

POLICY BRIEF

NUTRITION ON AN EMPTY PLATE/THE CRISIS OF EMPTY PLATES – THE PLACE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN ENHANCING NUTRITION SECURITY

by The National Food and Nutrition Commission of Zambia

If for one second you imagined a day in your life without money and no prospects for it in the horizon, with hungry children to feed, what picture would you paint. That is the unfortunate reality for 42 percent of our people. In effect five and a half million people



then is synonymous with food and nutrition insecurity.

This reality prevails on the flip side of the elevation of the country to middle income status. When Zambia was elevated to Lower Middle Income status, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita was USD1370 (equivalent to 6,850,000ZMK). To interpret this simply; every Zambian could earn USD 1370 if national income was distributed equally. This exposes the glaring income inequality, particularly considering that the moderate poverty line for 2010 was set at ZMK146, 009 and the extreme poverty line at ZMK 43,802.7 (30 percent of the moderate poverty line). By implication two

Notice their empty bowls



in Zambia wake up to such a desolate reality every day. When nearly half a country's population move around with empty bowls, any well meaning policy maker should stop, listen and ask what should be done.

In Zambia, 60.5 percent of the population lives in poverty, 42 percent in extreme poverty. To put extreme poverty into perspective, the

By implication two thirds of Zambia's population earns 45 times less than the per capita income while 42 percent earns 151 times less than the per capita income.

Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (LCMS) says: "It will always be shocking but true that there are households in this country whose total income cannot deliver a basic food basket on the table"

(LCMS; 2010) it cannot be expressed any clearer. Extreme poverty by this definition

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The first ever social Cash Transfer pilot was motivated by this grim reality. One of the stated objectives was to afford households a second meal in a day. If food security alone was in question, what were the odds of nutrition security? Food Security is "When all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Nutrition security is achieved when secure access to appropriately

nutritious food is coupled with a sanitary environment, adequate health services and care, to ensure a healthy and active life for all household members.”

Poverty remains a grave social economic challenge in Zambia. When coupled with under-nutrition, it not only threatens the current generation but debilitates long term human capital development affecting future generations. The DFID argues that nutrition is, essentially, a foundation for the attainment of the MDGs stating that prevention of malnutrition is therefore a long-term investment, which greatly benefits both present and successive generations and preserves human capital.

The poor normally suffer chronic hunger; a constant or recurrent lack of food that results in underweight and stunted children, and high infant mortality. Nutrition fundamentally determines life chances and people's ability to convert opportunities into outcomes. The consequences are long-term, inter-generational and irreversible, with the effects of poor foetal growth and/or stunting in the first two years of life being sustained into adulthood.

Role of Social Protection in Nutrition

- o Social Protection is a direct intervention in poverty reduction at the household level through provision of cash or in-kind support

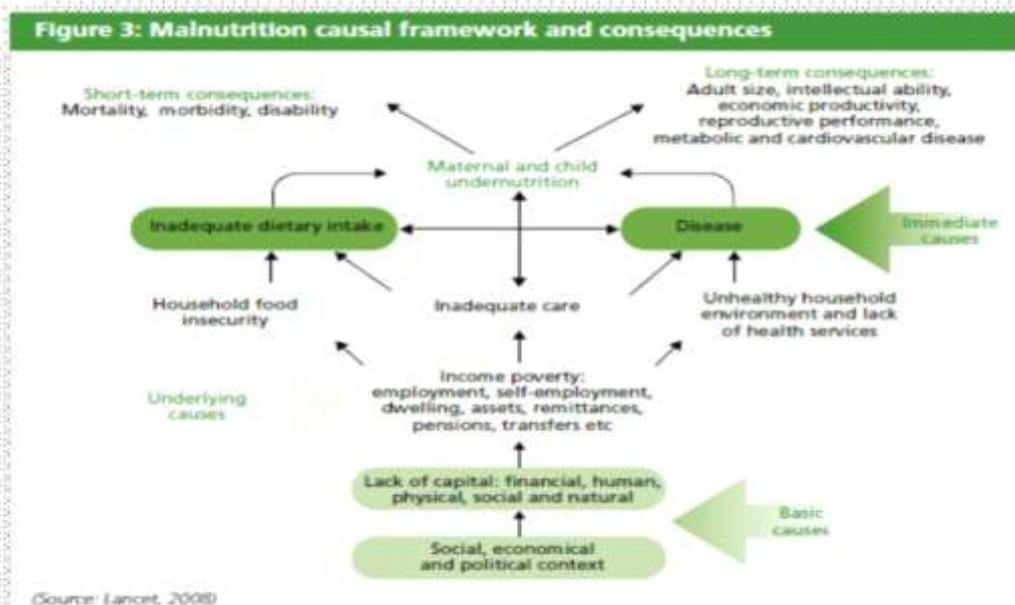
to households addressing income poverty and allowing households' basic consumption.

- o Reportedly, one of the key results of social protection in Zambia has been improved nutrition. A number of instruments such as the social cash transfers, food security pack, school feeding programmes child grants, agricultural subsidy programmes the social pensions address immediate food needs of the household.

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- o Social Protection is an investment in human capital development by countering ill health and hunger for children and adults which have long term consequences on income earning potential.

Social Protection, as an income enhancing



Examples of what has worked

Regardless of the type of social protection programme, household food spending and consumption consistently increases. This increased expenditure and food availability can translate into improvements in different nutritional indicators. Existing evidence suggests that a package of interventions, including a medical intervention and an income and livelihood enhancing intervention, will have significant impact on nutritional status.

For example:

- ❑ In Zambia, the percentage of households not satiated after one meal reduced from 56.6% to 35.2%; with food intake being reported to be more varied after receiving a social cash transfer
- ❑ Zimbabwe's Protracted Relief Programme generated over two months of additional food supply in an average beneficiary household.
- ❑ An extensive assessment of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) finds that three-quarters of participants consumed a higher quantity and quality of food compared to the previous year.
- ❑ In Bangladesh, BRAC's CFPR programme has led to an improvement in calorie intake from 1632 Kcal per day to 2236 Kcal per day (from below to well above WHO minimum recommended levels).
- ❑ In Mexico, 70% of households participating in the Oportunidades programme have shown improved nutritional status. Its impact on stunted growth in children has also been impressive, with the growth rate among children aged 12-36 months increasing by one centimetre a child a year, reducing prevalence by 10%.
- ❑ Similarly, in South Africa, having a recipient of the social pension in a household has been correlated with a three-to-four-centimetre increase in height among children. As noted in a DFID practice paper briefing, "A study of the unconditional Child Support Grant in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, suggests that it has an impact on child height for

children who started receiving the grant in their first 20 months of life."

Current Policy environment challenges and opportunities

Presently, nutrition in Zambia is treated as a health issue. While this is important, it overlooks the fact that some causes and consequences of under-nutrition or malnutrition are not health related. A number of interlocking factors lead to insufficient nutrition and result from it. One of the inhibiting factors in nutrition security at household level is income. At 45 percent incidence of malnutrition, policy blindness cannot be afforded.

The focus on nutrition as a health issue underplays the reality of multiple causal factors that reinforce under-nutrition, while existing interventions are happening in a fragmented fashion with no or very limited dissemination of results.

While Social Protection programming has been framed with a nutrition objective, there are no targets set. Currently Ministry of Community Development Maternal and Child Health (MCDMCH) is preparing to draft the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) which can be crafted to capture nutrition objectives and targets.

What to bear in mind

- ❑ Child malnutrition cannot be managed as a food problem alone.
- ❑ The multi-causality of chronic child malnutrition requires a multi-sector focused response.
- ❑ The strategy needs to be inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders, so as to have wider coverage in the country.
- ❑ Interventions need to be developed in a coordinated manner.
- ❑ Interventions proposed need to be based on evidence of effectiveness.

Recommendations

There is need for coordination on formulation of Social Protection Policy to ensure that nutrition objectives and nutritional targets are contained at conception stage.

Place high level inter-sector coordination above a single line Ministry to ensure comprehensive focus on nutrition across sectors.

Undertake large-scale efficiency and effectiveness, policy relevant evaluations to expand the evidence base for strategies and tactics to achieve high, sustained and equitable coverage with proven interventions to address under nutrition through social protection.

National Plans and NSPP should be more elaborate on nutritional targets.

Call to Action

Social Protection action is urgent Act now: Effects of under-nutrition and/or malnutrition are long term at best and lasting at worst.

because, without it, too many households remain vulnerable to poverty and exclusion which affects nutrition, makes them susceptible to illness, limits their opportunities and creates a cycle that traps generations in poverty.

Policy makers to put in place effective social Protection coordination mechanisms that considering the broader context to show sustainable gains in reducing under nutrition through addressing household poverty and vulnerability

Ensure that nutrition in social protection has set targets that makes the nutrition lens in Social Protection clearer and enhance nutrition security.

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