

# **Statement Submitted**

**by**

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**To**

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,  
and International Organization**

**Hearing**

**“The First One Thousand Days: Development Aid Programs to Bolster Health  
and Nutrition”**

**Tuesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 1:30 pm**

**Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Karen Bass and other members of the Committee, I am pleased to address the Honorable Committee on the issue of U.S. Government foreign assistance programs which target the very young. The vital role that nutrition has in the first 1000 days of a person's life is a well-established fact in scientific literature.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely because meeting the nutritional needs at this stage has lasting impacts throughout life.

Sustainable development is an outcome beyond those of just economic processes. It is an outcome of economic, social, and political processes that interact with and reinforce each other in ways that hinder or facilitate its achievement. At the center of these dynamics is the human person – the economic agent – who generates and is served by the economic activity. The human person has physical needs, and these are typically first met within the family.<sup>2</sup> Whether these needs are met or not makes a difference in his or her capacity to contribute to the economic process. Growth stunting at the age of two is irreversible. One can argue that it amounts to depriving children of equal opportunities for the rest of their lives. It equally means depriving their families, communities, societies, and their country of the human and social capital potential they have and could have contributed.

Undernourishment in an infant or in an expectant mother causes low birth weight and poor cognitive development, undermines school performance and therefore, the future educational achievement of a person.<sup>3</sup> This means lower productivity and hence, it hampers development. Growth stunting in early childhood has been found to be also related to dementia, obesity, hypertension, and diabetes among other illnesses.<sup>4</sup> These illnesses not only affect those who suffer them but it places an economic burden on the family members, communities, and

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<sup>1</sup> See among others Food and Security Administration (FAO), *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: The Multiple Dimensions of Food Security*, 2013; Victora C, Adair L, *et al.*, "Maternal and child undernutrition: consequences for adult health and human capital," *Lancet*. 2008; 371:340–357; Robinson S., "Fall C. Infant nutrition and later health: a review of current Evidence", *Nutrients*, 4:8, 2012, pp. 859-874; Adair L.S. *et al.*, "Associations of linear growth and relative weight gain during early life with adult health and human capital in countries of low and middle income: findings from five birth cohort studies," *Lancet*, 2013. For more information see: [www.Globalnutritionseries.org](http://www.Globalnutritionseries.org)

<sup>2</sup> Maria Sophia Aguirre, "An Integral Approach to an Economic Perspective: Consequences for Measuring Impact," *Journal of Market and Morality*, 16:1, 2013, pp 53-67; Maria Sophia Aguirre, "La Familia: Motor del Desarrollo Económico", in *Hacia la Responsabilidad Familiar Corporativa, Guía de Buenas Practicas*, Centro Standard Bank CONFYE del IAE Business School, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Black, R.E., *et al.*, "Maternal and child undernutrition: global and regional exposures and health consequences", *Lancet*, 19;371, 2008, pp.243-60.

<sup>4</sup> Kim JM *et al.*, "Associations between head circumference, leg length and dementia in a Korean population", *International Journal of Geriatrics Psychiatry*, 23:1, 2008, pp. 41-8.; Staff RT *et al.*, "Childhood socioeconomic status and adult brain size: childhood socioeconomic status influences adult hippocampal size," *Annual Neurology*, 71:5, 2012, 71:5, pp. 653-60; .Gunston, G.D. *et al.*, "Reversible cerebral shrinkage in kwashiorkor: an MRI study", *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 67:8, 1992, pp. 1030-1032; and Msra, A and L. Khurana, "Obesity-related NCDs South Asia vs White Caucasians", *International Journal of Obesity*, 35:1, 2011, pp. 167-187;

finances of the country to which they belong. These burdens can be avoided through investing in effective preventive initiatives.

Ensuring household food access, good health and hygiene conditions, as well as good care and health practices for infant and pregnant mothers, is to ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to contribute towards building the human and social capital necessary for sustainable development. I mentioned earlier that, typically, these needs are first met in the family. Healthy families are the key to providing stability during this early stage of life.<sup>5</sup> Successful nutritional programs, such as CONIN in Argentina, ASEPUNTE and APIB cooperatives in Guatemala to mention a few, focus on prevention of hunger and/or undernourishment by taking a holistic approach. All these programs have in common that their focus of action goes beyond immediate provision of nutrients for those in need. Rather, through an integral approach, these programs seek to strengthen family life and engage communities so to address the obstacles encountered to achieve lasting nutritional and health solutions. They seek to improve the overall living conditions by helping those under nutritional stress develop initiatives that will provide access food and/or household appliances at accessible prices; they foster households and community agency by teaching responsibility and providing seed funds for home gardens and personal initiatives; they train beneficiaries in household management, hygiene, nutrition, saving schemes and local government agency. They facilitate training and education so head of households can find jobs.

Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of the Committee, U.S. Government foreign assistance programs which target the very young cannot be considered one more effort among the many initiatives in which the U.S. is engaged. It is a priority and it is a long term investment. These programs have lasting effects on the lives and opportunities of disadvantaged populations; and they prevent essential human and social capital losses wherever malnourishment prevails. Because of the lasting impacts infant malnutrition brings, identifying strategies that go beyond the mere provision of food to families but take an integral and holistic approach and places the

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Sophia Aguirre, "The Family and Economic Development: Socioeconomic Relevance and Policy Design", in *The Family in the New Millennium*, ed. Scott Love and Thomas Holman, London: Praeger Perspectives, 2006; Bisnaire, Lisa, Philip Firestone, and David Rynard, "Factors Associated With Academic Achievement in Children Following Parental Separation", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60:1, 1990, pp. 67-76; Duncan, W., "Economic impact of divorce on children's development: Current findings and policy implications", *Journal of Clinical and Child Psychology*, 23:2, 1994, pp. 444-457.

family at the center of these solutions, is to work towards making sustainable development possible. Thank you.