

Editor's note

In a child lies the future of any nation. The good news in the recently released report "The Child Development Index 2012: Progress, challenges and inequality"¹ is particularly welcome. "The story in numbers (*as given in the report indicate*): 127 countries improved their scores on the Child Development Index in the period of 2005–10; 9,000 fewer children under-five died per day on average in the period of 2005–10 than in 1995–99, 50 million more children were in primary school in the period of 2005–10 than in 1995–99; 36 million fewer children were underweight in 2005–10 than 1995–99; But... more children suffered from acute malnutrition in 2005–10 than in the first half of the 2000s." The Child mortality index is based on i) under-five mortality ii) primary school aged children not in school and iii) prevalence of being underweight. The report calls for a sustainable effort by the governments of developing countries to "i) Build on the target recently approved by the World Health Organization for a 40% reduction in the number of children who are stunted by 2015, by setting up national policies and specific targets for reducing child stunting, ii) Strengthen social transfer programmes (such as cash transfers) as a key policy tool to combat hunger and undernutrition, both in times of stability and as an effective crisis response tool that is easily scalable, iii) Ensure that national nutrition policies and social transfers are aimed at reducing inequalities and the disproportionate impact of undernutrition among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society".

Within the context of the report, South Africa, a country with a stubbornly high prevalence of undernutrition indices, has recently

embarked on a welcome process, spearheaded by the Nutrition Directorate of the national Department of Health, to evaluate nutrition interventions for children from conception to five years of age, the most vulnerable of children, as well as pregnant women or women who care for children younger than five years of age. Using a multi-sectorial approach (Departments of Basic Education, Social Development, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Treasury, Water Affairs, Rural development and Land Reform, United Nations agencies, food industry, NGOs and other development partners), the evaluation has been planned to focus on availability of resources, mainstreaming of nutrition in all other relevant programmes, assess service delivery models, institutional arrangements, monitoring and evaluation systems, implementation of high impact interventions and interventions targeted at children younger than five years of age by various government department. One hopes that South Africa will soon achieve the status afforded in the report to Tanzania, a country that has "halved its child mortality, and almost halved the proportion of underweight children".

Prof Demetre Labadarios

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Reference

1. The Child Development Index 2012: Progress, challenges and inequality. Save the Children, UK. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/child-development-index-2012-progress-challenges-and-inequality>; Accessed 29th August 2012.

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