

Thursday 27 November 2014

P8_TA(2014)0072

Child malnutrition in developing countries**European Parliament resolution of 27 November 2014 on child undernutrition and malnutrition in developing countries (2014/2853(RSP))**

(2016/C 289/12)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, in particular Article 25 thereof, which recognises the right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in particular Article 11 thereof, which recognises the right to ‘an adequate standard of living [...], including adequate food’ and the ‘fundamental right [...] to be free from hunger’,
- having regard to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted in 2008, which makes the right to food enforceable at the international level,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Articles 24(2)(c) and 27(3) thereof,
- having regard to the Declaration on World Food Security adopted at the World Food Summit convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome in 1996,
- having regard to the Right to Food Guidelines, adopted in 2004 by the FAO, which offer guidance to states on how to implement their obligations as regards the right to food,
- having regard to the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goals 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015) and 4 (to reduce child mortality),
- having regard to the Food Assistance Convention, adopted in 2012,
- having regard to the global and synthesis reports of the UN International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, which were published in 2009 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the 2009 report of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) on world food shortages affecting children,
- having regard to the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food entitled ‘Agroecology and the Right to Food’, which was presented at the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 8 March 2011,
- having regard to Expo Milano 2015, the theme of which will be ‘Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life’,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 31 March 2010 entitled ‘Humanitarian Food Assistance’ (COM(2010)0126),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 31 March 2010 entitled ‘An EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges’ (COM(2010)0127),

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.unep.org/dewa/Assessments/Ecosystems/IAASTD/tabid/105853/Default.aspx>

Thursday 27 November 2014

- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 October 2012 entitled ‘The EU approach to resilience: Learning from food security crises’ (COM(2012)0586),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 12 March 2013 entitled ‘Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance: an EU Policy Framework’ (COM(2013)0141),
 - having regard to its resolution of 27 September 2011 on an EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2013 on ‘the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises’ ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on child malnutrition in developing countries (O-000083/2014 — B8-0041/2014),
 - having regard to the motion for a resolution of the Committee on Development,
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas close to a billion people are still suffering from hunger, and whereas at least 225 million of the world’s children under the age of five are suffering from acute and chronic undernutrition or from stunted growth as a result of chronic child and maternal undernutrition, with an estimated 2,6 million of such children dying every year in developing countries;
- B. whereas, according to the Global Hidden Hunger Indices and Maps ⁽³⁾, an estimated 2 billion people globally, or one out of three people in developing countries, are suffering from chronic deficiency of essential vitamins and minerals (micronutrients), a condition known as ‘hidden hunger’, which drastically increases their susceptibility to birth defects, infection and compromised development;
- C. whereas, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), undernutrition is by far the biggest contributor to child mortality and causes 35 % of the disease burden in children under the age of five;
- D. whereas almost 20 million children are still suffering from severe acute malnutrition in both emergency and non-emergency contexts, and whereas only 10 % of them have access to treatment;
- E. whereas the nutrition of children aged five or younger depends a great deal on their mothers’ nutrition levels during pregnancy and breastfeeding;
- F. whereas undernutrition is also a cause of morbidity and loss of productivity, and impedes social and economic development in developing countries;
- G. whereas those who survive undernutrition often suffer lifelong physical and cognitive deficiencies that limit their ability to learn and to enter the world of work, leaving them trapped in an intergenerational cycle of disease and poverty;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 56 E, 26.2.2013, p. 75.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0578.

⁽³⁾ Global Hidden Hunger Indices and Maps: An Advocacy Tool for Action

Thursday 27 November 2014

- H. whereas, owing to the effects of climate change on agricultural production and hence on nutrition, the number of undernourished children is expected to increase;
- I. whereas one important cause of hunger in developing countries is massive rural and urban poverty, exacerbated by rural migration, which is triggered by the fact that for many people small-scale farming is not a viable option;
- J. whereas 25 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, some of the States Parties have not been able to create an enabling environment in which children's access to adequate food can be secured;
- K. whereas at the 1996 World Food Summit governments reaffirmed the right to food and committed themselves to halving the number of hungry and malnourished people from 840 million to 420 million by 2015; whereas, however, the number of hungry and malnourished people, especially children, has increased in recent years, primarily as a result of the food crises of 2008 and 2011;
- L. whereas various international legal instruments link the right to food to other human rights, including the rights to life, livelihood, health, property, education and water;
- M. whereas the right of all to food and good nutrition is paramount to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); whereas nutrition is linked to most, if not all, of the MDGs, which are themselves closely interrelated;
- N. whereas international organisations confirm that there is sufficient food production to feed the whole of the world's population and that child undernutrition is linked to food insecurity and poverty of households, exclusion, inadequate care and feeding practices, unhealthy household environments and inadequate health services;
- O. whereas the right to food and good nutrition is essential in order to build resilient families and communities and enhance their ability to reduce long recovery periods after an emergency, in a context characterised by an increase in the number and scale of disasters;
- P. whereas optimal nutritional status results when children have access to affordable, diverse, nutrient-rich food, and also to appropriate maternal and childcare practices, adequate health services and a healthy environment, including safe water, sanitation and good hygiene practices;
1. Points out that the causes of child undernutrition are numerous, and that most of them are man-made and therefore avoidable, including inefficient economic structures, unequal distribution and/or unsustainable use of resources, poor governance, over-reliance on individual crops and monocultural cropping practices, discrimination against women and children, and ill-health caused by deficient health systems, together with lack of education, especially for mothers;
 2. Insists that public authorities must guarantee the three dimensions of the right to food and good nutrition: availability, meaning that it is possible either to feed oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources, or to establish well-functioning distribution, processing and market systems; accessibility, meaning that both economic and physical access to food is guaranteed; and adequacy, meaning that food must be safe and satisfy the dietary needs of every individual, taking into account age, living conditions, health, occupation, sex, culture and religion;

Thursday 27 November 2014

3. Underlines the fact that, from a life-cycle perspective, the most crucial time to meet a child's nutritional requirements is in the first 1 000 days of life, including the period of pregnancy, as this is when the child has increased nutritional needs in order to support rapid growth and development, is more susceptible to infections and is totally dependent on others for nutrition, care and social interaction;
4. Reaffirms that addressing child and maternal undernutrition requires an integrated approach and coordinated action in a number of sectors which influence undernutrition, such as health, education, agriculture, water, energy access and sanitation, together with the responsible involvement of all stakeholders, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt consistent long-term development strategies and to make efforts to reduce undernutrition, including in the context of emergency situations and humanitarian intervention;
5. Calls for the EU to increase the support provided by its development aid programmes for sustainable smallholder, peasant and medium-scale agriculture production for — primarily — local consumption, and to invest in participatory, nationally led plans, which should be implemented at a local level in cooperation with farmers and their representatives, local and regional authorities and civil society organisations;
6. Commends the improvements made over the last few years in the fight against child undernutrition, as demonstrated by the indicators of progress in achieving MDG1; considers, however, that the number of children dying or suffering from undernutrition remains unacceptably high and contributes to maintaining the vicious circle of poverty and hunger;
7. Stresses, therefore, that the fight against child undernutrition and the provision of universal access to adequate nutritious food should remain one of the most important targets of the post-2015 agenda under the goal of ending hunger, with a specific call to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030 and to achieve, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under the age of five;
8. Considers that the reduction of funds for agriculture under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) as compared with the 9th EDF was a mistake; exhorts the Council, therefore, to reflect on this and to take corrective action with a view to the 11th EDF;
9. Stresses the importance of political will in addressing undernutrition; welcomes the Road Map for Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) developed by the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) to accelerate nutrition improvement, particularly in high-burden countries, with the participation of various stakeholders, including those UN agencies with a mandate in the area of nutrition; calls on the Commission and the Member States to implement the principles outlined in the SUN road map; urges the Commission to encourage and orchestrate participation in the SUN initiative by civil society and grassroots organisations with direct links to small farmers and their families;
10. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to investing EUR 3,5 billion between 2014 and 2020 in improving nutrition in some of the world's poorest countries, and calls on the Commission to scale up its commitments as regards nutrition-specific interventions in order to meet its objective of reducing by 7 million the number of stunted children under the age of five by 2025;
11. Stresses that women play a crucial role in child nutrition and food security by breastfeeding, by producing, buying, preparing and distributing family food, by caring for children and the sick, and by ensuring proper hygiene; points out that although 60 % of chronic hunger affects women and girls, women produce 60-80 % of the food in developing countries;

Thursday 27 November 2014

12. Underlines the fact that women, although responsible for approximately 80 % of farming in Africa, formally own as little as 2 % of the land; further points out that recent programmes in India, Kenya, Honduras, Ghana, Nicaragua and Nepal have found that female-headed households have greater food security, better health care and a stronger focus on education than male-headed households;

13. Stresses that there is a close correlation between a woman's level of education and the nutritional status of her family; urges, therefore, that the gender barriers to education and literacy be removed in order to give women greater access to education;

14. Calls, therefore, for inclusion of the gender dimension and promotion of women's empowerment in all policies aimed at fighting child undernutrition;

15. Stresses that undernutrition among pregnant women has devastating effects on newborns, which are likely to irreversibly handicap the child's future development; calls, therefore, for particular attention to be paid to the protection of women's health and rights and for nutritional training to be an integral part of education programmes and school curricula for girls;

16. Reaffirms the importance of literacy as a powerful tool for fighting poverty and enhancing economic development; stresses, therefore, the importance of supporting girls' education, as investing in girls improves the chances for both them and their future children to lead healthier and more productive lives;

17. Stresses that child undernutrition is found mostly in developing countries, not only among rural populations but also in urban settings; takes the view, therefore, that one of the key vectors for the eradication of child hunger lies in agricultural policies and reforms aimed at enabling small-scale farmers to produce more effectively and sustainably in order to ensure sufficient food for themselves and their families;

18. Emphasises that failure to address child undernutrition in a timely manner in both development cooperation and humanitarian intervention is likely to threaten all dimensions of human development, to undermine national education programmes, to burden national health expenditure and to hamper the socioeconomic development of developing countries, causing them economic losses that have been estimated at 2-8 % of their GDP;

19. Recalls that micronutrient deficiencies, which account for approximately 7 % of the global disease burden, have grave consequences for physical and cognitive development in infants and young children; highlights the fact that in the 20 countries with the highest Hidden Hunger Index scores (18 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa and two — India and Afghanistan — in Asia), stunting, iron-deficiency anaemia and vitamin A deficiency are highly prevalent among preschool children;

20. Points out that child undernutrition originates not only from shortage of food and lack of infrastructure but also from problems of food distribution, inadequate access to food and lack of purchasing power, particularly in the face of high food prices exacerbated by speculation on commodities; notes that lack of purchasing power particularly affects the urban poor, who are unable to produce their own food; stresses, in this connection, the importance of protecting small farmers and traditional farming methods;

21. Calls on the Commission to involve the Member States that have acceded to Expo 2015 to launch a joint initiative taking as its point of departure 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life', with a view to securing commitments and binding targets for combating hunger and undernutrition, alongside diversified strategies in areas ranging from agriculture to cooperation;

Thursday 27 November 2014

22. Recognises that improvements in child and maternal nutrition, and in food security in general, will require effective and coordinated action in respect of a number of policies and sectors, including: effective and sustainable rural development, land- and water-use policies; appropriate health, safe water and sanitation services; appropriate maternal and childcare practices; the protection of marine life and other ecosystems and biodiversity; deforestation and climate change mitigation; adaptation and disaster-risk reduction; sustainable production and consumption; sustainable and secure access to energy; trade; fisheries; social inclusion; and decent employment;
 23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to mainstream nutrition, food safety and sustainable agriculture in all their development policies with a view to protecting and promoting nutrition and ensuring a holistic approach from the local to the global level; invites the Council and the Commission, as appropriate, to prioritise nutrition as a key development goal in development cooperation instruments, notably the 11th EDF and the new Development Cooperation Instrument;
 24. Stresses that, in order to be more effective, development and emergency programmes need to be closely linked so as to anticipate and prevent food crises, help reduce the damage caused and facilitate recovery;
 25. Calls on the governments of developing countries to create an enabling environment for better child nutrition through improved policies, coordination between national plans and strategies relating to nutrition and donors' programmes, governance, and accountability to their citizens; encourages greater transparency in developing countries' budgets, for example via budget tracking, so as to be able to better assess the number and quality of projects addressing malnutrition;
 26. Highlights the need for improved and coordinated data on undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency in order to better assist intervention programmes and to provide targeted and informed support to the countries concerned;
 27. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to mobilise long-term financial investments and resources for nutrition in cooperation with actors including UN agencies, the G8/G20, emerging countries, international and non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector, and to identify nutrition as a priority for innovative financing;
 28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition.
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