

Take Home Messages

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Message 1: Children from all regions of the world have similar potential for physical growth and cognitive development in utero and early childhood

- Stunting is a powerful indicator of failed development and a maker of poor development
 - Where stunting has decreased, many things have worked
 - Where stunting remains high, many things have failed
- ✓ Good physical growth and brain development are every child's birth right – because “All lives have equal value”

Message 2: Stunting is an outrage that demands a response commensurate with the damage it is doing

- Stunting has declined in South Asia, but it still compromises the futures of 38% of children – more than 65 million children
- South Asia remains the epicenter of the global stunting crisis – compromising the future of the whole region
- Threats to the future such as HIV, SARS and Ebola that have catalyzed global movements have been recognized as “clear and present dangers”
- Those affected by stunting do not have a voice
- Stunting is so ubiquitous it is viewed as the “normal” state of affairs
 - An opportunity to seize the moment to demonstrate change is possible
 - Real-life evidence from within and outside the region that declines in stunting at scale – for millions of children at a time – can be achieved with political determination and evidence-based interventions

Message 3: We need to create a “new normal” for the drivers of stunting

- New normal in child feeding:
 - Age-appropriate foods for young children – timeliness, quality, quantity and safety
- New normal in status of women – including nutrition:
 - Good height, good BMI, no anemia
- New normal in sanitation and hygiene:
 - No open defecation
 - Hand washing with soap

Message 4: 1,000 Days are a “Golden Period”

- “1,000 Days” concept going mainstream: many countries and households are responding to the stunting challenge by focusing on this “golden period” and ensuring that infants and young children and pregnant and lactating women meet their nutrient needs
- Meeting nutrient needs of pregnant and lactating women, and infants and young children is a challenge:
 - High nutrient needs
 - Infants and young children require particularly nutrient-dense foods
- Nutrient density and the diversity of complementary foods can be improved at scale using a mix of interventions: locally produced and available foods and fortified foods for children
- We have largely neglected nutritional needs of the mothers during pregnancy and lactation
- We need better knowledge of how to ensure mothers enter the 1,000 Days with good nutritional status

Message 5: Complex causes, Smart actions

- Nutrition, Health and WASH, Education and Social Protection have major roles to play
- Define the concrete actions that each sector should do to make its contribution:
 - Reducing stunting a common objective, and common benefit
 - Need to co-locate our interventions

Message 6: Act now, and for the future

- Deliver known solutions at scale to address the proximate causes of stunting
- Partner with kindred spirits to address long-term determinants:
 - Age of marriage
 - Girl's education
 - Delayed age of first pregnancy and optimal birth spacing
 - Labor policies that include maternity leave
 - Women's status
- Wins in stunting reduction build the futures of children, families and nations

Message 7: Start with focus and scale in mind

- The response needs to be at the scale of the problem
- Prioritize those who need it most – understand your stunting epidemic and focus on the youngest, poorest and most socially excluded
 - From HIV: “Know your epidemic, know your response”
- Many platforms to deliver our interventions:
 - Seize opportunities that we have been missing:
 - Scale-up of ANC, institutional deliveries, adolescent health services
 - Integration of essential hygiene promotion into social and behavior change communication for child feeding
 - Integrate prevention and treatment of malnutrition
 - Share knowledge in how to tackle challenges of operating at scale:
 - Ensuring supply
 - Ensuring demand
 - Building capacity
 - Ensuring accountability

Message 8: South Asia can afford to act – cannot afford inaction

- Economic growth alone will not stop stunting
 - Move from “trickle down” to strategic investment
- Seize the opportunity of economic growth in the region to invest in the future of children and their nations
 - Knowing what it will cost is a powerful tool
 - Need to track expenditures against costed plans
 - Know the cost of inaction
- It will cost – but it is an investment that “locks in the potential”

Message 9: Engage the private sector to shape the future

- Across all the sectors that affect stunting, the private sector is an increasingly larger part of the landscape:
 - Food system
 - Health system
 - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
 - Education
 - Employment
- Government has the opportunity to create an enabling environment:
 - Optimize value-added of the private sector
 - Establish quality standards
 - Ensure competition
 - Minimize harm

Message 10: Serious problems require serious measurement

- Frequent, quality, disaggregated measurement and use of:
 - Nutritional status
 - Effective coverage of interventions
 - Counting toilets is not enough
 - Counting ANC visits is not enough
 - Performance of systems
 - Capacity
 - Levels of investment
 - Indicators and measurement systems that work across sectors

Closing Thought

“Children are living beings - more living than grown-up people who have built shells of habit around themselves. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love.”

- Rabindranath Tagore

- Love of our children is a universal value, and fundamental to values in South Asia
- The time is now to translate that value into action – so no child is deprived of his or her potential for physical growth and cognitive development
- We all need to be accountable so that governments and their partners make it happen