NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL

Nourish Life

The cost of inaction:

The economic and human capital benefits of investing in nutrition

AT LEAST USD $1.1 BILLION COULD BE SAVED ANNUALLY IN BURKINA FASO THROUGH SMART INVESTMENTS IN PROVEN, COST-EFFECTIVE, HIGH-IMPACT NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the World Health Assembly (WHA) set global nutrition targets to spur action and investment in addressing malnutrition. In May 2025, the targets were revaluated, reset and extended to 2030. The 2030 targets aim to achieve a 40% reduction in the number of children under five who are stunted, a 50% reduction of anaemia prevalence in women of reproductive age, a 30% reduction of low birthweight among newborns and an increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding to 60% in the first six months. Targets have also been set on overweight and obesity, and on wasting.[1] At present, Burkina Faso is on course to meet one of the six global nutrition targets (exclusive breastfeeding).[2] While some progress has been made on stunting, 21.8% of children under five are still affected.[3]

In Burkina Faso, over 780,000 children under five are stunted, close to 2.5 million are anaemic, 150,000 are born with low birthweight and more than 318,000 are being sub-optimally breastfed for the first six months of life. Additionally, there are 2.7 million cases of anaemia in older adolescent girls and women (15–49 years).[4]

The interrelated crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and cost of living increases have put unprecedented pressure on social sector accounts and caused many governments to consider diverting investments from public health and prevention programs to bolster short-term responses to urgent needs.

However, emerging data continues to support the importance of investing in nutrition and the compounding benefits that can be realized through smart nutrition interventions. The 2024 World Bank Group Investment Framework found that an additional USD $13 billion is needed to scale up evidence-based nutrition interventions globally from 2025–2034. Globally, every dollar invested was estimated to generate USD $23 in return.[5]

Through the development of an online, user-friendly Cost of Inaction Tool, Nutrition International has sought to support policymakers as they weigh their options. The tool provides an analysis of the costs of "inaction" — of allowing limited to no progress on key indicators of undernutrition to be made — and how doing so affects countries' income in both the immediate and long term. The new tool demonstrates that investments in nutrition can generate significant economic savings as long as smart investments are made in proven, cost-effective and high-impact nutrition interventions.

THE FINDINGS

The impacts of poor nutrition are wide-ranging and serious. Findings from the Cost of Inaction Tool estimate that the total global economic cost of undernutrition is more than USD $761 billion per year. In Burkina Faso, at least USD $1.1 billion per year could be saved with increased investments in stunting, anaemia in children, adolescent girls and women of reproductive age, low birthweight, and the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.[3]

When a population is undernourished, it is more vulnerable to preventable infections and diseases. With adequate nutrition, not only does a population strengthen immune systems against preventable diseases and infections, but healthcare costs and treatment expenses are also reduced. Ensuring proper nutrition for vulnerable groups, such as infants, young children and pregnant women is key to unlocking their potential. When children are well-nourished, they are more likely to succeed in school, which in turn helps them to live a better life, thrive, and contribute to socio-economic development.

In response to persistent nutrition challenges, Burkina Faso has adopted a National Multisectoral Nutrition Policy (PNMN), "Politique nationale multisectorielle de nutrition", for the period 2020–2029. The policy aims to improve the nutritional status of the population — particularly women, children and other vulnerable groups — through the implementation of coordinated, multisector interventions.[6] The PNMN is operationalized through rolling five-year action plans. The current Multisectoral Strategic Nutrition Plan (2020–2024), "Plan stratégique multisectoriel de nutrition", outlines five strategic priorities: reducing undernutrition, addressing micronutrient deficiencies, strengthening the prevention and management of nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases, improving food safety, and enhancing governance and legislation related to nutrition.[7]

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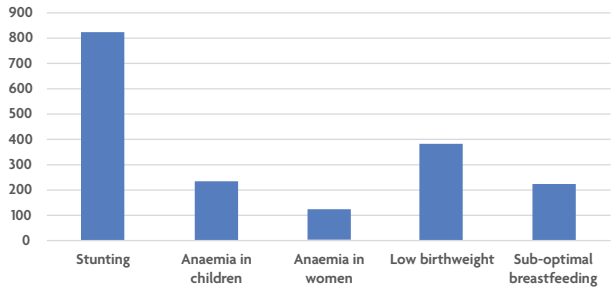
KEY FINDINGS

Each year, in Burkina Faso, the current levels of stunting, low birthweight, anaemia, and not protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding result in an estimated:

- **USD $1.1 billion** in economic costs (or 6.2% of the gross national income) due to cognitive and mortality losses
- **1.6 million** IQ points lost
- **294,000** school years lost
- **13,000** child deaths
- **52** maternal deaths from cancers and type II diabetes

ECONOMIC COST OF INACTION IN BURKINA FASO, USD $ MILLION PER YEAR



***The total economic cost is lower than the sum of each individual cost. This estimate avoids double counting of costs associated with co-occurrence of stunting, anaemia, low birthweight and sub-optimal breastfeeding.**

Burkina Faso ranks fifth out of 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa for highest anaemia in adolescent girls and women prevalence and seventh out of 201 countries globally. With a current prevalence of 52.5%, Burkina Faso has made some progress against the 2012 prevalence of 53.3%, but it has not yet met the 2030 global nutrition target for anaemia in adolescent girls and women of 26.6%.[3]

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF ACHIEVING GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS

Here are some of the benefits that Burkina Faso stands to realize if the 2030 global nutrition targets were to be met:

- If Burkina Faso were to meet the 2030 WHA global nutrition target on stunting, an estimated 62,000 cases of stunting would be averted annually, preventing 5,200 deaths, the loss of 621,000 IQ points and 100,000 school years. Overall, this would prevent USD $329 million in economic losses.
- If Burkina Faso were to meet the 2030 WHA global nutrition target on anaemia, an estimated 1.4 million cases of anaemia would be averted annually, preventing USD $59 million in economic losses.
- If Burkina Faso were to meet the 2030 WHA global nutrition target on low birthweight, 41,000 cases of low birthweight would be averted annually, preventing 1,400 deaths, the loss of 397,000 IQ points and $105 million in economic losses.
- If Burkina Faso were to meet the 2030 WHA global nutrition target on exclusive breastfeeding, 10,000 cases of diarrhoea would be averted annually, preventing 170 deaths, the loss of 41,500 IQ points and 14,500 school years. This will avert USD $9.5 million in economic losses.

ABOUT NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL'S TOOLS

The Nutrition International Cost of Inaction Tool was developed in 2023 by Nutrition International, in partnership with Limestone Analytics and with funding from the Government of Canada. The Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool was created in 2017 by Alive & Thrive, with funding from the Gates Foundation, and it was updated by Nutrition International and Alive & Thrive in partnership with Limestone Analytics in 2022, with funding from Government of Canada. Both tools present results for over 140 countries to see the potential benefits if action is taken now. All estimates included in this brief are as of May 2025. Visit both tools on Nutrition International's website to read about the methodology and data sources and to learn more about Nutrition International.

For further support, including additional analyses, tool demonstrations and technical assistance, you can reach out to Nutrition International at healthecon@nutritionintl.org.

Cost of Inaction Tool

Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool

REFERENCES

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