United Nations Children’s Fund  
Executive Board  
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UNICEF Executive Board  
Improving Nutrition for Sustainable Development  
A Focus on Stunting Prevention

The international community is increasingly aware of the importance of good nutrition for both economic growth and social development. Leaders and decision makers now understand the consequences of undernutrition, not only in emergency situations like the Sahel, but in perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequity in nations where undernutrition persists.

UNICEF has been working to build on this growing international momentum around nutrition, playing a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of nutrition programmes in many countries. UNICEF is a key participant in global initiatives and partnerships around nutrition, such as the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, in which Executive Director Anthony Lake chairs the Lead Group, and the REACH inter-agency initiative for combating child hunger and undernutrition.

This session will update the UNICEF Executive Board on these developments, reviewing the global nutrition situation and looking at implementation of nutrition programmes. We will share information about UNICEF’s role in achieving global progress, both through international initiatives such as SUN and action at national level, which will be illustrated through a number of success stories.

The lifelong impact of undernutrition during the period of pregnancy up to two years of age is well established. It leads to stunted growth, reduced brain development and school performance, significantly reduced income as an adult and increased incidence of chronic disease. It influences birth outcome for the next generation, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and hampering national development.

About 170 million children under the age of five suffer from stunting, or low height for age. In several countries – many of them food-secure - more than 40 per cent of children are stunted. The session will look at the global nutrition situation through the lens of the problem of stunting.

Board Members will learn that the prevalence of stunting has come down significantly over the past two decades. This progress is welcome, but much remains to be done, especially in the area of adequate infant feeding practices. Less than 40% of children aged 0-6 months are exclusively breastfed, and the quality of
complementary food for children aged 6 to 24 months is very poor in most countries. For example, micronutrient content is often much too low. It is not unusual that just 30 per cent of a nation’s children in the age range of 6 to 24 months are adequately fed in terms of quantity and quality.

Future nutrition programming will be informed by the positive recent experiences of countries working to tackle the problem of undernutrition. Select examples will be presented on stunting reduction in Ethiopia and Haiti, expanded programmes to treat children suffering from severe acute malnutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, improved breastfeeding practices in Sri Lanka and India, and anemia reduction among children in Kyrgyzstan. In each of these experiences, the factors which lead to success will be presented and the role of UNICEF analyzed. Key factors included: sound national policy based on evidence, good partnerships, integrated programming, and effective community outreach.

The session will also update Board Members on developments related to the SUN movement, which offers tremendous potential for progress. 28 countries Africa, Asia, and Latin America are on board, having committed to the reduction of undernutrition. UNICEF is a major contributor to national and international activities conducted in the framework of SUN, and is committed to further expand this role. UNICEF sees good partnerships as central to this process, and the importance of REACH, the joint UN initiative to improve coordinated support, is stressed.

UNICEF will continue to play a lead role in nutrition and will advocate to invest in nutrition, build partnerships at the country level, provide evidence-based technical guidance and programme support, expand innovative monitoring for results, and share its extensive experience.