



END HUNGER AND UNDERNUTRITION



SYNTHESIS
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Accelerating progress to end hunger and undernutrition in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Rwanda

Compact2025 is a bold initiative for ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025. It brings stakeholders together to set priorities, innovate and learn, fine-tune actions, build on successes, and synthesize sharable lessons in order to accelerate progress.

Compact2025 and partners organized a series of [roundtable discussions](#) in 2016 in focal countries Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Rwanda to set the critical groundwork for assessing how to accelerate progress to end hunger and undernutrition in each country by 2025. The roundtables identified key knowledge, policy, and implementation gaps as well as opportunities, synergies, and priority areas for action. In 2017, country forums were held in the focal countries to follow up on recommendations made during the roundtable discussions. In all countries, there was a high degree of commitment, strong interest to work together across sectors, and out-of-the-box thinking for solutions to accelerate progress.

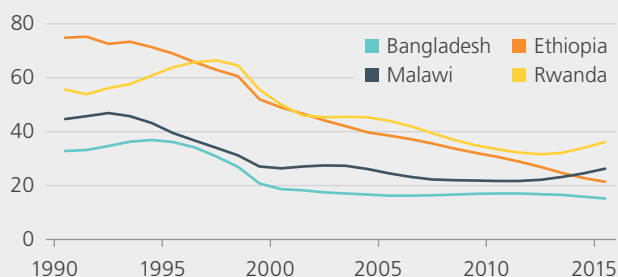
THE NEED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS

Compact2025 focal countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Rwanda—have each made strong progress in reducing hunger and undernutrition (Figures 1 and 2). From 1990–92 to 2015–17, each country was able to reduce the prevalence of hunger by roughly half. These countries have also made progress in reducing undernutrition, with the proportion of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting declining to about 36–40 percent by 2014.

Hunger and undernutrition come with severe social and economic costs. Undernutrition alone costs Ethiopia, Malawi, and Rwanda between 10 and 16 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) every year. In Bangladesh, the cost of undernutrition is upward of US\$1 billion annually.

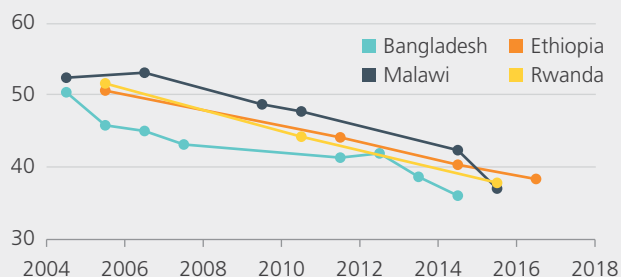
Strong national commitment buttressed by support from numerous partners and stakeholders has helped advance food security and nutrition in these countries. However, to meet their goals and end hunger and undernutrition by 2025, progress must be accelerated.

Figure 1 PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT (%)



Source: FAO 2018

Figure 2 PREVALENCE OF UNDER-5 STUNTING (%)



Source: FAO 2018

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

While each country faces unique challenges to ending hunger and undernutrition, several cross-cutting recommendations for addressing challenges and exploiting opportunities to accelerate progress emerged in all four countries.

1. MAKE STRATEGIES, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS MORE NUTRITION-DRIVEN

Compact2025 focal countries have many solid strategies, policies, and programs in place, but these should be more nutrition-driven, and food security and nutrition should be placed in a broader policy context. Participants agreed that instead of directing agricultural strategies toward self-sufficiency goals, the focus should be on food security and nutrition outcomes. Greater investments in nutrition-driven agricultural interventions, such as diversifying production to include more nutritious nonstaple food crops and enhancing the nutritional value of staple crops through biofortification, show promise. These should be complemented by already popular nutrition-specific interventions, such as food supplementation.

“I see Compact2025 as a means of strengthening ongoing food security and nutrition initiatives in this country, providing evidence to better prioritize and implement actions, and stimulating innovation for new solutions to end hunger and undernutrition.

—Saulos Chilima, Vice President of Malawi

Social protection policies and programs also have to become more nutrition-driven: For example, programs can focus on delivering more nutritious foods, and policies can target nutrition as a measurable outcome. Furthermore, social protection should be integrated with interventions that boost agricultural productivity—such as Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme—and amplify impacts on nutritional outcomes using behavior change communication. Other sectoral programs such as school feeding programs should also become more nutrition-driven. They can deliver high-nutrient foods, which contribute to health and nutrition outcomes while creating more demand for such foods.

“A more integrated approach is necessary for social protection to address the issue of nutrition.
—Binayak Sen, Research Director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)

2. IMPROVE COORDINATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

No one sector or organization can end hunger and undernutrition alone. Coordination is key to complementing each other’s efforts while avoiding duplication. Improving coordination can help to harmonize program interventions for greater synergies. For example, agriculture and social protection programs can be driven by nutrition outcomes; school feeding programs can buy nutritious foods from agricultural cooperatives; and complementarities in enhancing nutrition can be found in improving water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure and providing irrigation.



We need stronger coordination mechanisms to eradicate hunger and malnutrition.
—Anastase Murekezi, Prime Minister of Rwanda

Institutional mechanisms should be set up or empowered to coordinate across sectors, stakeholders, and levels of government. For example, a high-level office could serve to coordinate efforts across multiple sectors and stakeholders and track progress. Additionally, private sector groups and cooperatives should be more actively engaged in coordination and information-sharing platforms.

Coordination at district and community levels with empowered committees that meet regularly and can coordinate between different sectors and stakeholders is equally important.

3. ENHANCE AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND SCALE-UP SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

A common theme across all countries was the need to implement appropriate policies and effectively scale up promising programs. In Bangladesh, social protection policies can be enhanced by consolidating underfunded programs: Just a handful of social protection programs account for more than 90 percent of total expenditures, spreading resources too thin for many other programs. In Malawi, implementation of social protection policies could be made more efficient by installing a unified beneficiary registry, and technological innovations should be integrated in service delivery to improve targeting and reduce leakages.

To scale up successful programs, programmatic and geographic gaps in coverage should be filled and should be targeted to the neediest households and districts. For example, Rwanda's One Cow per Family program could extend its coverage to households with less than half a hectare of land, which are currently not eligible for a cow. Further, as Ethiopia begins to implement the [Segota Declaration](#), it is crucial to build in systems for monitoring and evaluation in order to learn lessons and refine programs for scale up. Overall, there needs to be more dialogue, information sharing, and learning around best practices for program implementation.

4. STRENGTHEN CAPACITY

Strengthening capacity of institutions, organizations, communities, and individuals is critical to accelerate progress. Stakeholders agreed that greater capacity is needed to develop effective nutrition-driven policies and to implement those policies efficiently at national, district, and community levels. National and regional capacities in research, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation should be strengthened. Bangladesh's Governance Innovation Unit, acting as a platform for a knowledge and innovation hub, is a notable example.

In-country capacity should be strengthened at all levels for nutrition knowledge and food safety standards. At universities, for example, agriculture and rural development curriculums should mainstream nutrition coursework. Household capacity for proper food preparation must also be strengthened in order to enhance nutrition and to meet food quality and safety standards.

5. FILL DATA AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

There are several data gaps that must be filled in order to generate evidence to inform strategies, policies, and programs. More sex- and district-disaggregated data should be collected and analyzed in a timely fashion. In addition, a better understanding of where undernutrition exists—for example in Bangladesh, in certain regions or in urban slums—as well as more data on its underlying determinants can indicate the nature and severity of undernutrition in different contexts.



It will be extremely important to ask ourselves: What is it that [other countries] have done that has enabled them to reduce their stunting problem? Because it gives us a good idea of what we could also do to tackle our problem.

—Newai Gebre-Ab, Chief Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister

Filling data and knowledge gaps requires sustained investments in research and development as well as upgraded knowledge management and information-sharing systems. Better systems are also needed for sharing data, knowledge, and lessons learned among stakeholders and sectors. One example could be creating a database of research findings to inform policy formulation and programming.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Along with recommendations that were common to the four countries, country-specific recommendations emerged, a few of which are highlighted here.

BANGLADESH: EMPOWER WOMEN

In Bangladesh and beyond, women's empowerment is a key pathway to improving nutrition. More must be done to address social constraints that trap girls and women in cycles of hunger, undernutrition, and disempowerment. Interventions should target girls and adolescents with a focus on improving their nutrition, access to health services, and educational status. School feeding programs should extend to secondary schools to encourage families to keep adolescent girls (and boys) in school. Doing so not only provides nutritious foods but also can help delay early marriage and increase education. Social change should be promoted to address child and adolescent marriage and its underlying causes (for example, the dowry system).

ETHIOPIA: DEVELOP POLICIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR BETTER NUTRITION

As issues of nutrition cut across many sectors, accountability should also be shared. Starting from the highest levels, nutrition should be a mandate that cuts across relevant line ministries, sectoral policies, and donors. The development of the technical support unit supporting the Ethiopian National Information Platform (NIPN) on the Nutrition Technical Advisory Project (ENTAP) is a key first step in this direction. Adequate and sustainable financing and mechanisms for monitoring, accountability, and coordination will be key to supporting a nutrition mandate. Forward-thinking policies should also be developed to address and prevent overweight and obesity.

MALAWI: "BREAK THE CYCLE" WITH HOLISTIC, TRANSPARENT, AND MARKET-DRIVEN APPROACHES

A pattern of food shortages met with humanitarian aid has developed in Malawi, and stakeholders agreed that this cycle must be broken. Strengthening the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) to ensure timely data collection and action, improved information sharing, and better targeting is critical. To develop long-term solutions, market-driven

policies and approaches with a focus on nutrition are needed. Maize policies and regulations should be more transparent and consistent. The Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) should be reformed to be less distortionary and to promote more diverse and nutritious crops. The reduction of expenditures on FISP in the 2016/17 budget and expected number of beneficiaries is a good first step. Further, incorporating nutrition into a multi-sectoral approach for a resilient food system is key.

RWANDA: COMMUNICATE AND ADVOCATE FOR BETTER NUTRITIONAL OUTCOMES

Of particular importance is the role of communications and advocacy. Media, including television, radio, and theater, were suggested to promote nutrition education and awareness campaigns. Kitchen and cooking demonstrations, school nutrition sessions, and behavior change communication programs are crucial to improving utilization of nutritious foods. Further, a national guideline on diets combined with a communication plan can help to inform people about what constitutes a balanced diet. Developing knowledge- and information-sharing systems together with the private sector, as well as empowering existing structures for multisector collaboration are important in this regard.

THE WAY FORWARD

Compact2025 aims to set up a Knowledge and Innovation Hub in each focal country, ideally within a high-level government office in partnership with relevant ministries and stakeholders. The hubs will work to support country goals, processes, and programs with demand-driven research and innovation for the purpose of accelerating progress. They will help to collect data, strengthen capacities, and enhance tracking and monitoring and evaluation systems.

The hubs will synthesize lessons and compile, share, and communicate information and best practices within and across focal countries. The country hubs will be supported by a global Knowledge and Innovation Hub that is currently in development.

Follow-up roundtable discussions will be held in focal countries next year to reconvene stakeholders, evaluate progress, exchange experiences, identify action gaps, and fine-tune next steps toward ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025.