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For a world without hunger

# Your topic: Nutrition

2019 REPORT





## Dear friends of Welthungerhilfe,

Of all the disasters reported in the news today, the worst remains: Every ninth person goes to bed hungry. That amounts to more than 821 million men, women, and children worldwide. This is in addition to the two billion people suffering from malnutrition. They lack the important micronutrients necessary to lead a healthy life and to fully realise their mental and physical potential.

Learn in this report how Welthungerhilfe is taking a new step in the fight against under- and malnutrition with the concept of regional nutrition consultants (p. 6). In this interview, consultant Tamanna Ferdous reports on her experiences.

How important the interplay between education, hygiene, and location-appropriate agriculture is for healthy nutrition is revealed by our project in Myanmar. In the middle of the Irrawaddy Delta, people enjoy a more balanced diet than ever before. Turn to page four to read about what the five-colour nutrition concept is all about.

I could list many more examples about the impact your support is having. You have our gratitude – and that of the people we serve.

Sincerely,

Ute Latzke  
Welthungerhilfe Nutrition Expert

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**Cover Photo:** Welthungerhilfe offers training in the practical aspects of healthy nutrition in sessions like this one in Bangui, Central African Republic.

### Jean Rabel, Haiti

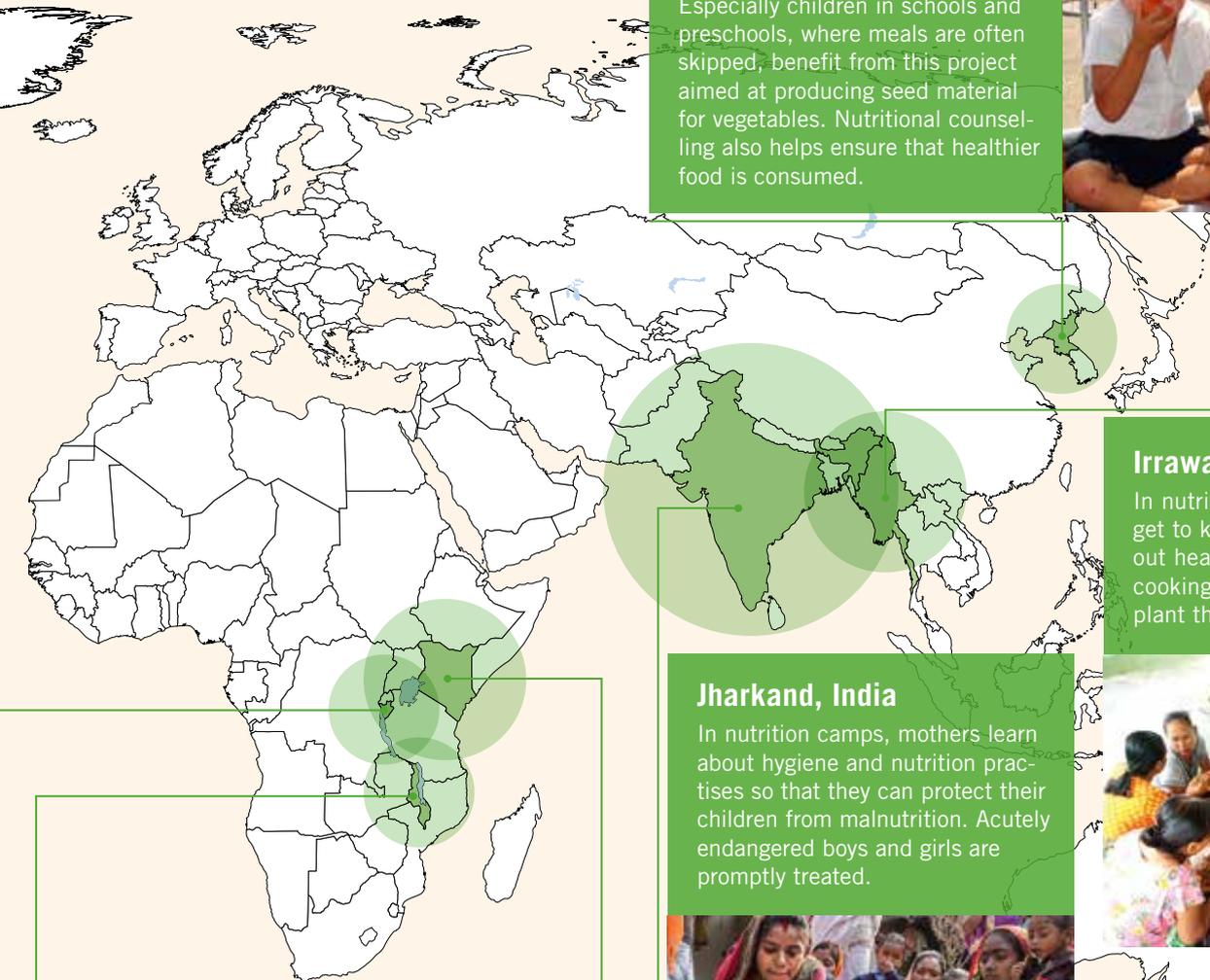
Small-scale farming families receive information about balanced nutrition and how to cultivate locally-adapted vegetables and tubers in order to improve the food supply.



### Ngozi, Burundi

Trained in health and nutrition, traditional household consultants explain to families how to achieve a balanced diet that does not rely solely on starchy foods.

To defeat hunger worldwide, we support small-scale farmers and their families while addressing the root causes of malnutrition.



### Four provinces near Pyongyang, North Korea

Especially children in schools and preschools, where meals are often skipped, benefit from this project aimed at producing seed material for vegetables. Nutritional counselling also helps ensure that healthier food is consumed.



### Irrawaddy Delta, Myanmar

In nutritional counselling, women get to know new vegetables, try out healthy recipes, and organise cooking competitions. They also plant their own vegetable gardens.



### Jharkhand, India

In nutrition camps, mothers learn about hygiene and nutrition practices so that they can protect their children from malnutrition. Acutely endangered boys and girls are promptly treated.



### Mangochi, Malawi

This project aims to improve the nutrition situation of young small-scale farmers by means of permaculture, i.e. a resilient, self-regulating ecosystem. A minimum of effort yields a more diverse harvest.



### Kaijado, Kenya

Masai women are putting a new business idea to the test, producing milk and cheese. They have learnt a lot about hygiene, nutrition, milk production, and livestock breeding.



# Myanmar: Measurable Results



The families now plant healthy vegetables themselves.



The cooking competitions evaluate how balanced the meals are.

**The significance of the interplay between education, hygiene, and location-specific agriculture for healthy nutrition is demonstrated in a study conducted by Welthungerhilfe in Myanmar. At the end of the project's third year, beneficiaries in the Irrawaddy Delta enjoy significantly better and more balanced nutrition. This improvement can be largely attributed to the women, who have greatly increased their knowledge about nutrition and are starting to challenge traditional nutrition taboos – for the good of their children.**

Daw Cho Cho Ei holds a picture in her hand. It shows her breastfeeding her daughter, looking down at her with a loving gaze. “At the time, I didn’t know how important breastfeeding is for newborns”, says the 28-year-old small-scale farmer from the village of Ka Lar Su, in Myanmar’s southern reaches. The photo is already one and a half years old. Her daughter is already running around behind the wooden house, healthy and happy, darting between lush rows of cabbage, aubergines, watercress, and carrots. The garden is the mother’s pride and joy. With the assistance of agricultural experts from Welthungerhilfe, she planted the garden three years ago in the shade of the high palm trees. Daw Cho Cho Ei uses no chemical fertilisers or pesticides. Everything in her garden grows naturally.

“I’ve learnt so much about nutrition”, says the young woman. “I know about the benefits of breastfeeding, how it protects children from malnutrition and diarrhoea. And I know how important a mother’s own nutrition is, especially while pregnant or breastfeeding.” A big help to her was the five-colour concept, which plays a major role in Welthungerhilfe’s edu-

cation measures. In addition to rice, their staple, combined with some oil, fish, and meat, she now tries to serve her family a palette of fresh fruits and vegetables every day, incorporating a variety of colours such as red tomatoes, green spinach, white snake gourds, purple aubergines, or yellow lemons. The nutritional colour concept takes sufficient doses of vitamins and minerals into account as well as healthy plant-based nutrients such as flavonoids and isoflavones, which stimulate the immune system and protect against disease.

## Slowly Changing Habits

“Through the project, people in the 30 selected villages have gained a better awareness of what good nutrition is”, says Susanne Scholaen, Head of Office for Welthungerhilfe in the small city of Bogale. “Our work with the people was very intensive”, she recounts. “We prioritised practical activities as much as possible. In cooking competitions, we presented new vegetables, tried out recipes, and tasted the results. We cooked nutritious meals for infants and young children and planted kitchen gardens. Hygiene is an important part of nutrition as well, because it prevents the transmission of diseases that would otherwise cause diarrhoea and thereby lead to malnutrition. Very few families in the delta had toilets, and faeces generally went directly into the river, so we promoted safe toilets with seepage pits. Other key factors were handwashing before breastfeeding, before eating, and after every use of the toilet.”

This integrated training approach has proven a success, as an internal study shows. At the end of the project period, Susanne Scholaen and her team asked 85 women between



The success of the project has spread through the entire region and is still evident today. Many people eat significantly more fruits and vegetables than before and have become healthier and more resilient. The nutrition taboos during pregnancy remain a challenge”, says Susanne Scholten, referring to examples such as bananas, which supposedly cause children to grow into giants, or tomatoes, which are thought to cause miscarriages.

### Paying it Forward

Thanks to the training sessions, Daw Cho Cho Ei has long since overcome this superstition. The Welthungerhilfe project is officially over, but the mothers take for granted that they will continue to share their knowledge on healthy nutrition with other women far beyond project end.

the ages of 15 and 49 from four villages about their nutrition habits. They took along vivid images depicting the ten food groups, including dairy products, grains, fish or meat, nuts, fruit, vegetables overall, and vitamin A-rich vegetables such as tamarind leaves. Almost every second woman reported eating from five or more food groups every day; three years ago, less than one in five could say the same.

Vivid pictures explain the various food groups.

Every year more than  
**three million**

children under five  
years die because of  
undernutrition.

Source: UNICEF



# A Comprehensive Approach to Malnutrition



Tamanna Ferdous knows that each country's particular cultural circumstances and agricultural conditions need to be taken into account during nutritional counselling.

**Tamanna Ferdous is regional nutrition counsellor for Welthungerhilfe's programmes in Asia. With a PhD in nutritional science, the experienced public health expert oversees projects in her base of Tajikistan as well as in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, and North Korea.**

## **Why does Welthungerhilfe need regional nutritional counsellors?**

Nutrition is about much more than just having enough food. Factors such as health, hygiene, and education also come into play. We do not yet have sufficient personnel with the required expertise to apply this comprehensive approach in all of our locations. I am therefore joined by two colleagues in advising our country offices on how to integrate issues of nutrition into their individual national strategies.

## **You advise seven very different countries. Can nutrition problems everywhere be solved with the same approach?**

Even if the problems have somewhat similar effects, we need a customised approach for every country. This requires a detailed knowledge of not only nutritional deficits but also the agricultural, climatic, cultural, and religious particular-

ities of each country. In Afghanistan, for example, we conduct our classes using verses from the Quran that deal with healthy nutrition. This approach is supported by the imams. Neglecting the country-specific context means endangering our success. Back when I was working in Afghanistan, we wanted to use pictures to educate mothers on the importance of breastfeeding. However, the babies on the pictures did not look like Afghan children, so the mothers did not feel that the advice applied to them. Once we adapted the materials, we were far better able to reach them.

## **Is breastfeeding really that important in the fight against mal- and undernutrition?**

Yes, extremely important. There is nothing better for babies than breastmilk. Unfortunately, this knowledge has been lost among people in many of the countries in which we work. For example, many mothers do not use their initial breastmilk, called colostrum, because it is slightly yellow in colour. But this very milk contains many of the mother's antibodies, which are crucial for strengthening the newborn's immune system. Instead, babies are fed tea, honey, oil, or sugar water in some cultures. Despite the best intentions, this can have fatal consequences. In many emerging

and developing countries, corporations and the advertising industry are doing their best to convince mothers that powdered infant formula is much better for their children than breastmilk. This is utter nonsense, of course, but we now have to go a long way to convince the anxious mothers.



Fresh fruits and vegetables are important components of a balanced nutrition.

### **Is it true that we only have to convince the mothers to improve the nutrition status of an entire community?**

On the one hand, it is true that women, in particular mothers, play a prominent role in nutrition. They are usually the ones who cook for the family and feed and take care of the children. If they can decide what to serve the family and if they have access to sufficient resources, it is probable that their own nutrition and that of their families will permanently improve. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the role played by men. It is often the men and fathers who decide what a family plants, what to purchase at the market, what to cook, and when family members can go to the doctor. We also need to pay special attention to the grandparents and other family members who frequently take care of the children while the parents work.

### **More than two billion people throughout the world are suffering from so-called hidden hunger. What does that mean?**

Hidden hunger can have catastrophic effects, even if they are not immediately apparent. Babies and children do not develop properly and can die early. Adults fall ill more often and are not able to fully realise their physical and intellectual potential. This type of malnutrition is usually caused by a monotonous diet that does not contain sufficient micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. If we do not take countermeasures, this problem could become worse. This is also devastating for a country's economy.

### **Do you take access to healthy nutrition into account as well?**

Before conducting nutrition training, we ensure that the participants will be able to afford the food they require for a healthy diet. We support them in a variety of ways, including with suitable seed material, assistance with planting kitchen gardens, and sufficient income-generating opportunities so that they can go to the market to purchase whatever they do not cultivate themselves. The growing global demand for food is leading to an increase in the use of synthetic fertilisers, herbicides, and pesticides. Although this offers greater yields in the short term, the sensitive tropical soil suffers damage in the long term. This makes it important to support sustainable cultivation practises in order to produce food in sufficient quantity and diversity in the future. Ensuring that healthy food remains or becomes affordable is therefore also a political responsibility. I am an optimist. Malnutrition is primarily caused by people, which means that people can successfully fight and even eliminate it.

Because men make important decisions regarding nutrition, they are also included in the consultations.



# Diversity is Crucial to Health



Food from at least five of the ten food groups should be consumed every day, according to the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) indicator.

**In many of its project countries, Welthungerhilfe sees a wide gap between the required and actual quantity and quality of food consumption. Dietary energy, proteins, and high-quality fats are lacking, as are essential micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals. This has alarming consequences: Especially before and during pregnancy and breastfeeding, malnutrition severely impairs the function and development of mothers and their children, which can ultimately lead to irreversible physical and mental damage, especially in infants.**

Welthungerhilfe is combating malnutrition and hunger with diverse approaches on a variety of levels. To assess whether this is actually working, the quality of nutrition for women

of reproductive age in a given region is captured in the form of an indicator. The first step is to ask a representative sample of women to report anything eaten in the past 24 hours. This occurs once or twice per year. Then, their answers are evaluated against the international standard of the ten food groups. If food from at least five food groups is consumed on a daily basis, the assumption is that the women are receiving sufficient energy, protein, and key micronutrients to meet the minimum requirements for staying healthy. Regularly consuming food from all ten food groups is ideal; by contrast, less than five is considered critical. The survey of the women allows conclusions to be drawn about the dietary diversity of the entire family and ultimately about the success of the programmes.