

- 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2: Achieve universal primary education
- 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

## GOAL 4: REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

- 5: Improve maternal health
- 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8: Develop a global partnership for development

### MDG 4 aims to reduce child mortality. Its target is to reduce the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015.

Undernutrition is estimated to be an underlying cause in more than one-

third of all deaths in children under five. Improvements in child nutrition are a significant way to reduce child mortality.

Efforts to reduce child undernutrition and mortality cannot treat children in a vacuum, but as part of families and households. Analysis of recent trends confirms that child mortality

has fallen fastest in the countries that are making the most rapid progress in reducing hunger. Healthy, well-nourished people are both the outcome of successful social and economic development, including expanded access to education, and constitute an essential input into the development process.

### WHAT FAO IS DOING

FAO develops and implements programmes to assist poor households and communities to secure access to nutritionally adequate diets, improve their dietary intakes and nutritional well-being and reduce child undernutrition.

Activities include:

- community-centred initiatives using participatory approaches that encourage and empower households to take an active role in designing and implementing activities;
- development and dissemination of training materials on household food security and nutrition for use by local institutions and field staff;
- development and implementation of nutrition education programmes to empower families to grow, process and prepare a healthy nutritious diet;
- training programmes to enhance the capacities of national and local staff in nutrition; and
- promotion of a forum on household food security and community nutrition through informal meetings, expert consultations, networks and interactive Web sites to facilitate the exchange of information, foster collaboration and share lessons learned among development practitioners, agencies, institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Two recent notable initiatives are:

- improved complementary feeding for infants and young children
- the Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH) programme.

#### Improved complementary feeding

FAO is taking action to improve complementary feeding for young children, i.e. giving foods in addition to breastmilk, as an important way to prevent undernutrition and reduce child mortality. It is fundamental to provide small

children with adequate amounts of essential nutrients, consumed in appropriate quantities of diverse foods to promote proper growth and development of their full potential and future capacities. From six months onwards, breastmilk alone is no longer adequate and children must be given complementary foods made from ingredients that are rich in energy and micronutrients, especially animal source foods, legumes, vegetables and fruits.

The high levels of child undernutrition in children aged 6-24 months in many countries are mainly due to inadequate food intake, resulting from a combination of poor access to diverse foods, inadequate knowledge and skills to prepare nutrient-dense meals from available foods, and poor health, as well as limited access to clean water and sanitation. In many countries, infants and small children are fed on cereal-based porridges mixed with a little salt or sugar; these fill the child's stomach without providing adequate energy and micronutrients to support normal growth and development and prevent a child from becoming stunted in body and mind.

FAO encourages countries to develop national guidelines and strengthen local capacities aimed at empowering families to improve complementary feeding for young children,

using locally available and affordable foods. FAO-supported nutrition education programmes have demonstrated that practical food-based nutrition education and dietary counselling for mothers and care givers are effective and sustainable ways for improving young children's dietary intake and for preventing child undernutrition, especially when linked with home gardening, small animal raising and other interventions that improve household access to nutritious foods. Through linking household food security with nutrition education, improved complementary feeding using family foods is feasible even in resource poor environments.

#### Key facts

Approximately 130 million children under five years of age are underweight and 195 million are stunted (UNICEF, 2009).

A child born in a developing country is over 13 times more likely to die within the first five years of life than a child born in an industrialized country (UNDP, 2008).

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for about half the deaths of children under five in the developing world (UNDP, 2008).

Between 1990 and 2006, about 27 countries – most in sub-Saharan Africa – made no progress in reducing childhood deaths (UNDP, 2008).



Distributing fortified milk.  
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## Afghanistan and Zambia: improving child feedings

In Afghanistan, half of the children under five years of age are chronically malnourished, and up to one in ten suffer from acute malnutrition. Children under two years of age are most affected. Acute malnutrition can be easily prevented and often treated with exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, complemented by nutritious complementary foods and continued breastfeeding up to two years of life.

FAO provided technical and financial support to Afghanistan for the preparation of a guide on improved feeding practices and nutritious recipes for Afghan children and mothers, entitled *Healthy Foods, Happy Babies, Lively Families*. It is designed for home economics officers, agricultural extension workers, community health workers, literacy teachers, and other professionals who are working to support Afghan families. This publication is available at: <http://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/nutritioneducation/15403-0-0.pdf>

In Zambia, FAO collaborated with the National Food and Nutrition Commission in field-testing and developing complementary foods for young children, resulting in a booklet containing

information and guidance on the preparation of nutritious and safe complementary foods using a variety of seasonally available foods. It is designed for community service providers such as community nutrition promoters, peer educators and other development agents from the health, community development and agricultural sectors working with families and community groups. This publication is available at: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/15278-1-0.pdf>.

In Zambia and Afghanistan, there was notable change in dietary diversification of complementary foods, especially through the inclusion of green leafy vegetables and a variety of fruit (and carrots for Afghanistan) and the addition of protein-rich and iron-rich foods, e.g. beans and small fish flour (for Zambia) in children's porridge.

Based on these successful experiences and at the request of interested countries, FAO is now applying this approach in more countries.

## Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Undernutrition

Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH) is a joint initiative of FAO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

REACH promotes interventions in five priority areas:

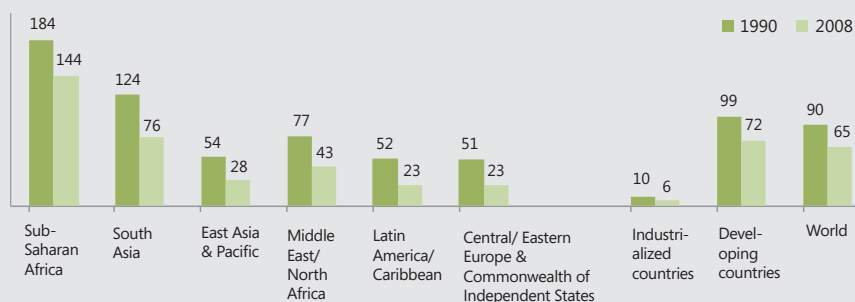
- improving infant and young child feeding;
- treating severe acute malnutrition;
- increasing micronutrient intake;
- improving hygiene and parasite control; and
- increasing food availability and accessibility.

REACH has been implemented in two countries: Lao People's Democratic Republic and Mauritania, and there are plans to extend the initiative to Sierra Leone and to other countries in Africa and Asia. For more information see: <http://www.reach-partnership.org/home?sessionid=83CD3F4BD4F335E079015698E53802A1>



Introducing carrots to the local diet.  
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## Declines in under-five mortality between 1990 and 2008 in all regions, per 1000



Source: UNICEF, 2009

## Documenting lessons learned

Food security, nutrition and livelihoods briefing notes document lessons learned and successful practices. These are designed to raise awareness of what has been achieved in the field.

Notes related to child nutrition include:

- FAO briefing note on improved complementary feeding
- FAO briefing note on participatory cooking demonstrations in nutrition education

The notes are available from the FAO Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division: [nutrition@fao.org](mailto:nutrition@fao.org).