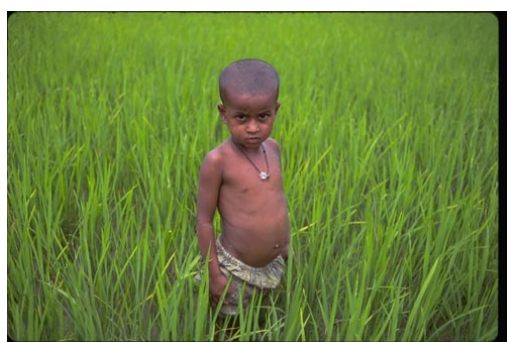


Children & Nutrition: South Asia

Trends in underweight prevalence in children under five	
1990	53%
Current available data	46% (78 million children)
Average annual rate of reduction (AARR)	1.7% (insufficient to reach MDG target)
Other key nutrition indicators	
Infants with low birthweight (%)	31
Children exclusively breastfed 0-6 months (%)	38
Children receiving vitamin A supplementation (%)	58
Households consuming iodized salt (%)	49
Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	92



Challenges

This region has staggeringly high levels of underweight children. Almost half of all children (46%) are underweight -- a total of 78 million. Just three countries -- India, Bangladesh and Pakistan -- account for half of all underweight children worldwide, even though they have just 29% of the developing world's under-fives. Some countries have made strong progress in reducing the proportion of children under five who are underweight. In this region, calorie shortages are less to blame for child undernutrition than lack of nutrients in staple foods, women's low educational and social status, large numbers of low birthweight infants and lack of access to safe sanitation. South Asia is the only region on earth where a higher proportion of girls are underweight than boys: 47% compared to 44%.

UNICEF / HQ97-0323/Shehzad Noorani. An undernourished boy stands in a field in Bangladesh.

Priority countries

- India, Bangladesh and Pakistan account for half the world's underweight children.
- Nepal is the only country in the region slipping backwards in underweight prevalence, with a negative AARR of -0.5.

Progress

- Bangladesh cut underweight prevalence from 66% to 48% between 1990 and 2004 and, with Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka, is on track to reach the MDG target of halving underweight prevalence among children.
- Bhutan halved underweight prevalence in about 10 years, from 38% in 1988 to 19% in 1999 and is the first country in the region to achieve universal salt iodization.
- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan have reached more than 85% of children aged 6-59 months with two doses of Vitamin A supplements each year.
- A review of India's iron supplementation programme to reduce anaemia in adolescent girls found a 10-25% reduction in anaemia among 8.7 million girls at a yearly cost of around US 50 cents per girl.
- In Nepal, child undernutrition in UNICEF programme areas has been reduced from 50% to 17% and anaemia in pre-school children fell by 77% after two rounds of deworming. In many communities child undernutrition has disappeared.

UNICEF in action

- UNICEF works at the policy level to promote good nutrition for children. In Bangladesh, for example, UNICEF has supported the drafting of national strategies on anaemia and infant and young child feeding.
- Across the region, UNICEF supports the push for universal salt iodization and has helped to establish salt iodization plants in Afghanistan.
- Also in Afghanistan, UNICEF supports hospital-based treatment for severe undernutrition through therapeutic feeding units.
- In India, UNICEF has worked with the government on an integrated communication campaign, which includes raising public awareness of nutrition issues. The campaign is backed by UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Roger Moore.
- In Nepal, UNICEF has developed a growth monitoring manual so that communities can check the development of their own children, low dose vitamin A treatment for pregnant women with night blindness, deworming during pregnancy and postpartum vitamin A supplementation.