



It's Canada's time to tackle malnutrition and unlock girls' potential

Good nutrition is so much more than a full stomach. It is the foundation for human development.



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Girls all around the world have big dreams. They dream of being doctors, soccer players, and presidents. But for more than one billion women and girls, malnutrition is standing in their way.

Proper nutrition is the first step to helping girls achieve their dreams. It is the critical ingredient every one of us needs to survive and to thrive. Without it, the brain cannot develop fully, the body cannot grow properly, and the immune system cannot function effectively.

Good nutrition is a universal right. However, for social, cultural, and biological reasons malnutrition affects girls the hardest. In many countries, women and girls often eat last and least. As a result, twice as many women experience malnutrition as men, and girls are twice as likely to die of it as boys.

Good nutrition is about so much more than just surviving; it is the foundation for human development. Globally, one out of every four children is mentally and physically stunted due to malnutrition. That is more than 150 million children who will never have the chance to reach their full potential. About a third of girls worldwide are not in school, and the massive burden of anemia is one of the reasons.

Changing this unacceptable situation starts by ensuring proper nutrition in the first 1,000 days, from conception to a child's second birthday. After that, access to the right nutrition at the right time is essential for human growth and development.

For example, teenagers—especially girls—have unique vulnerabilities that need to be addressed, such as anemia. For those who go on to become mothers,

good nutrition can be the difference between life and death. Low-cost actions, like providing anemic women with access to iron and folic acid when they are pregnant and providing support for exclusive breastfeeding once they give birth, have a high impact for women and for their children.

Girls with access to good nutrition are better able to learn, which allows them to stay in school longer and perform better. Well-nourished girls with access to education learn more and go on to earn more over their lifetimes.

When women have more decision-making power over resources they tend to spend more on health and education, which helps to raise healthier, more educated children who in turn become more productive adults. Currently, malnutrition is estimated to cost the global economy \$3.5-trillion per year. Imagine what the full force of one billion healthy, educated, and empowered women could do for the world.

Investing in nutrition for women and girls creates a virtuous circle connecting health, education, and economic empowerment. It is a crucial ingredient to empower-

ing women and girls, as well as their families and communities, to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and build a more equitable world.

Good nutrition is so much more than a full stomach. It builds the capacity to dream and the power to achieve. It's the difference between giving birth to a child and giving her life, between attending school and learning there, and between simply surviving and having the chance to thrive. At its core, nutrition is the difference between what could be and what never gets the chance.

Canada is a global leader in the fight against malnutrition and a champion for women and girls' health and rights around the world. Achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals will require countries like ours to use that leadership to rally others and drive collective action on issues that can make a real difference. Canada's presidency of the G7 next year is a shining opportunity to change the status quo for women and girls and tackle the preventable burden of malnutrition that they face.

Joel Spicer is president and CEO of Nutrition International.