

Action agenda for nutrition security in India released

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In the wake of stubbornly high levels of under nutrition across India, the Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security convened a review by technical experts about what works to improve nutrition and to develop a set of evidence-informed recommendations. These recommendations, included in an Action Agenda for Nutrition Security, were released at Delhi today.

“New frontiers of the mind and technology are before us, and if they are pioneered with the same vision, boldness and drive with which the battle against food shortage was fought through the green revolution, we can achieve the goal of Zero Hunger sooner than generally considered possible,” said Professor M. S. Swaminathan.

The recommendations are based on a review of the current evidence and approaches to achieve nutrition security in India. A similar document entitled “Sustainable Nutrition Security in India: A Leadership Agenda for Action” was originally released by the Coalition in 2010; this document updates the evidence and calls for specific areas of action for national and state-level actors. These

areas of action are urgent to enable accelerated movement in India's poor nutrition statistics.

The action agenda calls for five top areas of action:

1. Institutionalize leadership for nutrition within the Prime Ministerial and Chief Ministerial Offices.
2. Prioritize universal coverage of selected evidence-informed essential nutrition interventions, with a special focus on children under two years of age, pregnant women and adolescent girls.
3. Finance and deliver at scale the essential nutrition interventions with active attention to equity.
4. Ensure equitable access to food security, including dietary diversity, primary health care, safe drinking water, environmental and household sanitation and address gender issues pertaining to women's education and delaying age of conception.
5. Position nutrition as a development indicator and establish a reliable system for periodic data-driven updates on the state of nutrition in India.

There is universal concern, across diverse stakeholders, about the unacceptable degree of poor nutrition in India. As seen in the recent Together for Nutrition conference, the evidence suggests that a proper fusion of political will, scientific skill and people's participation can help to reduce the malnutrition problem sooner than most people feel possible.

"The Coalition has identified several urgent areas for action. They are all important, but two in particular stand out for me (1) positioning nutrition as a development indicator of the highest order, with frequent and regular data collection and (2) positioning accountability for nutrition within the Prime Minister's Office. Malnutrition is too easily ignored with little accountability on commitments made—these two recommendations, if taken up, will not allow that to happen," observed Professor Lawrence Haddad.

The seemingly impossible task can only be achieved, however, only by mobilizing the power of partnership. The Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security in India calls on the central and state governments, along with other partners, to take this agenda for nutrition action forward. The children of India cannot wait.

Dr. Laxmikant Palo, Senior Advisor – Nutrition, Save the Children, said, "In order to compliment the goals of Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security in India, the recommendations will be taken forward from this report and will be implemented at state levels by Save the Children".