

Malnutrition – A Consequence of Food Insecurity

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition covers a range of conditions, including acute malnutrition, chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies¹. It “results from a combination of problems related to poor diet, ill-health and inappropriate care. It is closely associated with poverty.”² It is also an outcome of food insecurity.

Acute malnutrition typically refers to someone who has lost a significant amount of weight over a short period of time, resulting in being abnormally underweight or wasting.

Chronic malnutrition typically refers to someone who has not had access to enough nutritious food over an extended period of time, resulting in stunted growth.

Micronutrient deficiencies “occur when people do not have access to micronutrient-rich foods such as fruit, vegetables, animal products and fortified foods, usually because they are too expensive to buy or are locally unavailable.”³

Malnutrition can affect people profoundly over both the short and long-term. “Nutrition outcomes link food security and human development: well-nourished children have greater capacity to learn and grow into more capable and productive adults.”⁴ This is because malnutrition can inhibit physical development, including that of the brain and the nervous system. These impacts continue into adult-hood, as typically the physical damage is irreversible. Under-nourished children are also more vulnerable to illness due to a weakened immune system, and are at greater risk of death. An estimated one third of deaths among children under age five are associated with under-nutrition⁵.

Malnutrition in Rwanda

Chronic malnutrition is a significant problem in Rwanda. A nutrition survey in 2012 found that among children aged six months to five years, 12 percent were underweight and 43 percent had stunted growth⁶. “The prevalence of chronic malnutrition among children of this age has remained “very high” in Rwanda over the last 20 years”⁷. In some rural areas more than 60 percent of local children were found to have stunted growth⁸.

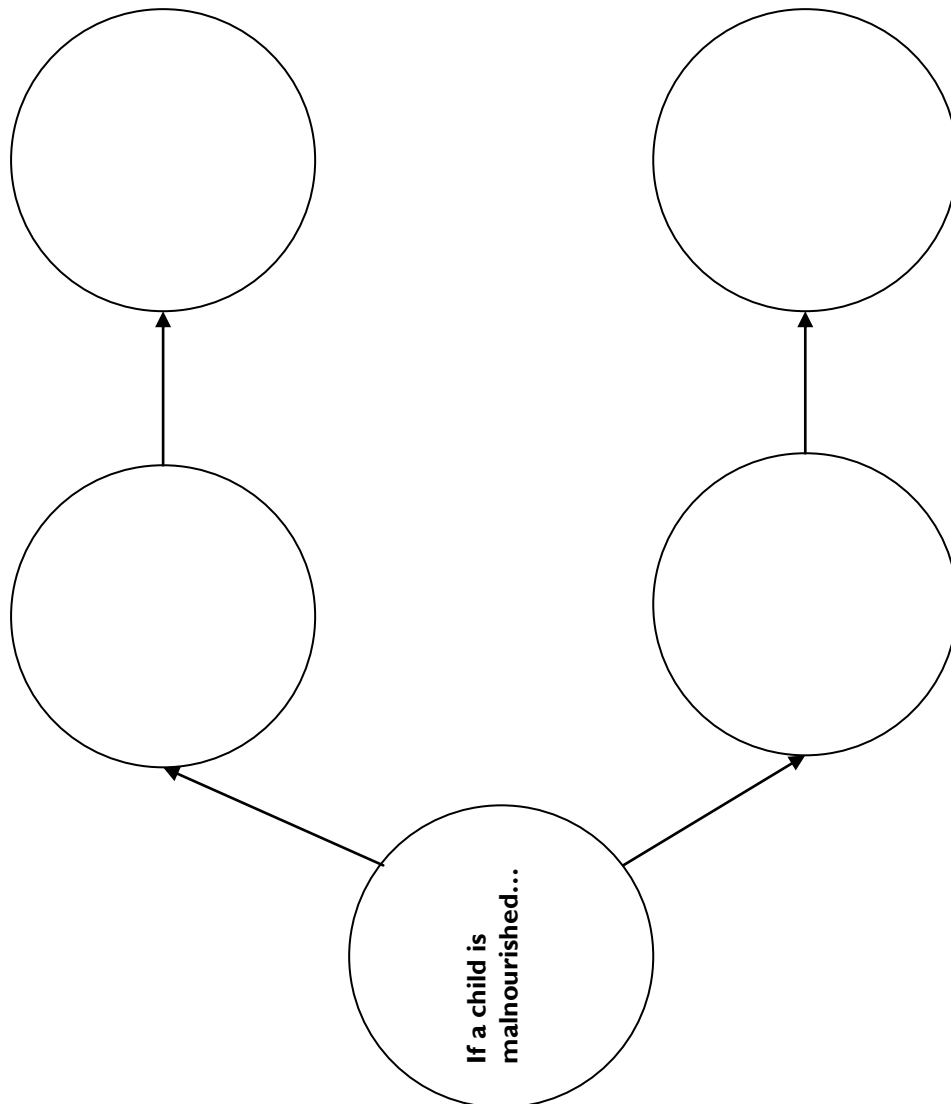
The survey found that children were more likely to experience the effects of chronic malnutrition if:⁹

- their family was poor
- they lived in a rural area
- they lived in an isolated community without easy access to health care services like hospitals
- they lived in northern or western Rwanda. These areas had the highest rates of stunting, whereas children living in the capital city had the lowest rates
- their mother was young
- their mother’s growth had been stunted as a girl
- their mother had no or limited education
- they were small in size when they were born
- they consumed less dairy products. “Children between one and two years old who had consumed milk products, were significantly less stunted than other children of the same age category”¹⁰

For you to do

1. Using the consequences flow chart below, brainstorm some of the consequences for a child if they are malnourished. Hint: consider both potential health and socio-economic consequences in the short and long-term. You will also need to brainstorm the effect of those consequences. For example:

If a child is malnourished => they are likely to have stunted growth => in girls this is likely to cause complications when they are pregnant and during child-birth



¹ The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004, pg 108

² United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, MDG Statement 2010, www.unscn.org/files/Statements/2010_SCN_MDG_Statement_160910_final.pdf [accessed February 2014]

³ WHO, WFP and UNICEF, Preventing and controlling micronutrient deficiencies in populations affected by an emergency, 2007, pg 1

⁴ UNDP, Africa Human Development Report 2012, pg 85

⁵ UNICEF, Improving Child Nutrition: The achievable imperative for global progress, 2013, pg 6

⁶ MINAGRI NISR and WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey: Rwanda 2012 – Executive Brief, pg 4

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., pg 5

⁹ Ibid., pgs 4-5

¹⁰ Ibid., pg 5