

Working Together for a Better Future in Uganda

For more information, contact:

The Permanent Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda, ps@opm.go.ug

Fighting Malnutrition: A Call to Action for Civil Society Organizations Working in Education

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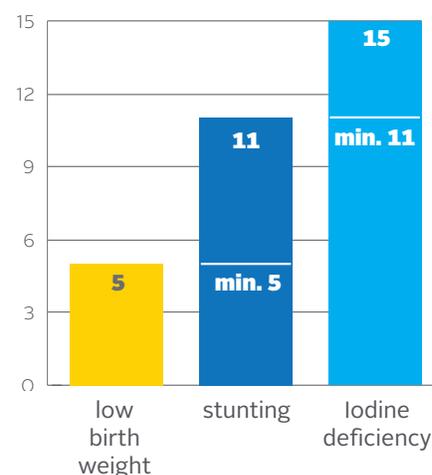
The Uganda Vision 2040 identifies human capital development as one of the keys for Uganda's transformation into a prosperous and modern country. Education is a critical element for this goal, but malnutrition is holding Uganda back.

- Malnutrition in children, especially during the critical 1,000-day period from pregnancy through a child's second birthday, affects their ability to learn by delaying and impairing cognitive development, contributing to poor school performance, and resulting in a less productive population.^{1,2,3,5}
- Uganda's loss in human capital is due to overlapping forms of malnutrition, including chronic malnutrition (stunting, or low height-for-age), underweight (low weight-for-age), acute malnutrition (wasting, or low weight-for-height), anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency, and low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg), decreasing the potential of the country's children.^{1,2}
- About 3 of 10 children under 5 in Uganda are stunted.¹ Children who are stunted learn to sit, stand, and walk later; have poorer cognitive function; enrol in school later; perform worse in school; are more likely to repeat grades; miss more days of school due to illness; and are more likely to drop out of school than well-nourished children.^{2,3,4,5}
- 10% of children weigh less than 2.5 kg at birth, a weight that is linked to poor cognitive development during infancy and decreased attention span later in life.^{1,2,5}
- Anaemia affects more than half of children under 5, and vitamin A deficiency affects 30%.¹ This can impair cognitive development and worsen school absenteeism by increasing the likelihood and severity of infections.



Photo credit: Alex Mokori, RCQHC, 2010

IQ Points Lost to Malnutrition⁴



Malnutrition is *preventable and treatable*. The Copenhagen Consensus 2012 determined that nutrition is the *best investment* for countries to improve health, schooling, and productivity.

How can improved nutrition support the work of civil society organizations working in education?

- As children's nutritional status improves, so do their cognitive development and school performance, leading to better completion rates, higher educational attainment, and improved earning capacity in adulthood. When parents are well educated, they are more likely to have well-nourished families, continuing the cycle.
- By 2025, investment in proven, effective, and high-quality nutrition interventions implemented at scale will improve child development, cognitive function, and school performance. Improved nutrition would:^{2,4,5}
 - Prevent permanent brain damage in about 236,000 children and increase the average child's IQ by up to 13.5 points through prevention of iodine deficiency
 - Improve cognitive development in children by preventing and treating iron deficiency anaemia
 - Result in earlier school enrolment, children staying in school longer, and better performance in school—by 2025, this would total 19.8 million equivalent school years of learning gained
 - Strengthen future intellectual and productive capacity of Ugandans

Civil society organizations working in education can support improved nutrition in Uganda by:

- Supporting and expanding early childhood development programmes that work in tandem with nutrition programmes to promote optimal cognitive development.
- Supporting nutrition early in life for children's cognitive development so they have the best chance to perform well in school.
- Promoting the completion of secondary education for boys and girls to improve nutrition for the next generation of children.
- Developing a comprehensive nutrition curriculum for tertiary institutions, including teacher training, nursing, agriculture, and social development colleges.

Improving nutrition will greatly improve education outcomes.



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