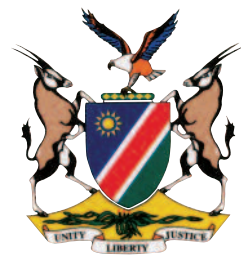




What Parliamentarians can do About Malnutrition in Namibia





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Foreword

Following the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit in September 2010, the international community including Namibia, came together to launch the “Scale-Up Nutrition” (SUN) initiative. The launch marked a global call for greater national ownership and stewardship of nutrition interventions and better coordination of nutrition activities.

Being among the first respondents in the global movement to scaling up nutrition, Namibia has made tremendous progress in addressing malnutrition. Efforts have been made to convene the various stakeholders and sectors towards a coordinated and focussed response to malnutrition resulting in the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform, the National Alliance for Improved Nutrition. The Government of the Republic of Namibia has taken further steps to develop coherent policies and legal frameworks, aligning nutrition actions around a common result framework and improved financial tracking and resource mobilisation.

Despite these various endeavours, malnutrition still remains a public health concern. It is a well-known fact that malnutrition and poverty are interlinked and form a vicious cycle. Evidence from global scientific studies show that malnourished mothers are more likely to give birth to malnourished babies who are likely to die. If they survive, they may grow into short adults, who will in turn likely give birth to malnourished babies. Children, who do not grow to their full potential, may not do well in school and may not reach their full income earning capacity. This perpetuates a cycle of malnutrition and poverty which erodes the little income in poor households.

Global evidence demonstrates that investments in nutrition yields significant returns to Governments. Studies show that every dollar spent on nutrition in the first 1,000 days of child’s life, generates US\$16 in return and boosts the country’s GDP by over 10 percent. The first 1,000 days is therefore a window of opportunity – it is a critical time to invest in nutrition.

As a government, we recognise that malnutrition is a human rights issue. We are aware that to overcome malnutrition, we need the participation of both the duty bearers and rights holders at all levels of our communities: from families to policy makers. In this regard, Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in improving nutrition outcomes by acting as opinion leaders and champions of breastfeeding and optimal nutrition, not only in parliament, but in their own constituencies too. Parliamentarians need knowledge and skills on nutrition to enable them to make informed decisions to sustainably address the causative factors of malnutrition. They need evidence to better advocate for improved nutrition resources for nutrition programmes.

This booklet is intended to provide Parliamentarians with key information on nutrition. It gives a snapshot of the nutrition situation in Namibia. At the same time, it highlights the critical roles and responsibilities Parliamentarians can play in improving the nutrition status of the very communities they are meant to serve. The booklet also provides Parliamentarians with recommendations on how to engage and work with their constituencies to tackle malnutrition. The booklet further identifies opportunities for engaging various government sectors to improve coordination, resource mobilisation and accountability for improved nutrition.

It is my hope, that this booklet will be used as a valuable resource to inform, educate and assist us as Parliamentarians in our collective efforts to meet the global nutrition targets stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, MP
Right Honourable Prime Minister

Preface

In September 2015 world leaders and countries embraced the Sustainable Development Goals to consolidate and accelerate the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. Under the Sustainable Development Goal 2, countries have committed to end hunger and malnutrition in the next fifteen years.

Namibia was no exception, as the country not only embraced the Sustainable Development Goals, but also popularised and mobilised alliances in-country, while integrating the Goals into the country's National Development Plans. Despite unprecedented efforts to reduce malnutrition, the corrosive effects of malnutrition in Namibia are still visible with 24 percent of children under five years of age stunted with less chances of attaining full potential. To address sustainably the causes of malnutrition, the Namibian Government has aligned its efforts under a multi-sectoral approach with enhanced coordination and accountability of nutrition actions.

The World Health Assembly resolution 65.6 calls on all Member States to contribute to the attainment of Global Nutrition Targets by developing comprehensive plans on maternal, infant and young child nutrition. The resolution recognises that States like Namibia, face complex overlays of connected malnutrition burdens that need concentrated actions at the policy, health system and community level.

As a follow up to the resolution, Namibia hosted the Inter Parliamentary Union meeting on Nutrition in September 2015, in Windhoek. At the meeting, Parliamentarians echoed and committed to do more about making malnutrition history. They pledged to ensure that national governments allocate appropriate resources for Nutrition and to have viable and sustainable plans to address the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable members of society, especially women and children.

It is against this background that the concept of developing a Nutrition booklet for Parliamentarians was agreed upon. This information and advocacy tool was developed in collaboration with government departments; the Namibian Alliance for Improved Nutrition (NAFIN); and United Nations agencies. This booklet aims to provide key information and potential advocacy messages to enable both Members of Parliament, policy makers and the general public to communicate effectively on improved maternal and child nutrition.

The booklet recommends the critical roles and responsibilities that Parliamentarians can play in improving the nutrition status of children. It further highlights the significance of nutrition in the social and economic development of Namibia.

Finally, the basic premise of this booklet is that, overcoming malnutrition is a collective responsibility of all Namibian People. For Namibia to effectively address malnutrition, an integrated, multi-sectoral approach with sustainable capacities at all levels of the society needs to be in place. Most importantly, Parliamentarians' participation in the fight against malnutrition is a vital contribution to the realisation of children's and women's rights in Namibia.

Micaela Marques de Sousa
UNICEF Representative



What Parliamentarians can do About Malnutrition in Namibia

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Namibia is a signatory, highlights that good nutrition is a basic human right and no child should be deprived of that right. A child's good nutrition is a foundation for their survival, health and development.

Namibia is a member of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) global movement that aims at improving the nutrition status of children through enhanced funding for nutrition, collaboration and accountability. A multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platform called Namibia Alliance for Improved Nutrition (NAFIN) was established to advocate and coordinate nutrition interventions in the country. Namibia is also a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 2 aims at ending hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition of the children. The country has an obligation to contribute to the achievement of the aspirations of the above instruments.

Namibia has achieved progress in improving the nutrition status of children but the country has a long way to go to achieve better nutrition outcomes for the children. The 2013 Namibia Demographic and Household Survey (NDHS), shows that nearly one in four children under-five is stunted (24 per cent), compared to 29 per cent in 2006. This implies such children cannot reach their full potential in their entire life. The same survey also shows that nearly one in seven is underweight (13 per cent), and one in 15 (6 per cent) is wasted which is an improvement from 26% and 9% respectively in 2006. Further still 48% of children 6-59months were anaemic with no significant improvement from the 2006 findings.

The NDHS figures show an increasing trend in overweight and obesity in both adults and children. In adults obesity and overweight increased from 28% in 2006 to 31.4% in 2013. This has been caused by changes in people's lifestyles, especially the lack of enough exercise and eating too much junk food especially in peri-urban and urban settings. Obesity and overweight are factors which easily contribute to the development of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer.

A child's good nutrition is a foundation for their survival, health and development.



NUTRITION



GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS

Reduce by 40 percent the number of children under five who are stunted

Achieve a 50 percent reduction in the rate of anaemia in women of reproductive age

Achieve a 30 percent reduction in the rate of infants born with low birth weight

Ensure that there is no increase in the rate of children who are overweight.

Increase to at least 50 percent the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months

Reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5 percent

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Malnutrition is a broad term for a range of conditions caused by inadequate or unbalanced diets or by poor absorption of the food consumed. It may result from consumption of too little food, poor quality food or too much food. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 calls for an end to all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting, wasting and overweight in children under 5 years of age.

Child undernutrition is the result of insufficient food intake over a prolonged period. It is also a result of repeated infectious diseases such as diarrhoea and upper respiratory diseases such as cough.

Child undernutrition includes being underweight for one's age, too short for one's age (stunted), dangerously thin for one's height (wasted) and deficiency in vitamins and minerals (micronutrient malnutrition). Undernutrition is an underlying cause of nearly half of all child deaths globally.

Stunting refers to a child's low height for his/her age. It is the outcome of prolonged undernutrition and frequent infections during children's first 1,000 days of life. If unattended to, the damage that stunting causes to a child's physical and mental development is irreversible.

Wasting/acute malnutrition refers to the child's low weight for height. It occurs when an individual suffers from current severe food shortage, a recent bout of illness, inappropriate childcare practices or a combination of these factors. It tends to be highest in children from 12 to 36 months of age.

Overweight and obesity refers to too much weight for height. It increases the risk of chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Overweight people are not necessarily well nourished and may suffer from micronutrient deficiencies due to poorly balanced diets.

The data shows that too many children are not being fed enough nutritious food for their age and not receiving appropriate care such as responsive feeding, play and stimulation. This deprives them of the energy and nutrients they need at the most critical time in their physical and mental development.

The period between conception and a child's second birthday (the first one thousand days of life) is a critical period for a child's nutrition. The right nutrients for both the mother and the baby within this period, sets the stage for physical, emotional and intellectual development for a child's entire life.

Good nutrition builds strong immune systems, increases the children's chances of survival and protects them for their whole lives. Good nutrition also protects children against illness, infection and disease, ensuring better health outcomes throughout their childhood and adulthood.

In the first six months of life babies should be breastfed exclusively whenever the child want to breastfeed with no additional foods or liquids, including water. The mother's breastmilk is enough for the child. The baby should be put on a mother's breast within one hour after birth for it to be able suck the first milk called **colostrum**. This is called early initiation of breastfeeding.

Good nutrition builds strong immune systems, increases the children's chances of survival and protects them for their whole lives.

Exclusive breastfeeding means giving an infant 0-6 months breastmilk only with no additional foods or liquids, including water, except medicines prescribed by a medical professional.

Early initiation of breastfeeding means putting a baby on the mother's breast within the first hour of birth. This allows the baby to take in colostrum-the first milk- which is important for the building the baby's immunity and ensuring proper growth. It also helps the mother to sustain exclusive breastfeeding

After six months babies should continue to receive breastmilk along with safe, high nutrient and adequate complementary foods. In addition to breastmilk, babies should be fed frequently; 2-3 times a day with meals that have different nutrients.

Complementary feeding means giving other foods and drinks in addition to breastmilk at the age of six months. Complementary foods introduced at 6 months because at this age, breastmilk no longer meets all of the nutritional requirements of the growing infant. This practice focuses on complementary feeding among children aged 6 to 24 months.



The bodies and brains of thousands of young children in Namibia do not reach their full potential because they are not being breastfed and are not receiving adequate complementary food.

Poor nutrition at a young age causes irreversible mental and physical damage. In Namibia only 49% of babies are exclusively breastfed up to 6 months and most of them are introduced to complementary feeding at a very early age. This is very dangerous because it exposes them to diseases that affect their growth. Findings from NDHS 2013 show that only 41% of the children aged 6-23 months are fed the minimum number of times (2-3) per day and 31% are fed from the required number of food groups. This means most Namibian children do not get the required amount of nutrients to promote proper growth and development.

*A child aged 6-23 months should be fed on at least 4 food groups per day. This is called the **minimum diet diversity**. The food groups include; animal source foods, fruits and vegetables, staple foods such as Mahangu and legumes such as beans.*

A child aged 6-23 months should be fed at least 2-3 times per day in addition to breast milk. This is called the minimum feeding frequency

Malnutrition is one of the most critical issues facing human, social and economic development in Namibia. A lot of children across the country still suffer and die unnecessarily from this condition, which can be prevented.

The fulfilment of children's rights, including those to good nutrition, depends on high-level support. For this support to be effective, national and community leaders should understand and respect their duties to children and act upon them.

The purpose of this booklet

Attention to the prevalence and effects of malnutrition in Namibia is needed so that more can be done for children and families to prevent and treat malnutrition.

This booklet is intended to raise awareness on the causes and impact of malnutrition. It encourages dialogue on how to tackle this challenge in a meaningful and sustainable way. The information in the booklet provides concrete suggestions on how Parliamentarians can best support families and communities in ending child malnutrition in Namibia.

It also explains the crucial role Parliamentarians can play in contributing to the reduction of malnutrition and stunting rates through enacting laws and regulations, influencing the shape of national development plans and determining national budget design and allocations.

Parliamentarians can be powerful champions of reducing malnutrition in Namibia by highlighting the problem among decision makers.

Parliamentarians also have a special responsibility to set the example and to encourage others to take action to improve the nutritional status of its people, with a special focus on infants and young children. This is because:

- Parliamentarians are the voice of the people and are mobilisers for good practices,
- They are trusted and listened to by the people and can raise awareness on the prevalence and impact of malnutrition on households and on communities,
- They have influence and access to resources, within the government and outside, needed to ensure progress,
- They can influence budgetary allocations, national laws, policies, strategies, plans and programmes to improve food security,
- Parliamentarians can represent the interests of mothers and their babies and act as champions of breastfeeding and optimal feeding of children,
- Parliamentarians have the mandate to oversee government activities.

This booklet is intended to raise awareness on the causes and impact of malnutrition.

Why parliamentarians should act on preventing malnutrition?

Good nutritional status of the populace is a cornerstone to improved productivity and economic growth of a nation.

- Poverty and malnutrition are interlinked and form a vicious cycle. A malnourished mother has high chances of giving birth to low birth weight baby, who grows to become a stunted adolescent and later a stunted adult. Stunted children suffer from irreparable intellectual impairment that causes poor academic performance, high school drop outs and consequently low earnings in adulthood. Hungry and malnourished adults are unable to be fully productive and are more likely to be ill, increasing the strain on often overburdened health systems. Breaking this vicious cycle will create a prosperous, creative, and healthy population that will build a better and more prosperous future.
- Good nutritional status of the populace is a cornerstone to improved productivity and economic growth of a nation. Investment in nutrition yields numerous benefits to the social and economic development of a country and is key to reducing inequality and eliminating poverty. Improving nutrition during the first 1,000 days is recognized as being one of the best and most cost-effective investments that can be made to achieve lasting progress in stunting reduction and promoting sustainable development in a country. Interventions after the second birthday can make a difference but often cannot undo the damage done by malnutrition during the first 1,000 days
- Studies conducted on investment in nutrition in various countries in the world indicated that every dollar spent on nutrition in the 1,000 days of child's life can generate US\$16 in return and boost the country's GDP by over 10 percent. In East and Southern Africa each dollar invested in nutrition can generate between US\$34-\$75 in economic productivity. It is estimated that if countries can reduce the prevalence of stunting by half by the year 2025 in accordance with World Health Assembly targets, we can generate US\$76 million in return.
- With strong political commitment and leadership as well as adequate financing and clear accountability mechanisms, ending child malnutrition in Namibia is possible in one generation. Several countries have already markedly reduced stunting levels in recent years, showing that rapid progress is achievable.

1000 days is a period from conception up to when the child is 2 years of age. This period is the window of opportunity for every child to attain proper brain and physical development. Nutrition mistakes that happen during this period are irreversible and cause permanent damage to the intellectual and physical development of a child.

Why is good nutrition important for a child and the mother?

The right nutrients for both a mother and the baby in the first 1,000 days will support the physical, emotional and intellectual development of that child's entire life.

The first 1,000 days of a baby's life are important in building a strong immune system, which protects the child against illness, infection and disease, and ensuring better health throughout childhood and adulthood. This is because in this period the child is particularly vulnerable to infections, illness and malnutrition.

Poor nutrition during the 1000 days of life results in stunted growth with adverse effects on child's brain development. This then leads to reduced school performance, low productivity and increased susceptibility to chronic diseases even in adulthood.

Stunted girl children grow into stunted adult women. The stunted adolescent girls grow into stunted women that are weak, sickly and less productive. When they become pregnant, they give birth to low birthweight babies, who will in turn grow into stunted adolescents. This creates a vicious cycle of malnutrition and poverty. The cycle can only be broken by ensuring that mothers, especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, take the right nutrients, practice proper hygiene, access health services and are able to make informed decisions on the feeding of their children.

From 0-6 months of life, breastmilk is the best food a mother can offer to her baby. During this period breastmilk alone is enough for the proper growth of the baby. Breastmilk also quenches a child's thirst, therefore water is not needed during this period.

Breastfeeding babies obtain the right balance of nutrients, their immune system is protected and they are able to fight off infections. Breastmilk is safe and the practice of breastfeeding promotes bonding between the mother and baby. Families, employers, national parliaments and Government all have important roles to play in the creation of a conducive environment that promote, protect and support breastfeeding and ensuring that mothers are able to exclusively breastfeed their children.

Maternity legislation that gives enough time of at least six months for working mothers to stay with babies is necessary. The creation of breastfeeding friendly corners/spaces at work places and shopping centres should be encouraged. Allowing breastfeeding mothers breastfeeding breaks during working hours, can support good breastfeeding practices and enhance the proper growth and development of children.

The right nutrients for both a mother and the baby in the first 1,000 days will support the physical, emotional and intellectual development of that child's entire life.



Why focus on stunting as a form of malnutrition?

A stunted child's height is below the average height for his age and the condition has everlasting and irreversible harmful effects on that child's life.

Urgent action is required to prevent the continued high levels of malnutrition in Namibia. In particular, attention should be paid to the prevalence and effects of stunting, which is caused by continued undernutrition during the most critical periods of growth and development. Stunting usually happens during the first 1000 days of life, from a woman's pregnancy to the child's second birthday.

A stunted child's height is below the average height for his age and the condition has everlasting and irreversible harmful effects on that child's life.

Stunting can cause delayed motor development, impaired cognitive function and poor school performance, reduced earnings in adult life and increased risks of nutrition related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity in the future.

- An estimated 20 per cent of stunting begins in the womb, when a mother is malnourished and is not getting enough of the nutrition she needs to support her baby's growth and development during pregnancy.
- A severely stunted child faces a four times higher risk of dying than a child who is not stunted.
- Stunting puts children at great risk of death and severe illness due to common childhood infections, such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, and measles.
- An adult who has been stunted as a child is likely to be less productive and will be less likely to escape poverty as compared to one who was not stunted.

Why children are stunted

- **Inequities** - Namibia has huge geographic, social and economic disparities in nutrition status of children. Children living in rural areas are twice as likely to be stunted as urban children. Children from the poorest households are three times more likely to be undernourished than children from the wealthiest households. Children whose mothers have no education are almost four times more likely to be undernourished than children whose mothers have secondary education or higher.
- **Aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes** - The marketing of breastmilk substitutes such as infant formula presents one of the biggest challenges to breastfeeding. The marketing strategies of breastmilk substitute companies persuade mothers to introduce substitutes to the babies, and do not tell them that a mother's milk is the best for her baby because it contains many antibodies that are difficult to include in infant formula. This interferes with the mother's breastmilk production and leads to dependency on the substitute.

The Government is working on the adoption of regulations to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, but there is still a need to ensure that these regulations will be adequately monitored and enforced and that resources are available to allow this.

- **Gender norms, social, cultural and traditional practices** - There are some cultural beliefs that can affect the practice of breastfeeding. For example, early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding are essential for child nutrition, however, a mother may be unable to do this because her partner or family expect her to follow tradition – such as waiting to start breastfeeding or giving the child water, herbs or traditional medicines.

In some cultures, the colostrum (the first milk) is regarded as dirty. Mothers in these cultural settings are told to squeeze out this milk and throw it away. However, this first breast milk, or colostrum, contains vital antibodies to protect a baby against diseases. Therefore, colostrum should never be discarded as it is usually the case in some of our communities.

- **Poor Sanitation practices** – There is a relationship between poor sanitation and high rates of malnutrition. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 50% of malnutrition cases can be associated with repeated diarrhoea as a result of unsafe water or insufficient hygiene. In Namibia, only one-third (34%) of the population has access to proper toilet facilities and half of the population practice open defecation. One out of five schools nationwide lack toilet facilities, and only slightly more than half of the health facilities have running water and soap.



Government efforts to Scaling up nutrition

Namibia is a member of the global movement for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and is a signatory to a number of regional and international instruments including the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Nutrition Targets. Namibia is also a member of the World Health Assembly, and as such is committed to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes through national legislation.

Namibia also ratified the International Labour Organization Convention 183 and Recommendation 191 and as such recognizes key elements of maternity protection such as the scope, leave, benefits, health protection, job protection and non-discrimination, breastfeeding breaks and breastfeeding facilities as a minimum standard in national legislation on maternity protection.

Namibia has an obligation to contribute to the realization of the goals of such instruments.

In an effort to scale up nutrition interventions to reach every mother and child, Namibia joined the SUN movement in 2011 and established Namibia Alliance for Improved Nutrition (NAFIN) through a Cabinet resolution to coordinate, advocate and scale up nutrition interventions. The government recognizes that the mandate to address problems of food insecurity and malnutrition falls under no single sector nor government Ministry, but is cross-sectoral in nature and therefore, re-established the National Food Security and Nutrition Council. NAFIN and the Council are mandated to bring together various line ministries such as Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture academia, private sector and development partners to discuss and advance the nutrition agenda in the country.

What can parliamentarians do?

Parliament has the power to create real and lasting change for the children. It is the central institution through which the will of the people is expressed, laws are passed and government is held accountable. **Parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to send the message that the well-being of the children is the responsibility not just of people who work with children, but of all society.** Improving the nutrition status of children is a key factor in enhancing the productivity and economic prosperity of the country. Malnutrition is an impediment to social and economic development as it perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty across generations.

Parliamentarians have a key role to play if the war against malnutrition is to be won in Namibia. The following are some actions which can be taken to accelerate the pace of scaling up nutrition in the country.

a) Enact laws that promote, protect and support child nutrition

- Advocate and vote for the establishment and enforcement of monitoring mechanisms in the Public and Environmental Act to control the marketing of breastmilk substitutes in accordance with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS) and follow-up resolutions. This prohibits the promotion and advertising of breastmilk substitutes such as infant formula, feeding bottles and teats. It also encourages mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies for the first six months of life with continued breastfeeding until two years or beyond. Mothers should also be empowered to make informed choices on infant and young child feeding free from commercial pressure.

- Advocate and vote for penalties for the violation of the national laws and regulations on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes.
- Advocate and vote for maternity protection laws to facilitate breastfeeding and child care while the mother is working. This includes ensuring paid maternity leave (which is currently only 12 weeks in Namibia, whilst the ILO states 14 weeks), breastfeeding breaks during working hours and supporting the introduction of baby friendly workplaces where mothers have time and space to breastfeed their babies when they return to work.
- Advocate and promote nutrition education and good nutrition practices in schools as a way to build healthy behaviour and improve academic performance
- Advocate for improved quality of school feeding programmes. Schools can contribute to reducing all types of nutrition problems by including nutrition in the school programmes. Where possible and where facilities are in place, the school feeding programmes should include nutritious foods produced in school gardens and in local communities.
- Advocate and vote for comprehensive legislations to regulate the marketing of foods which have too much saturated fats, trans-fats such as oily foods, sugars and salt. Carbonated drinks such as sodas and juices that promote weight gain are also to be discouraged.

b) Representation of the multiple interests and views of the citizenry

Members of Parliament are both the people's representative to the parliament and parliament's representative to the people. Parliamentarians are well positioned to advocate on behalf of children and mothers to have policies and programmes that address the underlying causes of malnutrition in the country. Therefore;

- As leaders in the respective communities, Parliamentarians can sensitize mothers, policy makers and the general public on the benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of not breastfeeding.
- Share and promote case studies and evidence that demonstrate the successful implementation of interventions that have reduced malnutrition and highlight the benefits to women, children and communities.
- Promote and advocate good behaviours and practices on nutrition within the communities
- Mobilise community members' involvement and discussions in community group meetings on nutrition
- Effectively promote and educate communities on the benefits of a healthy diet and lifestyle. This includes encouraging the re-

introduction of traditional foods such as beans, peas, lentils, mahangu, maize, potatoes into the diet. Traditional foods are lower in fat and richer in fibre in comparison to commercially processed food.

- Enhance food security at community and household levels so that families have enough food to lead active and healthy lives throughout the year. All family members should participate in activities to produce enough food in households.
- Support environmental hygiene and sanitation in households by promoting the building of toilet facilities and clean water at every household.
- Support schools to have improved sanitation and hygiene facilities and practises
- Support the training of community health workers who can identify children with malnutrition. These community health workers can also help families in promoting the best feeding practices for the children.
- Establish community led referral arrangements for children with malnutrition. These children will be helped with the right treatment for malnutrition.

c) Oversight to government programmes.

Parliament is well positioned to influence the executive and improve accountability to ending malnutrition through the following ways

- Parliamentarians can follow up on how the resources dedicated to address malnutrition and the coverage and reach of nutrition interventions are being used. Resource tracking is an important way of promoting transparency and can be used for advocacy purposes.
- Advocate for budgetary allocations to address malnutrition. Currently, the amount of funds invested in nutrition in Namibia is not known and there is no budget line for nutrition in government budget.
- Have access to up-to-date and reliable data on nutrition investment. This information is important to help in supporting the prioritisation, planning and resource allocation for nutrition
- Advocate for credible, comprehensive and current data on nutritional status in order to track progress against targets set to reduce malnutrition. This will assist in holding all nutrition stakeholders to account on the commitments that they have made.

d) Budgeting for nutrition interventions

Parliamentarians have a role to ensure that they scrutinize the budget to ensure that needs of the children are reflected and catered for. By exercising its budgetary oversight powers and bringing transparency to the process, parliament can bring greater accountability and help allocate adequate funds to nutrition interventions.

Monitor the implementation of the budget to ensure that funds are utilised for the purposes they were allocated for.

What you can do to support your communities to improve nutrition?

Cases of malnutrition can be found within different communities. People in the communities therefore have a role to play in ending and treating malnutrition and reducing stunting among children.

- **Share information about malnutrition** – Community members can use platforms such as community meetings to inform families and colleagues that malnutrition is a danger and how the condition affects families, communities and the country. Community members can also discuss information on proper child feeding practices. They can also support those affected by malnutrition by giving them information and facts on how and where the child can be treated.
- **Get involved in community groups** – Mothers' involvement in groups such as mother support groups, provides an important platform for learning about nutrition. Mothers support one another. Within these groups, younger mothers can learn from older mothers on the best practices on child feeding and care of the young ones.
- **Becoming change agents** - Defeating malnutrition starts at the community and household level. Community members must be involved through training young mothers on good child feeding and caring practices. Community members can also support other families with the early identification of malnutrition and informing the community leaders and health officials of these cases.
- **Enhance food security in homesteads** - Family members in the community should participate in activities to produce enough food. Families should also be encouraged to make decisions on food production collectively between the husband and wife. A variety of foods have to be produced and eaten at home.
- **Promote and encourage the practice of breastfeeding** - Breastfeeding within the first hour of a baby being born will help to increase their chances of surviving beyond 5 years. This first breast milk, or colostrum, helps the development of the baby's immune and digestive systems and this helps reduce diarrhoea in the child. Mothers should also be supported to breastfeed exclusively in the first six months of the baby's life.
- **Promote environmental hygiene and sanitation** – It is every individual's responsibility to ensure proper hygiene and sanitation in homesteads. An ideal house should have a toilet, kitchen, rubbish pit, tippy tap or handwashing can with soap, ventilation and a dish rack. Having these structures at the household is important for controlling diseases. A

Parliamentarians are well positioned and have the power to create real and lasting change for the children.

lot of money is saved when there is less illness and this money can be spent on other household needs and saved up for the children's education.

- **Give support to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers -** Mothers have to be supported to prepare well and go through pregnancy successfully. The mother can get this support from the home and also from the community.

During pregnancy and while breastfeeding, mothers have to eat a balanced diet and to eat an additional meal a day. This is because whatever she eats, the baby she is carrying will be benefiting too. The mother should also get enough rest and receive proper health care.

Housework should be a responsibility of every member of a household. Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers have to be supported by their husbands and other family members with household work to enable them to have enough rest. This rest is important for their bodies to gain and store enough body energy and nutrients to cater for the needs of the baby and themselves.

- **Mobilize community members for action –** Community members can influence government, religious and traditional leaders and public officials to take action and to hold themselves accountable to controlling malnutrition. They can encourage the leaders to set up public forums to discuss malnutrition. Discussing issues as a community is an important way to get more people to agree with national policies.

Conclusion

The war to defeat malnutrition in Namibia is a collective responsibility for both duty bearers and right holders. The government, communities and their leaders have responsibility to improve the nutrition status of the children. Parliamentarians are well positioned and have the power to create real and lasting change for the children. They can allocate resources from the national budgets, establish strong policy directions, and debate, shape and enforce laws that protect, promote and support nutrition of the children. Parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to send the message that the well-being of the children is the responsibility not just of people who work with children, but of all society. Improving the nutrition status of children is a key factor in enhancing the productivity and economic prosperity of the country. When Parliamentarians speak on behalf of children, their voices resonate and they are heard by all people at all levels. Let's join hands to defeat malnutrition and make Namibia a better place for children.

