a lack of trust, due particularly to the marketing of unhealthy foods to children and the lack of adherence to the breastfeeding code, relations are strained. However, sustainable, lasting solutions to the double burden of malnutrition require us to engage the food industry through a sharing of goals. Food companies have technical and marketing experience and expertise that can support the development of affordable, nutritious foods, particularly for consumers at the base of the pyramid. These relationships should be managed through incentives and regulatory frameworks that support healthy eating principles.

Low- and middle-income countries are continuing to tackle undernutrition while finding themselves increasingly challenged to fight growing rates of overweight and obesity. These countries cannot afford to ignore the potential of unhealthy diets. A food system that is efficient in delivering healthy food to all at an affordable price, in all situations, is required. High-income countries have seen the cost and consequences of not recognizing this sooner. Current estimates suggest that malnutrition costs the global economy US\$3.5 trillion a year – 11% of the world's GDP.<sup>6</sup>

### In this issue

We would like to thank all our contributors, who have very kindly shared their insights and research. We begin by hearing Alessandro Demaio's thoughts on how the global community can come together through integrated action on the double burden of malnutrition. If you are interested in hearing about how key stages in people's lives have relevance for their health, read Chandni Maria Jacob and Mark Hanson's article examining how a life-course approach to policy design can help prevent childhood malnutrition. To understand further the unique challenges presented in different contexts, read Simón Barquera, Mariel White and Norma Buenrostro's synopsis from Latin America, while Regina Moench-Pfanner, Jeyakumar Henry and Klaus Kraemer provide the view from Asia. If you would like to appreciate how to identify interventions that can have the greatest impacts, we recommend you review the findings of Indira Bose, Saskia de Pee and colleagues from their ‘Fill the Nutrient Gap’ analysis in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Tajikistan. What does a double- or triple-duty action look like? Rafael

Pérez-Escamilla and Sofia Segura-Pérez provide the rationale for breastfeeding as an important example of triple-duty action in the context of the double burden of malnutrition.

Don't miss Jessica Renzella and Elyse Franko-Filipasic's enlightening article on the value of community-centered approaches in addressing an issue as complex as the double burden. To dive into some of the science behind the complexity, read H el ene Deslile's piece on the frequent co-occurrence of nutritional deficiencies and cardiometabolic risk markers. For a compelling call to action on the role of double-duty actions in addressing the double burden, do read Corinna Hawkes' article. Within the theme of breaking out of our silos, let Jessica Fanzo and Paul Newnham convince you of the importance of addressing capacity challenges and engaging new voices in the nutrition fight, respectively. Hear the private sector's voice and learn about FRESH's approach from the contribution of Alison Cairns, and if you are interested in finding out how to get consumers to choose fruit and not fries, Marti van Liere and Valerie Curtis share their insights. Last but not least, we are extremely pleased to feature one of Peru's leading chefs, Arlette Eulert Checa, in our 'Day in the Life' interview, offering the inspiring example of how she uses her skill and passion for food to improve the diets of all Peruvians.

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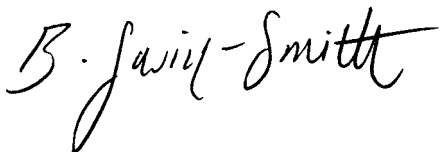
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With warm regards,

**Breda Gavin-Smith**

Global Public Health Nutrition Manager, *Sight and Life*



Despite the bleak outcomes that regions, countries, communities and individuals are currently facing, one must acknowledge that the challenges posed by undernutrition, overweight and obesity along with diet-related noncommunicable diseases present a unique opportunity for mutual learning and collaboration between the global North and South, as every country in the world is affected by one or more forms of malnutrition.

We very much hope you will enjoy this new issue of *Sight and Life* magazine, and trust that it will stimulate new ways of thinking that pave the way for meaningful and lasting change.

### References

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**Kesso Gabrielle van Zutphen**

Knowledge and Research Specialist, *Sight and Life*

