

## Children & Nutrition: Eastern and Southern Africa

Trends in underweight prevalence in children under five	
1990	33%
Current available data	29% (16 million children)
Average annual rate of reduction (AARR)	0.0 (no progress towards MDG target)
Other key nutrition indicators	
Infants with low birthweight (%)	14
Children exclusively breastfed 0-6 months (%)	41
Children receiving vitamin A supplementation (%)	68
Households consuming iodized salt (%)	60
Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	149



UNICEF/HQ00-0995/Alejandro Balaguer. KENYA: A toddler stands in a doorway while his mother peels potatoes.

### Challenges

This region has made little or no progress on underweight prevalence. The absolute number of underweight children has increased over the last 15 years. Falling agricultural productivity, food crises fuelled by drought and conflict, growing poverty and the rising crisis of HIV have slowed or reversed positive trends seen in the early 1990s in such countries as Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The relationship between the HIV epidemic and child nutrition in the region is complex and changing. A 2003 study in six southern African countries affected by drought, for example, found that levels of underweight in children

increased more rapidly in relatively prosperous communities close to urban areas than in other areas due to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. And certainly millions of vulnerable children across the region who have lost carers are at risk of missing out on the nutrients

they need. Of the 17 countries in this region with sufficient data, only Botswana is on track for the MDG target. In Burundi, 45% of children are underweight and 57% are stunted. The prevalence of children underweight in Eritrea is 40%; in Ethiopia and Madagascar the rate is more than 40 per cent.

### Priority countries

- Ethiopia, where almost half of all children are underweight, has made no progress since 1990.
- In South Africa, the proportion of underweight children is relatively low (12%) but rates are rising sharply, by an average of 5.6% every year since 1994-1995. Only 7% of children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life.

### Progress

- This region has a higher rate of exclusive breastfeeding, at 41%, than any other region except East Asia and the Pacific.
- Despite having the highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the world, Swaziland has the lowest proportion of underweight children in the region (10%). Botswana, with the second highest adult HIV prevalence rate worldwide, reduced underweight prevalence from 17% in 1996 to 13% in 2000.
- Around 60 per cent of households in the region consume iodized salt.

### UNICEF in action

- UNICEF is playing a leading role in salt iodization, vitamin A supplementation and breastfeeding across the region and documents examples of best practice in nutrition.
- UNICEF Country Offices are key supporters of government nutrition programmes to eliminate micronutrient deficiencies and reduce undernutrition in young children by promoting optimal feeding and the protection of breastfeeding.
- UNICEF supports water and sanitation programmes across the region, and particularly in schools, to reduce the diarrhoeal disease that contributes to undernutrition.