

## **Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative: oral report**

### **Background note**

#### **I. Background**

1. Every year, undernutrition contributes to the deaths of about 5.6 million children under five in the developing world, according to the *Progress of Children: A Report Card on Nutrition* (UNICEF, 2006). One out of every four children under five – some 146 million children in the developing world – is underweight for his or her age, placed at increased risk of an early death and subject to illness, disability and underachievement. However, swift and sustainable advances, based on proven interventions, can be made to enhance the survival and development prospects for young children. For these reasons, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) are collaborating closely with the World Bank and other partners to encourage countries to reposition nutrition in national development, an essential step for the accelerated and sustainable achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative will focus on Millennium Development Goal 1, target 2, which aims to reduce the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and undernutrition by 2015. Efforts will be made in particular to halve the proportion of children under age five who are underweight.

2. As previously reported, the Initiative will achieve three major objectives:

(a) To stimulate, enable and assist national Governments to mainstream and accelerate the elimination of child hunger and undernutrition within national policies and programmes based on monitoring and accountability for results;

(b) To provide adequate policy support and expert technical guidance supported by clear, consistent and well-informed advocacy;

(c) To mobilize sufficient additional resources in support of national efforts, and support national efforts to target the use of resources in a cost-effective, consistent and coordinated manner towards the elimination of hunger and undernutrition among children and pregnant and lactating women.

#### **II. Purpose of the report**

3. The purpose of this report is to update the UNICEF Executive Board on actions taken by WFP and UNICEF, together with partner organizations, since the previous oral reports were delivered at each agency's annual session of the Executive Board in June 2006.

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4. Input was provided by 32 WFP and UNICEF country offices who had expressed interest in the Initiative, as well as by four regional consultations conducted with the participation of a number of WFP and UNICEF country and regional offices in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Four WFP and UNICEF regional offices are playing a key role in helping to shape the design of the Global Plan of Action.

5. An Advisory Committee is scheduled to meet in September 2006 to review and further shape the draft Global Plan of Action, which will be reviewed by the WFP Executive Board in November 2006 and the UNICEF Executive Board in January 2007. The launch of the Initiative is expected to take place near the end of the first quarter of 2007.

6. In addition to WFP and UNICEF, organizations invited to participate in the Advisory Committee are the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition, the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

7. A Partners Group for the Initiative is planned at the global level, the aim of which will be to encourage the participation of a wider range of interested countries and organizations. These will include, for example, international non-governmental and civil society organizations and foundations; international private sector organizations; and universities and research institutions.

### **III. Technical interventions in nutrition**

8. Four technical interventions in nutrition have been found to be the *most effective* in reducing the immediate causes of under-five mortality: (a) exclusive breastfeeding for six months and appropriate complementary feeding thereafter; (b) micronutrient fortification and, in special circumstances, supplementation; (c) water and sanitation interventions; and (d) community-based therapeutic feeding of children who are severely undernourished. That high priority should be given to these interventions in order to reduce hunger and malnutrition is a fact that was underscored by the Copenhagen Consensus panel in 2004 and again in 2006. For a *long-term prevention strategy*, the attainment of a quality education for girls and women is vital, as is improving the status of women. Gender development, including a stronger engagement by fathers in preparing for parenthood and child care, is also essential.

### **IV. Immediate next steps**

9. There are three next steps: (a) finalize the preparation of the draft Global Plan of Action in September 2006 for the subsequent review by the Advisory Committee and the WFP and UNICEF Executive Boards; (b) continue to refine the communication strategy for global advocacy, awareness-raising and resource mobilization with partners and finalize an audience matrix that will cover the various types of audiences (e.g., communication), major messages, and the types of results sought for children; and (c) consult with a number of international non-governmental organizations in order to benefit from their advice on the proposed Global Plan of Action for the Initiative.