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SUMMARY:

The U.S. Contribution to Ending Global Malnutrition

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Malnutrition causes significant harm at the individual, national, and global levels. Malnutrition is linked to 45 percent of all preventable deaths¹ among children younger than 5—about 2.6 million deaths every year. Women also die from malnutrition-related causes; malnutrition in the form of anemia² is the cause of 20 percent of maternal deaths during pregnancy and childbirth.

Children who survive early malnutrition are likely to suffer from stunting. In 2017, approximately 151 million children under 5 were stunted because of chronic malnutrition during the 1,000-day window between pregnancy and age 2. The most visible sign of stunting is that children are far too short for their age, but malnutrition also stunts children's futures by causing lifelong, irreversible damage to their health, growth, and development. Adults who were well-nourished as young children have lifetime earnings of up to 46 percent more than those who are stunted.³

Wasting, or underweight due to acute malnutrition, affects approximately 51 million children. It is a deadly condition: children with severe acute malnutrition are up to 11 times as likely to die as well-nourished children.

These individual and family tragedies hinder a country's development and undermine its stability. But affordable investments in nutrition can help increase workforce productivity, reduce healthcare costs, and break cycles of intergenerational poverty. Research shows that every dollar invested in nutrition produces at least \$16 in economic returns,⁴ largely through the increased economic productivity and lower healthcare costs just mentioned.

Malnutrition causes damage at the global level as well. A principal example is armed conflict. This is clearly a two-way relationship, since conflict is one of the top causes of global malnutrition. The world currently has unprecedented numbers of displaced people, with women and children at particularly high risk of malnutrition and in need of prevention and treatment services. Strengthening maternal and child nutrition helps enable women and children to reach their full potential.

The United States and other industrialized countries also benefit from investing in global nutrition. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recognizes that op-



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timal nutrition is essential to ending extreme poverty and to ensuring the national security and well-being of the United States. Now is the time to act to end malnutrition, since this saves lives and relieves suffering today while also reducing the need for humanitarian assistance tomorrow.

The United States has been a world leader in the fight against malnutrition. Both the administration and Congress have participated in recent global efforts to make nutrition a higher priority. The two most visible administration actions were the adoption of the 2014 USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy⁵ and the 2016 U. S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan.⁶ The latter was developed with the collaboration of eight agencies, including USAID, with the goal of strengthening the impact of U.S. funding for global malnutrition by improving coordination, collaboration, and research that informs implementation.

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In recent years, Congress has prioritized nutrition and food security in authorizing legislation and has appropriated specific funding levels for nutrition. The Global Food Security Act (P.L. 114-195),⁷ emphasizing the importance of nutrition, in particular maternal and child nutrition, was passed in 2016. In 2018, it was reauthorized for an additional five years.

As directed by Congress, the administration developed a Global Food Security Strategy for fiscal years 2017-2021. The Strategy brings together 11 U.S. government agencies to highlight the overall importance of nutrition and emphasize the need for a “multi-sectoral approach,” meaning nutrition activities in a variety of fields, both nutrition-specific,⁸ such as treatment for children with acute malnutrition, and nutrition-related,⁹ which are often longer-term initiatives

such as nutrition-sensitive agriculture.¹⁰

What's Next?

Ending malnutrition is achievable, not merely an aspiration. But it will not happen overnight, so it is important to maintain current efforts that will make a long-term difference. The world has made progress, but it must be accelerated. The U.S. government, alongside other stakeholders, must continue to invest time and resources in global maternal and child nutrition, scale up what has proven to work, and explore new approaches.

Congress can play a leading role by increasing funding and improving legislation. Here is a summary of recommendations:

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

- Protect and increase U.S. funding and commitments for global nutrition.
- Make clear that global nutrition is a priority by supporting legislation to strengthen U.S. commitment to accelerating progress on global nutrition.
- Seek a more clearly defined budget for U.S. nutrition-sensitive spending, with the administration using a methodology shared by other nutrition stakeholders.
- Safeguard the technical capacity of the U.S. government, especially USAID, to respond effectively in the fight against malnutrition.
- Call on the administration to contribute further to the nutrition evidence base, especially around nutrition-sensitive actions and reaching adolescent girls.

For further analysis, see Bread for the World Institute's briefing paper #33, *The U.S. Contribution to Ending Global Malnutrition*, Available from: <http://www.bread.org/library/us-contribution-ending-global-malnutrition>.



Endnotes

¹ Black RE, Victora CG, Walker SP, et al. (2013). Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet* 382 (9890): 396

² WHO (2016). Micronutrient deficiencies: Iron deficiency anemia. Accessed at <http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/ida/en/>.

³ Hoddinott J, Maluccio J, Behrman J, et al. (2008). Effect of a nutrition intervention during early childhood on economic productivity in Guatemalan adults. *The Lancet* 371 (9610): 411-416.

⁴ International Food Policy Research Institute (2016). Global Nutrition Report 2016: From Promise to Impact: Ending Malnutrition by 2030. Accessed at <http://www.globalnutritionreport.org/the-report/>.

⁵ USAID (2014). Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014-2025. Accessed at <https://www.usaid.gov/nutrition-strategy>. For further analysis on USAID's Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, see Bread for the World Institute's briefing paper #37, A multi-sectoral approach to nutrition: Assessing USAID's progress.

⁶ U.S. Government (2016). U.S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan 2016-2021. Accessed at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/nutrition-coordination-plan_web-508.pdf.

⁷ Global Food Security Act of 2016. Accessed at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1252>.

⁸ Nutrition-specific: activities that directly address the immediate causes of undernutrition (inadequate dietary intake; disease or poor health status).

⁹ Nutrition-related: activities that address the underlying causes of undernutrition (household food insecurity, inadequate care and feeding practices, unhealthy household environments, and inadequate health services).

¹⁰ US Government (2016). U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy FY 2017-2021. Accessed at <https://feedthefuture.gov/resource/us-government-global-food-security-strategy-fy-2017-2021>.