Better Nutrition for Women: Key To Reducing Hunger

Women suffer disproportionately from hunger, poverty, and disease—seven out of 10 hungry people worldwide are women. Hunger and poverty are directly related to the status of women in society; because women are often the main caregivers in their families, they are the critical link in improving children’s overall well-being.

“… we must not forget the millions of women around the world who continue to struggle,” said Asma Lateef, director of Bread for the World Institute. “Unfortunately, where there is hunger and poverty, there is almost always poor access to maternal and child health care.”

A new analysis by Bread for the World Institute, “Maternal and Child Health PDF Icon,” examines the connections between poverty and maternal and child health in developing countries. The analysis also highlights the importance of proper nutrition during the first 1,000 days of a child’s life—from pregnancy to the child’s second birthday. Research shows the effects of malnutrition during this critical time period are irreversible.

“The United States and other countries must support foreign assistance programs that emphasize better nutrition for women and children,” said Lateef. “Maternal mortality and child malnutrition can be reversed by improving the social, economic, and political status of rural women. Progress has been made, but work still remains.”

7 out of 10 hungry people worldwide are women

Globally, women suffer disproportionately from hunger, disease, and poverty. Especially in developing countries, the low status of rural women—social, economic, and political—contributes to high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition among children as well. Where there is hunger and poverty, there is almost always poor access to maternal and child health care.

• Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children and are at risk of death during childbirth.

• Malnutrition increases the risk that a pregnant woman who is HIV-positive will pass the virus
on to her baby.

- Women suffer twice the rate of malnutrition as men. Girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys.

The opposite is true too:
- A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past her fifth birthday.

- Each extra year of a mother’s education reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%.

- In Africa’s poorest countries, an estimated 1.8 million children’s lives could have been saved if their mothers had a secondary school education. (2010 U.N MDG Report)

**Child Malnutrition**

The level of child and maternal undernutrition remains unacceptable throughout the world, but 90% of the developing world’s chronically undernourished children live in Asia or Africa.

- Globally, more than one-third of child deaths are attributable to undernutrition.

- Among children in the developing world younger than 5, an estimated one third – 195 million children – are stunted—and 129 million are underweight.

The United States is not exempt from hunger. In 2009, 85% of U.S. households were food secure throughout the entire year, and 14.7% of households were food insecure at least some time during that year, essentially unchanged from 14.6% in 2008. This remains the highest recorded prevalence rate of food insecurity since 1995 when the first national food security survey was conducted.

Eighty-four percent of U.S. households with children were food secure throughout 2007, meaning that they had consistent access to adequate food for active, healthy lives for all household members. Nearly 16% of households with children were food insecure sometime during the year, including 8.3% in which children were food insecure and 0.8% in which one or more children experienced very low food security—the most severe food-insecure condition measured by the U.S.
Department of Agriculture. Numerous studies suggest that children in food-insecure households have higher risks of health and development problems than children in otherwise similar food-secure households. This study found that about 85% of households with food-insecure children had a working adult, including 70% with a full-time worker. Fewer than half of households with food-insecure children included an adult educated past high school. Thus, job opportunities and wage rates for less educated workers are important factors affecting the food security of children.

**Poverty & Food Insecurity in Louisiana**

The population of Louisiana rose from 4,287,768 in 2006 to 4,492,076 in 2009. The number of children (under age 18) rose from 1,088,997 in 2006 to 1,122,395 in 2009. The median household income rose from $39,337 in 2006 to $42,492 in 2009. The total number of people living in poverty diminished from 793,223 to 755,460 in 2009. Louisiana ranked third (27.8%) in the nation in child poverty in 2006 and ninth (24.2%) in 2009. The percent of households that were food insecure went from 14.4% in 2006 to 10.0% in 2009.

Clearly Louisiana’s poverty rate and food security has improved in great
part because of federally funded food programs, i.e. food stamps, child nutrition programs, WIC to mention a few.

States with the highest prevalence of household food insecurity from 2007 - 2009 are:
Arkansas 1
Texas 2
Mississippi 3
Georgia 4
Oklahoma 5
LOUISIANA 45

Cutting food programs that work in the federal budget is irresponsible, cruel and un-American. Urge Congress not to cut programs for hungry and poor people as they work to reduce the deficit.

Call your senators at 1-800-826-3688.

Ask them to protect funding for programs needed by low-income people in the United States and for foreign assistance that is focused on reducing poverty.

This toll-free number will connect you to the Capitol switchboard. Ask to be connected to your senator’s office in order to leave your message.

Points to Make
* For every dollar in the federal budget, only 14 cents goes to domestic social safety net programs (excluding Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program). Cutting these programs will hurt families across the United States who continue to feel the impact of the recession.

* Less than 1 cent per dollar of the federal budget goes to foreign assistance programs focused on reducing hunger and poverty. Cuts to these programs will cost lives and add to global political instability.

* Any efforts to reduce the deficit must take on the entire budget, not just programs that help hungry and poor people.