that children in urban poverty are nearly 2.7 times as likely to be stunted.

Effective interventions to reduce child undernutrition may include micronutrient supplementation (iodine, iron and vitamin A); food supplementation (for micronutrient deficiencies); infection prevention and treatment; growth monitoring and promotion; education about infant feeding practices (breastfeeding and complementary feeding); and school feeding programmes.

If the needs of the urban poor are not addressed, progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) may be at stake, especially Goals 1 (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger), 4 (reducing child mortality) and 5 (improving maternal health). In addition to a strong focus on health and nutritional interventions (e.g., antenatal, maternal and neonatal care, immunization, appropriate feeding practices), the importance of reproductive health is being recognized in this context, as family planning can be a cost-effective and high-yield approach to improving the health of mothers and children. The Urban Reproductive Health Initiative, sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and currently implemented in selected urban areas of India, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal, is an example. The programme seeks to significantly increase modern contraceptive prevalence rates – especially among the urban and peri-urban poor – through integrating and improving the quality of family planning services, particularly in high-volume settings; increasing provision, including through public-private partnerships; and dismantling demand-side barriers to access.

by Jean Christophe Fotso

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the well-being of Africans through policy-relevant research on key population and health issues. Originally established as a programme of the Population Council in 1995, APHRC has been autonomous since 2001 and now has offices in Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. The Center focuses on research, strengthening research capacity and policy engagement in sub-Saharan Africa.