The Costs of Undernutrition
- Over one-third of child deaths are due to undernutrition, mostly from increased severity of disease.1
- Children who are undernourished between conception and age two are at high risk for impaired cognitive development, which adversely affects the country’s productivity and growth.
- Childhood anemia alone is associated with a 2.5% drop in adult wages.5

Where Does Burundi Stand?
- 53% of children under the age of five are stunted, 35% are underweight, and 7% are wasted.5
- 11% of infants are born with a low birth weight.2

As shown in Figure 1, the prevalence of stunting is substantially higher in Burundi compared to other countries in the Africa region with similar per capita incomes. It is possible to achieve better nutrition outcomes despite low income.

Vitamin and Mineral Deficiencies Cause Hidden Hunger
Although they may not be visible to the naked eye, micronutrient deficiencies impact well-being, and are widespread in Burundi, as shown in Figure 2.

Most of the irreversible damage due to malnutrition happens during gestation and in the first 24 months of life.6
Solutions to Primary Causes of Undernutrition

Poor Infant Feeding Practices

- Fewer than one-half (45%) of all infants under six months are exclusively breastfed.  
  - During the important transition period to a mix of breast milk and solid foods between six and nine months of age, almost 1 in 8 infants are not fed appropriately with both breast milk and other foods.

**Solution:** Support women and their families to practice optimal breastfeeding and ensure timely and adequate complementary feeding. Breast milk fulfills all nutritional needs of infants up to six months of age, boosts their immunity, and reduces exposure to infections. In high HIV settings, follow WHO 2009 HIV and infant feeding revised principles and recommendations.

High Disease Burden

- Undernutrition increases the likelihood that a child will become sick and also increases the severity of disease.
- Undernourished children who fall sick are much more likely to die from illness than well-nourished children.
- Parasitic infestation diverts nutrients from the body and can cause blood loss and anemia.

**Solution:** Prevent and treat childhood infection and other disease. Hand-washing, deworming, zinc supplements during and after diarrhea, and continued feeding during illness are important.

Limited Access to Nutritious Food

- An alarming 63% of households are food insecure, meaning they do not have enough calories. Many more households likely lack access to diverse diets year round.
- Achieving food security means ensuring quality and continuity of food access, in addition to quantity, for all household members.
- Dietary diversity is essential for food security. High levels of hidden hunger indicate that dietary diversity may be poor.

**Solution:** Involve multiple sectors including agriculture, education, transport, gender, the food industry, health and other sectors, to ensure that diverse, nutritious diets are available and accessible to all household members.

**World Bank Nutrition Related Activities in Burundi**

**Projects:** The World Bank is currently supporting a US$25 million Health Sector and Development Support Project. One of the aims of this operation is to increase utilization of health services for women and children under the age of 5.

**Analytic Work:** The World Bank recently produced a Health Sector Review Report addressing issues pertaining to child and maternal health.

**Iron:** Current rates of anemia among preschool-aged children and pregnant women are 56% and 47%, respectively. Iron-folic acid supplementation of pregnant women, deworming, provision of multiple micronutrient supplements to infants and young children, and fortification of staple foods are effective strategies to improve the iron status of these vulnerable subgroups.

**Zinc:** 47% of the population is at risk for insufficient zinc intake. Zinc supplementation can reduce diarrhea morbidity by more than 40%.

**Iodine:** An estimated 98% of households consume iodized salt. Consumption of iodized salt is a major factor in controlling iodine deficiency, which can cause IQ loss in infants and young children. Progress toward universal salt iodization should be sustained.

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**References**


**Addressing undernutrition is cost effective:** Costs of core micronutrient interventions are as low as US$0.05–3.60 per person annually. Returns on investment are as high as 8–30 times the costs.