Malnutrition in Uganda
We’ve Already Paid Too High a Price

Education and Nutrition Fact Sheet

Education is a key element in Uganda’s Vision 2040 for a prosperous and modern country. 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.

- 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 (< 2.5 kg), decreasing the potential of the country’s children.¹

- About 3 of 10 children under 5 are stunted in Uganda.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±³⁴⁵

- On average, stunted children lose 3–4 grade equivalents more than children who were never undernourished.³

- 10% of children weigh less than 2.5 kg at birth, a weight that is linked to poor cognitive development during infancy.¹²

- Anaemia affects more than half of children under 5 and vitamin A deficiency affects 30% of children under 5.¹

  This can impair cognitive development and worsen school absenteeism by increasing the likelihood and severity of infections.²³⁴

Malnutrition is preventable and treatable.

Increasing and sustaining commitment to and investment in nutrition now is crucial for Uganda for the decades to come.

- By 2025, investment in proven, effective, and quality nutrition interventions implemented at scale will improve child development, cognitive function, and school performance. Improved nutrition would: ³⁴
  - Prevent permanent brain damage in about 236,000 children and increase the average child’s IQ by 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 related to a reduction in stunting alone
  - Strengthen future intellectual and productive capacity of Ugandans

IQ Points Lost to Malnutrition³

Improving nutrition improves education outcomes. The education sector can support improved nutrition in Uganda by:

- Providing strong technical and political leadership and commitment within the Ministry of Education and Sports, to coordinate nutrition interventions in education.
- Supporting and expanding early childhood development programmes that work in tandem with nutrition programs to promote optimal cognitive development.
- Supporting nutrition early in life for children's cognitive development, so that 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.

People with higher levels of education have better health outcomes than those with less education. Some nutrition-related activities to improve learning and school performance include:

- Updating education sector policies and strategies that are relevant to nutrition
- Endorsing and operationalising the draft National School Health Policy
- Finalising and disseminating the School Feeding guidelines
- Supporting implementation of mandatory food fortification regulation by promoting use of fortified foods in schools and biofortified staples (e.g. iron-rich beans and orange sweet potatoes) in school feeding programmes
- Organising mass de-worming
- Supporting water and sanitation initiatives
- Educating children on positive health and nutrition practices