



# WILL THE MDG FOR NUTRITION BE ACHIEVED IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN?

## THE SITUATION

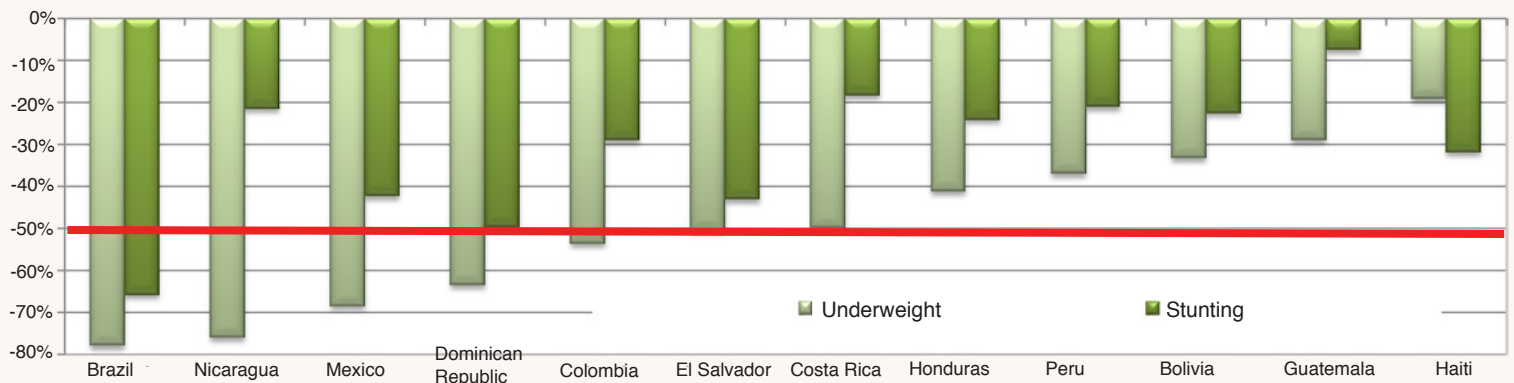
Eradication of undernutrition in LAC is still an unfinished agenda. Before the onset of the food and financial crises, LAC appeared to be on its way to meet MDG 1<sup>1,2</sup>. However, hunger and poverty increases due to the global financial crisis and food price volatility may have thwarted progress on this front.

If stunting was used as an indicator of undernutrition in LAC, much fewer countries would be on track to meet MDG 1<sup>3</sup>. Stunting is the best indicator for assessing malnutrition as it reflects the accumulated, permanent and long terms effects of young child malnutrition.

Persistent inequalities exist as malnutrition affects significantly more the poorest and least educated, especially indigenous children who are roughly two times more likely to be stunted than non-indigenous children.<sup>3</sup>

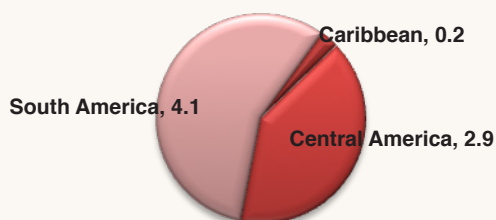
The sustained burden of malnutrition in women and children impairs the ability of countries to achieve at least six of eight MDGs. Good nutrition is crucial to reach the health, education and economic MDGs since good health, cognitive development and productivity can not be achieved without it.

Figure 1. Reduction in undernutrition 1990-2005<sup>4</sup>



It is estimated that 7.2 million children under five years of age in LAC are stunted and 22.5 million are anemic. The highest prevalence of chronic malnutrition and anemia is during the critical age of 6-24 months, with more than two thirds suffering from anemia.

Figure 2. Stunting in LAC in 2010<sup>5</sup>



## IMPACT ON COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT

Malnutrition irreversibly impairs human development and slows down economic progress. Malnourished children have reduced intellectual ability and years of schooling. Individual lose more than 10% of lifetime earnings and many countries lose at least 2-3% of their GDP to undernutrition.<sup>6</sup>

Higher incomes do improve nutrition—but only slowly in most countries. Several countries in the region have unacceptably high prevalence of chronic malnutrition in view of their GDP and sustained economic growth.

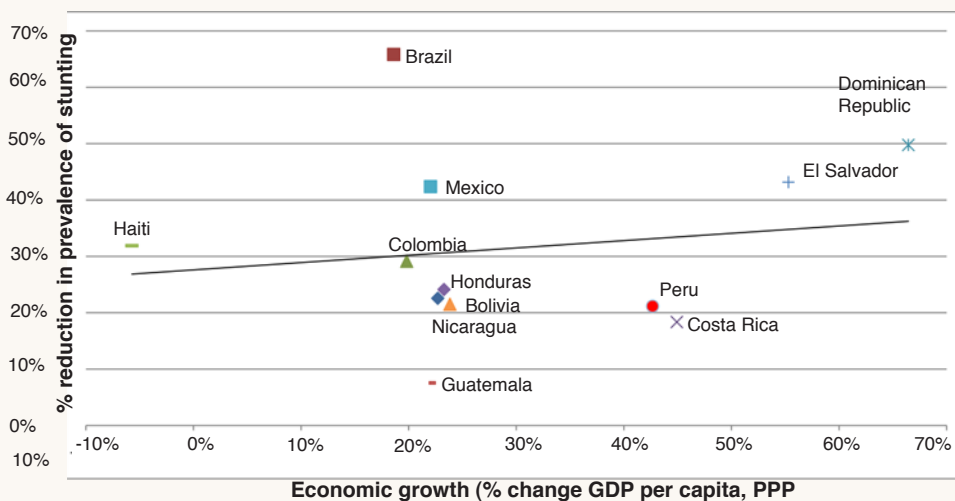


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The MDG for nutrition is unlikely to be met through income growth alone. As seen in Figure 3 below, some countries in LAC are clearly outliers as the reduction in stunting is much less than what would be expected given their economic growth rates.

Better nutrition outcomes can contribute to faster economic growth. In many cases, productivity gains alone provide sufficient economic returns to justify investments in nutrition using benefit/cost criteria.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3. Reduction of Stunting vs. Economic Growth 1990-2005<sup>8</sup>**



## THE CHALLENGE

**Presence of under nutrition and increasing overweight and obesity in the region.** A large proportion of the population, notably women and children, currently suffers from stunting, anemia and/or overweight. Three of the four countries in the world with the highest percentage of overweight mothers and malnourished children living in the same household are in the region: Guatemala (13%), Bolivia (11%), and Nicaragua (10%).<sup>9</sup> Lower birth weight and undernutrition in childhood are also risk factors for the development of non-communicable

diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

This is especially the case in undernourished children who experience rapid weight gain after infancy.<sup>10</sup>

## KEY INVESTMENTS TO ADDRESS MALNUTRITION

**Interventions to fight malnutrition should capitalize on the successful experience in the region on multi-sectoral approaches focusing on the first 1,000 days of life.** Health systems should aim to improve nutrition status of vulnerable groups by collaborating with other sectors such as social protection, education and agriculture.

## Examples of WORLD BANK'S SUPPORT FOR NUTRITION IN LAC

### Generating Knowledge on Nutrition

- Policy advice to update Haiti's National Nutrition Policy.
- Regional study to safeguard nutritional status of the most vulnerable during crises.
- Video series "My future in my first centimeters" focusing on the importance of linear growth in children.

### Financing Cost-effective Multi-sector Interventions

- Prevention of chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies through community-based growth promotion programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.
- Integrated approaches and target the first 1,000 days of life. In El Salvador, interventions aim to protect poor urban children from food price volatility.
- Improved nutrition and food security by combining approaches in health, education, social protection, agriculture and poverty reduction such as in Bolivia through conditional cash transfers.

### Promoting Regional Best Practices

- Build the capacity of client countries through South-South learning and dissemination of successful approaches.
- Convener for countries to adhere to the Scaling Up Nutrition Initiative (SUN) such as in Guatemala and Peru.

REFERENCES: <sup>1</sup>MDG 1 is Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, MDG for Nutrition (1c): halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; <sup>2</sup>De Onis M et al 2004. Estimates of Global Prevalence of Childhood Underweight in 1990 and 2015. JAMA 291 (21): 2600-2606. doi: 10.1001/jama.291.21.2600; <sup>3</sup>Lutter CK, Chaparro CM 2008. Mal nutrition in infants and young children in Latin America and the Caribbean: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Pan American Health Organization: Washington D.C.; <sup>4</sup>Source: Country Survey Data, PAHO's Health in the America 2012 (in preparation); <sup>5</sup>Source: PAHO 2010; <sup>6</sup>Horton S et al. Scaling Up Nutrition: What will it cost? The World Bank, 2010; <sup>7</sup>Alderman H, Behrman J, Hoddinott J 2007. Economic and Nutritional Analyses Offer Substantial Synergies for Understanding Human Nutrition. J. Nutr. 137: 537-544; <sup>8</sup>Stunting data: PAHO Health in the America 2012 (in preparation). GDP data: World Bank's World Development Indicators, 2011. Data for Haiti covers the period from 1995 to 2005 to match data available for stunting; <sup>9</sup>J. Garret, Ruel 2003. Stunted Child-Overweight Mother Pairs: An Emerging Policy Concern. FCND Discussion Paper 148. IFPRI: Washington DC; <sup>10</sup>Victora C et al, Maternal and child undernutrition: consequences for adult health and human capital. The Lancet, Volume 371, Issue 9609, January 2008; <sup>11</sup>Photo courtesy of Bibiana Melzi