



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Progress shows that stunting in children can be defeated – UNICEF

*Globally one in four of all children under 5 is stunted*

**DUBLIN, 15 April 2013** – A new UNICEF report issued today offers evidence that real progress is being made in the fight against stunted growth – the hidden face of poverty for 165 million children under the age of five. The report shows that accelerated progress is both possible and necessary.

*Improving Child Nutrition: The achievable imperative for global progress* confirms that a key to success against stunting is focusing attention on pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life. Stunting in a child is not only about being too short for his or her age. It can also mean suffering from stunted development of the brain and cognitive capacity.

"Stunting can kill opportunities in life for a child and kill opportunities for development of a nation," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. "Our evidence of the progress that is being achieved shows that now is the time to accelerate it."

One in four of all under-5 children globally is stunted because of chronic undernutrition in crucial periods of growth. An estimated 80 per cent of the world's stunted children live in just 14 countries.

The UNICEF report highlights successes in scaling up nutrition and improving policies, programmes and behaviour change in 11 countries: Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam.

The damage done to a child's body and brain by stunting is irreversible. It drags down performance at school and future earnings. It is an injustice often passed from generation to generation that cuts away at national development. Stunted children are also at a higher risk of dying from infectious diseases than other children.

But in parts of India – home to 61 million stunted children – progress is still being made. In Maharashtra, the country's wealthiest state and second most populous, 39 per cent of children under two were stunted in 2005-2006. That however dropped to 23 per cent by 2012, according to a state-wide nutritional survey, largely by supporting frontline workers improving child nutrition.

In Peru, stunting fell by a third between 2006 and 2011 following a Child Malnutrition Initiative that lobbied political candidates to sign a '5 by 5 by 5' commitment to reduce stunting in children under 5 by 5 per cent in 5 years and to lessen inequities between urban and rural areas. Peru drew on its experience of successful smaller projects and integrated nutrition with other programmes. It also focused on the most disadvantaged children and women and decentralized government structures.

Ethiopia cut stunting from 57 per cent to 44 per cent and under-5 mortality from 139 deaths per 1,000 live births to 77 per 1,000 between 2000 and 2011. Key steps included a national nutrition programme, providing a safety net in the poorest areas and boosting nutrition assistance through communities.

Stunting and other forms of undernutrition are reduced through a series of simple and proven steps such as improving women's nutrition, early and exclusive breastfeeding, providing additional vitamins and minerals as well as appropriate food – especially in pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life.

The report says that existing solutions and the work of new partnerships, including the Scaling Up Nutrition movement, create an unprecedented opportunity to address child undernutrition through countries accelerating progress through coordinated projects with donor support and measurable targets.

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### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

In June 2012, the Governments of Ethiopia, India and the United States with UNICEF launched a global roadmap to end preventable deaths of children under the age of five. Since then, under the banner of *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*, more than 170 countries have signed up and renewed their commitment to child survival.

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