



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Third International Conference on Financing for Development

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Side Event

On

“Harnessing Innovative Financing for Nutrition in Africa”

and

***Launch of the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy (ARNS) and
Commissioning of the Phase II Cost of Hunger Study (COHA)
Report***

Opening Remarks

by

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**Ellily Hotel, Green Hall
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**Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen
Colleagues,**

On behalf of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), I am honored and pleased to welcome you this afternoon to the launch of the Africa regional nutrition strategy and commissioning of the phase II Cost of hunger Report in the sidelines of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

I wish to acknowledge the organisers and partners for the amount of work put into preparing this timely event “Harnessing Innovative Financing for Nutrition in Africa”. Indeed, under the auspices of the 2015 Conference on Financing for Development, this event offers an opportunity to advocate for strategic investments and build on the COHA results to catalyze action for achieving the continental goals set by member States in the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy (ARNS) and African Renewed Initiative for Stunting Elimination (ARISE) initiatives.

Despite Africa’s remarkable growth in recent years, the continent is the only region in the world where the number of stunted children has increased - by 23% in the period 1990-2011.

In light of the insightful and informative comments of the distinguished speakers who have preceded me, it would be hard to overemphasize that under-nutrition, particularly stunting, has shown to limit the capacity of individuals to be healthy and well-educated, compromising irreversibly their physical and mental

development, and the potential of the society as a whole.

We, at ECA, attach great importance to efforts aimed at enhancing the health of African people, including tackling nutrition problems to achieve Africa's sustainable development objectives. In this regard, ECA has been working in close partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) since 2009 to support the African Union Commission in the implementation of the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) studies in different countries to raise awareness and promote action for reducing child under-nutrition and stunting.

As you are all aware, the AUC initiative – African Renewed Initiative for Stunting Elimination (ARISE 2025), catalyzed by the COHA studies to support member States to eliminate child under-nutrition by 2025, was endorsed by AU Heads of State in Malabo in July 2014, and reflects the commitments of African countries to eliminate child under-nutrition, in line with the ARISE initiative. This is also consistent with the AUC's African Regional Nutritional Strategy (ARNS) 2016-2025 and the newly defined Sustainable Development Goal 2, which calls for *“an end to all forms of malnutrition including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age”*.

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

In the context of increasing awareness on the extent of the problem and the need for urgent action at the highest level among policy makers, the report on the Cost of Hunger in Africa presents several significant findings which point out to the

fact that nutrition is not just a health problem, but a multi-sectoral problem requiring a multi-sectoral response.

This goes without saying that the COHA studies estimate the costs of inaction in addressing child under-nutrition and identify several significant findings. The following 3 items of compelling note challenge us to define innovating policies to address existing financing gaps in supporting nutrition initiatives:

- Firstly, results from the 2nd phase countries (Rwanda, Malawi, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Chad) show that between 50 and 75% of the costs of inaction in addressing child under-nutrition are borne by the families – putting a high burden, particularly on the poorest and most vulnerable populations.
- Secondly, up to 40% of children still die because of under-nutrition, and almost 2 out of 3 of working-age population suffered from stunting as children. Many of them in fact died because of stunting – yielding significant losses in productivity.
- Thirdly, between 6.3 and 11.5% of GDP has been lost due to costs associated with child under-nutrition.

Overall, the study estimates that up to 1.5 billion USD (or, 226 million USD annually) could be saved from reducing stunting rates to 10% by 2025, which could be invested strategically and effectively in other social or economic sectors. Yet, evidence shows that many countries are still falling short of the 2001 Abuja Declaration goal of allocating 15% of the budget to health spending.

Increasing public spending in health relies heavily on political will/commitment. Indeed, countries that have pledged and placed nutrition high in their development agendas have seen their levels of hunger and under-nutrition decrease dramatically over the last decade. It is clear that large (human and financial) resources can be saved by tackling undernutrition. Governments should therefore make the best use of available resources to improve nutrition interventions – and trigger those savings that the COHA scenarios have pointed to.

There is certainly a need for a different policy environment that maintains nutrition high on the national and regional development agendas to achieve the continental goals by 2025. . Indeed, Africa is known to possess vast amount of exploitable natural resources. Proven stocks of extractable energy resources on the continent (oil, natural gas, coal, and uranium) are estimated at between US\$13 and US\$14.5 trillion. An estimated US\$1.671 trillion of potential wealth and additional production potential were identified in the key sectors of agriculture, water, fisheries, forestry and tourism. For these opportunities to be realized, sound macroeconomic framework, careful development planning, debt sustainability and fiscal responsibility have to be in place.

In closing, I would like to call upon all stakeholders to translate commitments into policy actions by establishing and implementing viable financing mechanisms to harness domestic resources mobilisation in support of nutrition initiatives, and improving their efficiency and effectiveness.

I would like to reaffirm ECA's shared commitment to play its part in maximizing the UN's impact to the problem of malnutrition on the continent.

I wish you stimulating and fruitful deliberations and thank you for your kind attention.