



## Equal rights - the best recipe against malnutrition

A healthy diet for everybody is a human right

# About the author

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Heike Spohr is an agricultural engineer who has been working as a freelance consultant, adviser, mediator and coach since 2012. For over 20 years, she has held different functions in the area of development cooperation in Germany and abroad, including as a coordinator of the German Development Service's "Fostering democracy and strengthening civil society" program in Guatemala. Afterwards, she was the project management officer for a German NGO for many years and responsible for projects in the areas of human and women's rights, basic education and projects regarding income generating activities/satisfaction of basic needs.

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# Preface

Every 12th person in the world is a malnourished man or boy, every fifth person is a malnourished woman or girl. Over two billion people in the world suffer from malnutrition, which is also called “silent hunger” or “hidden hunger”. Some 1.4 million of these are women. Therefore, in its 56th, 57th and 58th fundraising campaigns, Bread for the World (BftW) has focussed on the subject of malnutrition with the slogan “Sated is not enough!”. The human right to food does not only mean that there should be enough food on the plate for a person to feel sated, but that all women, men and children should be able to eat a balanced, nutritious and vitamin-rich diet.

If food lacks important nutrients such as iron, iodine or vitamin A, this has consequences for physical and intellectual development. Malnutrition causes illnesses, makes people more susceptible to infection and lessens performance. It has an impact on the entire society. According to estimates by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the production losses and healthcare costs caused by malnutrition reduce global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2 to 3 percent.

This study by Heike Spohr illustrates that girls and women are affected by malnutrition in a particular way. For example, the high global rates of anaemia show how often they suffer from iron deficiency. The assumption that women generally need fewer calories than men is also questionable: Many women and girls in developing countries carry out heavy physical work in agriculture and in the household and they therefore have a high need for both macronutrients and micronutrients that is often not adequately met. As a rule, women are also responsible for feeding their children and other relatives. However, when poverty and gender-based discrimination come together, entire families and often girls and women in particular are affected by hunger and malnutrition.

In most countries, patriarchal societal and economic structures work in such a way that women are refused equal access to education, work, healthcare, land and other resources. Moreover, women and children are often subjected to domestic violence that makes them ill and violates their integrity. Under these conditions, women do not have - neither as farmers nor as participants in the labour market - the possibilities that they need to feed their families in a way that is adequate and balanced.

This study illustrates how development policy strategies for eliminating undernutrition and malnutrition among women and girls have to focus on strengthening

the long-term economic situation of women, on improving their social status, encouraging their political empowerment and abolishing violence against women and children. Positive outcomes in these areas are a necessary prerequisite for the improvement of the nutritional situation of women and girls in particular and for more equality in general. “Sated is not enough!” - also has to be valid for women and girls.

CARSTA NEUENROTH

Gender policy adviser

Bread for the World - Protestant Development Service

## Chapter 1

# Introduction



In contrast to what the Pessela family in Congo does, women are often the last to eat. Yet, they often have the same need for macronutrients and micronutrients as men – sometimes even a higher one.

For decades, international organisations, governments and non-governmental organisations have been trying to fight hunger in the world, using a variety of strategies. These have also to some extent reached people suffering from malnutrition and improved their nutritional situation. However, micronutrient deficiency cannot be fought casually. Moreover, it has to be considered that the large majority of people suffering from malnutrition are girls and women. Therefore, gender-differentiated strategies, which take into account structural and social factors, are necessary. These are currently lacking.

Existing strategies against malnutrition, which are developed from the perspective of nutrition, tend to focus on pregnant women, mothers and their children. One example is the “1,000 Days” programme, which considers the first three years of an infant’s life (from the beginning of pregnancy to its second birthday) as a decisive guide for its later health. Thereby, women play a role in their function as mothers and providers of food. The program is composed of measures for raising awareness, such as on the importance of breastfeeding, as well as targeted nutrition programmes, in which for example iron supplements might be distributed to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Agricultural strategies, such as the diversification of production, on the other hand, try to fight hunger through ensuring that there is sufficient food and preferably a variety of food for a balanced diet. In their function as producers of food, women can play a central role in improving their families’ food supply.

These strategies are flanked by hygiene, sanitation and health programmes. It has to be taken into account that people who are ill need particularly nutritious food for various reasons.

Different institutions have criticised the existence of a “silo mentality” and the fact that strategies and programmes are often implemented alongside each other rather than together. They have called for and, to a certain extent, developed and implemented integrated cross-sectoral approaches. Micronutrient deficiency in girls and women, whether pregnant or not, mothers or not, has to be approached systematically from a gender perspective. Otherwise, a large part of those concerned will not be reached. This study outlines what this means in detail and what changes are necessary.

## Chapter 2

# What we know about malnutrition among girls and women – and what we do not know

Women, particularly those of reproductive age, have a higher need of micronutrients (see Chapter 3). Pregnancy and lactation further increase this need. Very often, there is a lack of iron. One consequence is anaemia, which the World Health Organization (WHO) regards as an indicator for poor nutrition and health.

Globally, every fourth person suffering from malnutrition is a woman with anaemia. According to WHO data from 2011, there are 528 million women of child-bearing age suffering from anaemia in the world. According to the data, 29 percent of non-pregnant women (496 million) as well as 38 percent of pregnant women (32 million) are anaemic. Girls and women in west Africa and south Asia are particularly affected.

It is estimated that half of these anaemia cases are due to iron deficiency (WHO 2014a). According to the WHO, anaemia is the cause of 20 percent of maternal deaths during pregnancy, in childbirth or shortly after. What is striking, however, is the high number of anaemic women who are not pregnant: According to the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition's (UNSCN) Sixth report on the world nutrition situation the number of non-pregnant women with anaemia has risen in 16 out of 33 countries (UNSCN 2010).

Iodine deficiency is also widespread in the world: For 18 million infants born with brain damage every year globally, it can be assumed that the mothers suffered from severe iodine deficiency (DWHH, IFPRI, Concern Worldwide 2014). During pregnancy the need for iodine increases by 50 percent, which means that a lack of high quantities of iodine in the diet increases the risk of deficiency syndromes. Iodine deficiency, particularly in pregnant women, has an influence on a mother's performance as well as on a child's later (particularly intellectual) development. A further consequence of iodine deficiency are thyroid disorders, which one study finds have been diagnosed among 27 percent of women and 10 percent of men in Ethiopia (see Scherbaum 1997, p. 104).

The academic literature does not contain much concrete data on individual deficiency syndromes and micronutrient deficiencies. The metabolic processes of many micronutrients have not yet been adequately researched. Biomarkers, that is significant medical indicators, have not yet been identified for many of the 19 most important micronutrients (DWHH, IFPRI, Concern Worldwide 2014). This means that there is a lack of basic, reliable data on individual micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences.

## Nutrition and food

In this study, the terms “nutrition” and “food” are used as follows:

Nutrition comprises the preparation of food, its intake and how it is processed by the human body.

From a nutritional perspective, this includes the nutritional needs the human body has for macronutrients and micronutrients to maintain its health. Sustained unhealthy nutrition, which does not meet these needs, leads to health disorders (see malnutrition).

Food is what a person eats. Healthy food provides all the vital nutrients that the human body requires in

adequate amounts. The term food is closely linked to the production of food and correspondingly with agriculture.

We talk of food and nutrition security. The concept covers important aspects from the nutritional and agricultural sectors.





Micronutrient deficiency has consequences: Iron deficiency is the cause of death in every fifth woman who dies in pregnancy, childbirth or shortly after.

### Lack of gender-differentiated data

Gender-differentiated data, with a few exceptions, are even rarer. Instead, rough estimates and projections are currently being worked with.

For example, within the parameters of an analysis of the impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the Asian Development Bank determined that none of the studies about the effects on the nutritional situation that had been made in the two subsequent years examined the specific consequences for girls and women - although it was documented that women were more affected by loss of income as a result of the crisis than men. Yet, there is a lack of gender-differentiated data (see ADB 2013, p. 14).

In other parts of the world as well, there exists no gender-differentiated data on malnutrition, its causes and consequences. For Somalia, the FAO comes to the conclusion:

*“The past and existing nutrition surveys focus almost entirely on children under five years, pregnant and lactating mothers and women of reproductive age. An understanding of the nutritional status of other vulnerable groups such as older men and women, adolescent girls and chronically sick males and females (of all ages) is lacking.” (see FAO FSNAU 2012, p. iii)*

Indicators for malnutrition provide an important reference framework for data collection. However, there is a lack of gender-differentiated indicators and indicator systems, which can be used for data collection across

countries. In 2014, the FAO developed a Minimum Dietary Diversity indicator for women of reproductive age as a substitute indicator, but data to that effect have not yet been collected.

It is important to improve research regarding the diversity and quality of nutrition and the nutrition status itself in a gender-differentiated way. Moreover, such data have to be compared with other socio-economic indicators that have an impact on the nutrition of women and girls. The SIGI and the Global Gender Gap Index (see Glossary) already exist but neither has as yet been adequately applied to the subject of nutrition generally and to malnutrition in particular.

During the 65th World Health Assembly of 2012, all UN members committed themselves to achieving six global nutritional targets by 2025. These are formulated as indicators as follows:

- 40 percent reduction in the number of children under-5 who are stunted
- 50 percent reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age
- 30 percent reduction in low birth weight
- no increase in childhood overweight
- increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months up to at least 50 percent
- reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than five percent.

Only one of these targets refers specifically to women, namely to the incidence of anaemia as a form of malnutrition in women of reproductive age. All the other targets focus on children and on women only indirectly as mothers. Moreover, two years after the World Health Assembly, the target that focusses on women and the high number of anaemia cases, had not been met at all by the UN member states. Of 193 countries that had committed themselves to achieving the nutrition targets, 180 had not yet introduced the necessary initial measures and programmes to reduce anaemia among women (see IFPRI 2014).

## A critical look at nutrition studies and statistics

Generally, in the discussion about food and nutrition insecurity and malnutrition, as well as measures for nutrition security, women and girls are seen in their function as mothers or mothers-to-be.

Women of reproductive age, who suffer from undernutrition or malnutrition, are focussed upon particularly, as they are most likely to bring an undernourished child into the world – with grave consequences for the child’s intellectual and physical development.

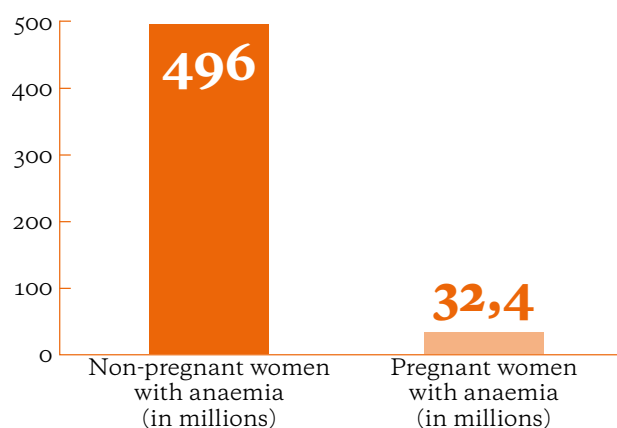
The influence of a mother-to-be’s constitution on the foetus is beyond dispute, but such analyses disregard the fact that girls and women should not eat an appropriate and diverse diet only as (potential) mothers. As individuals, they have the right to balanced and healthy nutrition, to the human right to food.

The focus on data collection and presentation regarding the nutritional situation of children and pregnant women and their use as a basis for developing strategies disregards almost half a billion non-pregnant women and girls with anaemia. Other cases of malnutrition in non-pregnant women and girls do not receive much attention either because of the focus on pregnant women and mothers. The WHO’s representation of the subject of anaemia summarises the most important factors from the WHO’s point of view as follows:

- “In developing countries every second pregnant woman and about 40 percent of preschool children are estimated to be anaemic.

- In many developing countries, iron deficiency anaemia is aggravated by worm infections, malaria, HIV and other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis.
- The major health consequences include poor pregnancy outcome, impaired physical and intellectual development, increased risk of morbidity in children and reduced work productivity in adults. Anaemia contributes to 20 percent of all maternal deaths” (<http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/ida/en/>).

The global prevalence of anaemia



Source: WHO (2015): The global prevalence of anaemia in 2011.

If the situation were to be analysed from a gender perspective, all women and girls, even those who are not pregnant or breastfeeding, would have to be included. Moreover, there would have to be further differentiation, according to, for example, age, workload, socio-economic status or ethnicity.

### Research results are influenced by people’s own attitudes

Often it is appropriate to approach data and statistics with caution. Many NGOs, such as Bread for the World and others, have criticised the FAO statistics on hunger. They argue that the numbers of hungry people are only shown to be in decline after the definition of hunger has been narrowed down. They maintain that definitions were changed according to political interests so as to depict a more positive picture when examining the successes of interventions.





Women play a central role in the rural economy all over the world. They cultivate plants for food, they keep poultry and small livestock and are significantly responsible for food production.

When a gender-differentiated analysis of nutritional situations is provided, it is likely that the premises and definitions are influenced by the positions and interests of those defining them. Thus, the subjectivity of researchers can very well influence their research results. This has been proven by academics such as the US professor of history of science and gender expert Londa Schiebinger or the US philosopher and historian Carolyn Merchant for certain areas of the natural sciences.

If one transposes such an assumption to the analysis of the nutrition situation of women and girls, it could mean that the own attitudes of academics regarding gender roles have an influence on premises regarding, for example, gender-specific workloads and nutritional needs based upon these, and that these thus co-determine research findings. However, there are no targeted studies on this related specifically to the subject area of food and nutrition.

## **Socio-economic context factors**

Women play a decisive role as those responsible for feeding their families and as producers of food. The gender-specific division of labour tends to assign reproductive activities, that is providing for and feeding the family, to women. As a rule, these activities are not remunerated. A comparison of households with the same level of income shows that when women have a say regarding the household's expenditure more money is spent on food than when men decide. According to a World Bank study, households in Guatemala in which women control income from the sales of vegetables or flowers, spend twice as much money on feeding the family than households in which men decide upon the household's outgoings (see WB 2007). Further studies on household budgeting in Brazil, the Philippines and Ghana also show that generally a rise in income generated and controlled by

women has a stronger impact on a family's nutritional situation than a rise in income generated by men (see Buchenrieder 2004).

Often, women do not even have decision-making powers over income that they themselves generate. World Bank figures show that such decision-making powers are directly dependent on a family's general income situation. In poor families, fewer women have a say in how income that they themselves have generated is used than in better-off families (WB 2012). It can be assumed that higher expenditure on food has an impact on undernutrition as well as malnutrition and that not only the quantity but also the quality of food and its diversity increases. However, there is a need for further research here.

Women are central actors in the production of food worldwide:

- In south-east Asia, they represent up to 90 percent of the workforce in rice production.
- In Colombia and Peru, they carry out between 25 and 45 percent of agricultural work in the fields.
- In Egypt, they comprise 53 percent of the agricultural workforce.

Only 15 percent of agricultural extensionists are women, however. In many cases, female agricultural producers have no access to agricultural extension at all (see WB, FAO, IFAD, 2009 p. 523).

Yet, although women are very important as producers they have limited access to the land on which they produce food. According to FAO data, less than 20 percent of the land titles for land used in agriculture are held by women. Women have a structural disadvantage when it comes to access to land and control over it. In many countries of west and central Africa, in the Middle East and north Africa, as well as in India, Nepal and Thailand, less than 10 percent of landholders are women. In other countries of Asia the number of female landholders is only marginally higher. In eastern and southern Africa, by contrast, as well as in parts of Latin America, women have somewhat better chances of acquiring and keeping land.

As a rule, lack of land is accompanied by a lack of access to agricultural credit and means of production (FAO, 2010 and WB, FAO, IFAD 2009). Even when women do own land they do not always control it. Often, they do not decide themselves on how land is used and what happens with the income that is generated.

Thereby, land ownership is an important factor in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

In households in which women own the land and decide what is done with it, which crops are planted for private consumption or sold at the market and how income is spent, it has been proven that more money is invested into feeding the family than in households in which women do not own the land. Generally, women invest income that is generated from agriculture into food more than men (see WB 2007; Buchenrieder 2004; Quisumbing 2003).

The disadvantages women face outside of the agricultural sector as well also foster malnutrition.

#### **Risk factor: Lack of education**

Despite trends in education that at first seem positive (see annual UN reports on Millennium Development Goals), the educational situation of girls in developing countries continues to pose a major challenge, particularly in rural regions and poor households. The discrepancies between girls and boys remain great, not so much regarding enrolment at primary level but in terms of school certificates and especially at secondary level where girls continue to be at a strong disadvantage. At the same time, higher educational status has a positive effect on women's health and that of their families - as well as on their nutritional situation.

#### **Risk factor: Violence against women and girls**

Violence impairs the physical and psychological health of women worldwide, as well as their personal integrity. Women experience violence predominantly as domestic violence, mostly perpetrated by intimate partners. In a 2008 study, researchers at Harvard University determined a clear relationship between domestic violence and undernutrition and malnutrition among women and children in India. Women who had been victims of domestic violence in the previous year had an 11 percent higher chance of suffering from anaemia. The researchers came to the conclusion that preventative measures in the area of domestic violence could have just as effective an impact in the fight against anaemia among women than pharmaceutical approaches, which involve whole communities and have led to a reduction in anaemia of between 1.1 and 12.4 percent (Ackerson/Subramanian 2008).

Whether a woman owns land or a house determines how high the risk of her being subjected to domestic vi-



It remains the case that far fewer girls than boys complete their education in developing countries, especially at secondary level.

olence is. For example, in the Indian state of Kerala the chances of women becoming victims of domestic violence is 20 times lower if they own land or a house than if they have no property (WB 2012).

The described risk factors for malnutrition among girls and women are substantiated by many concrete individual examples in the literature. However, there continues to be a lack of significant gender-differentiated data on the nutritional situation of women and girls, as well as that of men and boys, which clearly show the links between the different risk factors also at a national and cross-country level.

### **Women feeding the family**

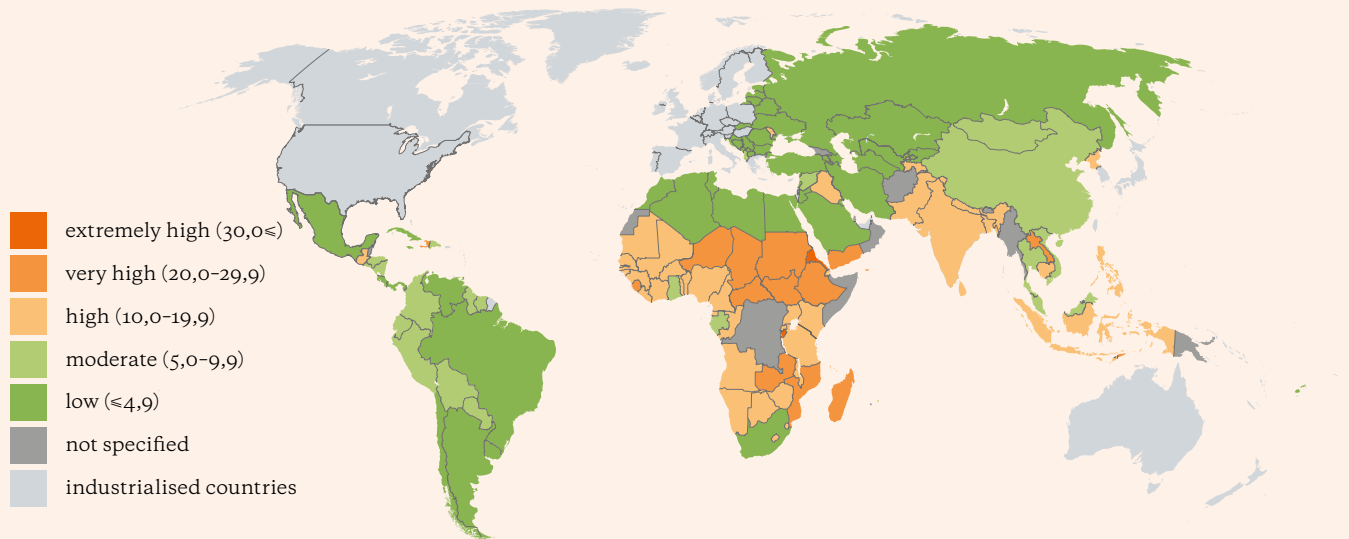
In many countries, the typical gender-specific allocation of tasks has changed significantly in recent years, especially in rural areas. However, this essentially applies to employment and productive work, for example in agriculture.

In the field of reproductive work little has changed between women and men. Only when women in the family die young, in regions where HIV is widespread for example, older children, girls but also boys, often have to take on the care work.

In many countries, striking social discrimination against women and girls and general food and nutrition insecurity coincide. This can be seen by comparing maps of the world provided by the Global Hunger Index (2014) and the 2014 SIGI sub-indexes on traditional norms in a family (family codes) and on the discrimination of daughters (son bias). It can be presumed that there is a correlation between gender discrimination and gender-specific undernutrition and malnutrition in these countries and that the differences between girls and boys, as well as between men and women, with regard to sufficient and balanced nutrition, are largest here. This concurrence is most visible in the countries of west and east Africa south of the Sahara, as well as in south and east Asia. A conspicuous correlation between food and nutrition insecurity in one country, measured by the Global Hunger Index, and the educational situation of women and girls, measured as a sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index, was clearly depicted in the 2009 Global Hunger Index report (see DWHH, IFPRI, Concern Worldwide 2009, p. 21).

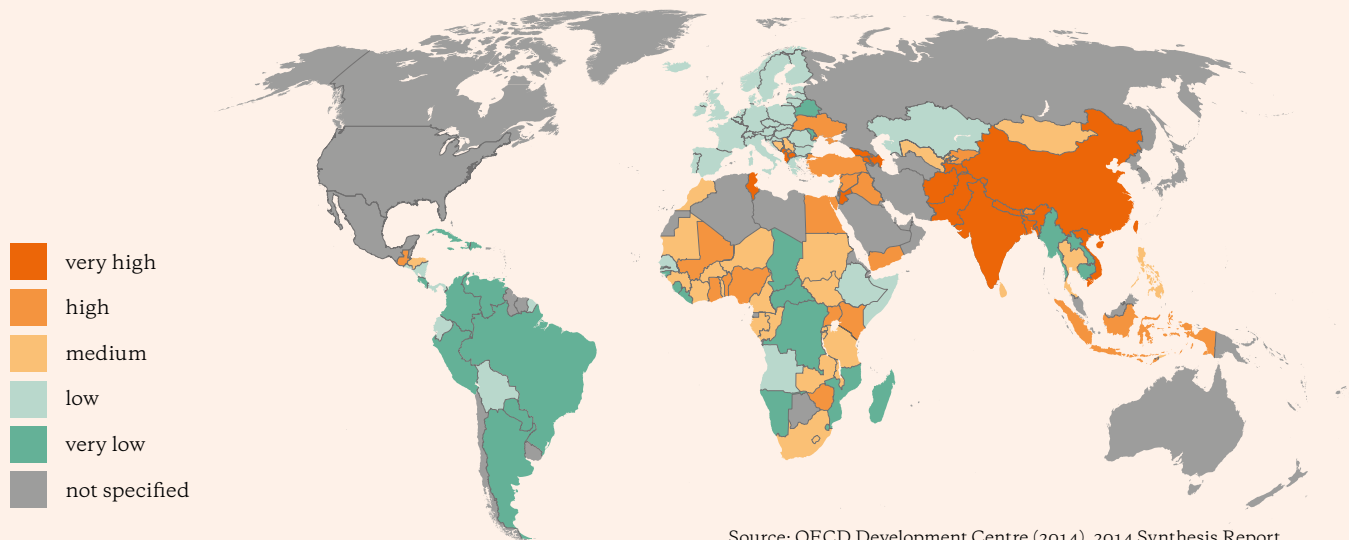


## Proportion of undernourished people



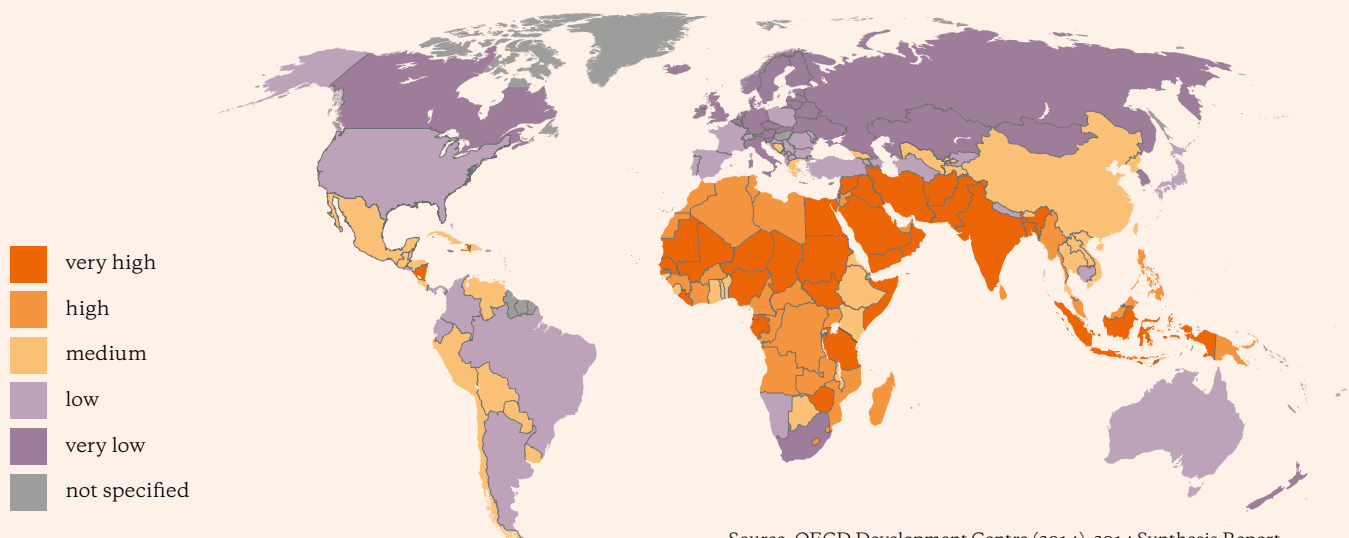
Source: 2014 Global Hunger Index

## Discrimination of daughters



Source: OECD Development Centre (2014), 2014 Synthesis Report

## Norms and laws that discriminate against women



Source: OECD Development Centre (2014), 2014 Synthesis Report

Correlation between social discrimination of women and children and nutrition insecurity

## Food and nutrition insecurity in rural and urban areas

Although a large part of food is produced in rural areas, that is also where 80 percent of hungry people live (IFAD 2014). Half of the hungry people worldwide are small-scale farmers, 8 percent belong to families which earn a living from fishing or herding animals, 22 percent are landless labourers, and 20 percent are made up by the urban poor.

By 2050, the number of poor people in cities will have increased, but over 50 percent of the poor will still be living in rural areas.

The chances of having access to sufficient food, particularly to a healthy and varied diet, differ for people in rural and urban areas. Some studies have examined the differences in nutrition situations in urban and rural areas, but many concentrate explicitly on aspects of malnutrition among children.

IFPRI indicates that in Mozambique there is a striking discrepancy between urban and rural areas when it comes to stunted growth in children under five. Whereas

in rural areas many children (46 percent) are affected, the figure is lower in urban areas (29 percent). Studies show that there are two decisive factors which have an impact on the nutrition of families: the amount of income and corresponding household expenditure (in rural areas less than half as much as in urban areas) as well as the mothers' level of education (12 percent of mothers in rural areas can read and write, as compared to 45 percent in urban areas) (IFPRI 1999).

In his report on women's rights and the right to food of December 2012, Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food between 2008 and 2014, stated that more attention had to be paid to women in rural areas in particular, with regard to food and nutrition security strategies. The report points out that women fell very short compared to men in rural areas and to men and women in urban areas regarding all development indicators (see De Schutter 2012, Para. 7, p. 6). A more precise analysis of more explicit comparative information on the nutritional situation of girls and women in rural and urban areas was not carried out within the framework of the present study.



## Chapter 3

# Causes of malnutrition among women and girls

In seeking causes of malnutrition among girls and women, it is important to take different nutritional needs into account, as well as the reasons for the different access to food that supplies necessary nutrients.

## How many micronutrients does the body need?

The amount of micronutrients that a body needs is based on:

1. gender-specific biological factors;
2. different workloads;
3. state of health.

### Biological factors

Girls and women of reproductive age generally have a higher need for certain micronutrients, for example iron, than men. Certain processes in the female body such as menstruation, pregnancy and lactation take up high amounts of micronutrients which have to be made available to the body with food. According to FAO data, even non-pregnant women need 2.5 more times more iron than men. A pregnant woman needs almost four times as much iron than a non-pregnant woman, 1.5 times more folic acid and 20 percent more calcium. During lactation, she needs 40 percent more vitamin A and C and 15 percent more vitamin B12 (see FAO 2000). Essentially, the food ingested by women should contain a significantly higher share of micronutrients than that eaten by men, even if the same amounts are eaten. If women eat less food, then it has to contain even more micronutrients.



Like these girls in Borrecha, Ethiopia, women often have to walk a long distance to collect firewood for the family household.

### **Different workloads**

An increased workload leads to increased consumption not only of macronutrients but also of micronutrients. This is valid for girls and women, as well as for boys and men. However,

*“... in many developing countries women work much harder than men. In rural areas they are often heavily involved in agriculture, and in urban areas they may work long hours in factories and elsewhere; yet when they return home from the field or the factory they still have much work to do in the household, including food preparation and child care. Frequently the heavy burden of collecting water and fuel falls on women. All of this labour increases women’s needs for nutritional energy and other nutrients” (FAO 1997).*

### **Enhanced nutritional needs because of illness**

People who are ill need more micronutrients. Moreover, the lack of a healthy diet increases susceptibility to illnesses and aggravates their progression. HIV and AIDS can serve as an example to illustrate the reciprocity between illness and nutritional needs. Malnutrition in people who are HIV positive can lead to AIDS developing faster and the disease progressing more quickly. Moreover, the risk of contagion increases (see WHO 2003). It is presumed that a lack of micronutrients during lactation also increases the risk of HIV being transmitted from a mother to her child (see Gillespie/Kadiyala 2005, p.53). The importance of this interdependency has also been recognised by the United Nations, which adopted a declaration on the matter back in 2006 already (see UN Resolution 60/262, Art. 28, p. 14).

HIV infection, or AIDS, increases the need for macronutrients and micronutrients because the body consumes more nutrients in reaction to the attack on its immune system. Moreover, the capacity for absorbing nutrients is reduced. HIV-positive people often lack vitamin A, C, E, B6 and B12, as well as folic acid, zinc, iron and selenium. These are excreted in urine more than usual (see NFNC Zambia 2011, p. 11). This means that if a person already suffers from malnutrition then micronutrient deficiencies and their after-effects will be intensified by HIV infection or other illnesses.

This affects women in particular. Women who are affected by poverty run a higher risk of infection in regions where HIV is widespread and particularly if they have diminished defences because of malnutrition, cannot protect themselves adequately during sex because of social discrimination or are forced to undertake sex

work to ensure themselves and their children a livelihood. This is the beginning of a vicious circle of poverty, malnutrition, susceptibility to illness, social discrimination as a woman, HIV infection, social discrimination because of HIV infection, further impoverishment and increased malnutrition and its consequences.

## **Differences in access to appropriate food**

The reasons for why women and men have different possibilities of feeding themselves adequately and as healthily as possible, and the consequences of unbalanced nutrition and micronutrient deficiency, are highly complex.

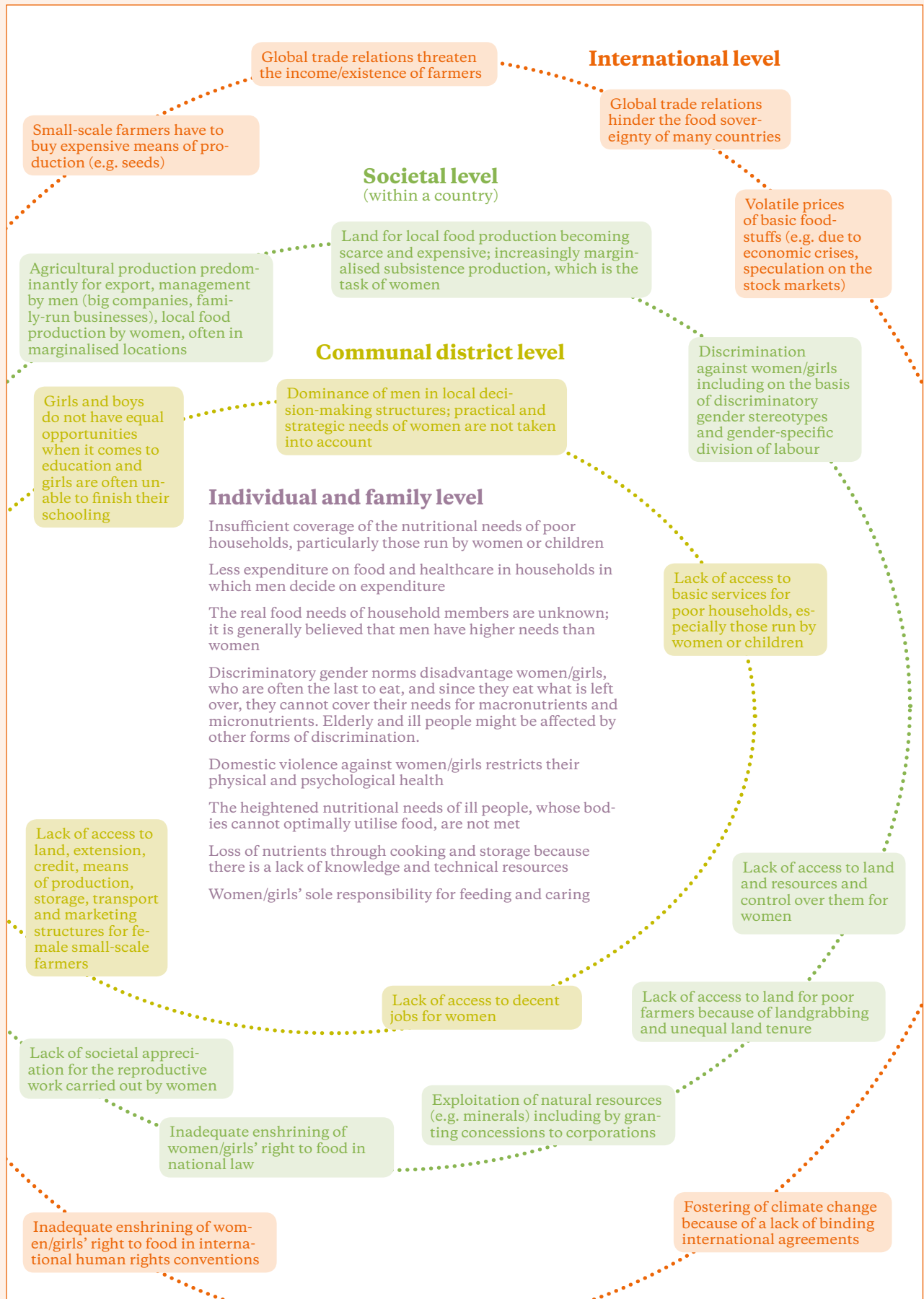
There are many regional differences and specific situations that lead to malnutrition in large parts of the population. The extent to which women and children are more affected than men and boys varies from region to region and each specific situation (see Chapter 2 and <http://genderindex.org/>). However, certain general conditions can be named that – directly or indirectly – play a significant role in the lack of equal, unrestricted access to appropriate food on the part of girls and boys, as well as men and women.

Even if it is not all-encompassing, a representation based on the “ecological model”, borrowed from social and developmental psychology, reflects the complexity of different influences and effects caused by the relationships within and between the different levels. For example, the model lists different risk factors that, according to region, have a direct or indirect negative influence on the nutritional situation of girls and women and can foster malnutrition. The representation enables the identification of risk factors and causes at different levels.

### **Individual and family levels: The discrimination of girls and women begins at home**

All over the world, there exist particular ideas about the different nutritional needs of women and girls and men and boys. What is typical is the assumption that men and boys have a greater basic metabolic rate, work harder and thus need more and better food than women. However, this does not necessarily correspond to the needs of individual family members.

## Causes and relevant factors for undernutrition and malnutrition in women and girls - in the ecological model



The reason for this can be lack of knowledge. In many cases, it is unknown that women and girls have a higher need for certain micronutrients than men. The considerably higher need that women and girls have for iron than men has already been referred to. For girls and women, it is therefore all the more important to eat a good, balanced diet.

It should not be ruled out that gender stereotypes influence assumptions about the different nutritional needs of men and women: For example, the idea that men generally have to eat more and better than women because they basically work harder – even if this is not the case in daily life at all.

Required quantities of calories and nutrients calculated or fixed by academics should be questioned against this backdrop. In a publication that examines malnutrition among women in particular, the FAO lists the different energy needs of men and women.

The FAO determines the energy need of a man to be 3,164 kcal and that of a woman to be 2,594 kcal. Their intensity of labour is assumed to be the same. Yet the energy need of the man who is 12 cm taller but nine kilos lighter than the woman is supposed to be one and a half times more than that of a woman who is nine kilos heavier, but works just as much as the man (FAO 2000).

Differing allocation of food on the basis of the lower social status of girls and women in families also plays an important role. Discrimination against girls and women,

which in many parts of the world has glaring effects on their nutritional situation, begins in the family. However, the causes for this lie in society, in which gender-specific roles and values are ascribed, developed, consolidated and transported across all levels, by all kinds of media.

In many parts of the world, the favouring of boys over girls begins before birth. One example of this is “India’s missing girls” and the targeted abortions of female foetuses. In some parts of India, 126 boys are born for every 100 girls. The Indian census of 2011 found that there were 37 million more men than women in India.

In other countries of south Asia and Africa in particular, girls are also at an extreme disadvantage compared to boys. This can continue directly from the time of a girl’s birth. Higher pressure from the family to bear a boy can, if a girl is born, lead to a shorter waiting time before the next pregnancy in the hope that a desired-for boy will be born. Female infants are often neglected. Infant mortality among girls is considerably higher than among boys (see WB 2012, pp. 120/121).

Discrimination continues as girls grow older. In many cultures, women and girls eat after men and boys. This has fatal consequences, particularly when there is a shortage of food, because they eat what remains – as a rule they thus eat less and the quality of their food is worse than that of the male family members. If this coincides with a higher need for nutrients then the problem of malnutrition among girls and women increases exponentially.

### Physical activity norms for adults

	Light activity (kcal)	Moderate activity (kcal)	Heavy activity (kcal)
<b>Men (height 1.71m)*</b>			
Lowest acceptable body weight (54 kg)	2,325	2,682	<b>3,164</b>
Highest acceptable body weight (73 kg)	2,786	3,199	3,775
<b>Women (height 1.59m)*</b>			
Lowest acceptable body weight (47 kg)	1,846	1,941	2,154
Highest acceptable body weight (63 kg)	2,223	2,337	<b>2,594</b>

\* Requirements would be higher for taller people and lower for shorter people (See FAO 2006, p.6)

### **Food taboos: About “good” and “bad” foods**

There are taboos for certain foods in many regions and cultures of the world. They are supposed to serve different purposes, such as for example:

- protecting limited natural resources from being over-used,
- protecting health,
- for certain ritual, spiritual or religious practices,
- or serving as a way of marking off a cultural identity with regard to others.

Frequently, food taboos have the function of defending the interests of the strong, especially those of men over women, and thus cementing social hegemonies (see Og-

beide 1974; Meyer-Rochow, 2009). Remarkably often, prohibitions exist for pregnant or breastfeeding women that regard (of all things) food that has a high nutritional content (see Meyer-Rochow 2009).

In western Ethiopia, girls are allowed to leave the family home less frequently and at a later age than boys. In some regions, girls are not allowed to drink milk (Scherbaum, 1996). If a shortage of calcium coincides with a lack of UV radiation then this can cause the bone disorder, rickets. This can be reinforced later by multiple, extended periods of breastfeeding. In certain parts of the country, pregnant women are supposed to abstain from white food such as milk, curds, eggs, bananas and flatbread made of maize and taro root, which are impor-

**Ethiopia:** An unpublished study on the nutritional status of families in different regions of Ethiopia commissioned by Bread for the World in 2004 detected clear patterns of food allocation within a household. The male household heads eat most of the food first, then the children eat and finally the wife/mother (see Gebrewold, Tadesse & Getahun 2004).

**Cambodia:** The economic decay because of the civil war and the Khmer Rouge dictatorship has had particularly long-lasting negative effects in the country's most remote regions. “The indigenous Kreung and Tampuan communities in 2001 had high child mortality (twice the national average for children under five) and low literacy rates. [...] There were very few schools, and grade five completion was low,” especially among girls. They had to look after siblings and help in the home. While everyone suffered from undernourishment and malnutrition, girls were particularly disadvantaged: They were “the last to eat, they did not receive nutritious food, such as meat” (see WB 2012, p. 112).

**Pakistan:** A study carried out in the squatter settlements of Karachi to examine the causes of stunted growth found that “female children were nearly three times more likely to be stunted than male children.” The results found a correlation between stunting and

- lack of maternal formal schooling
- households that were food insecure and
- large household size (see Baig-Ansari et al. 2006).

**Bangladesh:** The effects of the neglect of girls, for example with regard to the intensity of breastfeeding and the time when this ends, “in the quantity and quality of the administered food [...] as well as in the psycho-emotional stimulation and caring behaviour of the parents [...] were noticeable in girls in Bangladesh from the comparatively higher mortality rates [...] and higher prevalence of acute forms of malnutrition” (Scherbaum 1996, p. 139).

According to data from the Bangladeshi Nutrition and Food Safety Centre of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, 49 percent of young girls in Bangladesh – considerably more than boys of the same age – are undernourished and/or malnourished. This is due in part to the fact that food is kept from girls.

Soyata Maiga, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, described the discrimination of girls on the African continent on the occasion of Pan-African Women's Day in 2014 as follows: “Young girls experience harmful practices and are forced to also handle, at a tender age, domestic responsibilities which prevent them from enjoying their fundamental rights, including the right to education, health, and protection against all forms of abuse and exploitation [...]” (<http://www.achpr.org/press/2014/07/d219/>).



tant suppliers of macronutrients and micronutrients (see Scherbaum 1996; Golder 2001). In Papua New Guinea, the Onabasulu ethnic group and other nearby tribes ban women from eating fresh meat, juicy bananas or wild red berries during menstruation. If they do, it is thought that there will be a negative impact on the production of fruit-bearing plants as well as on the future effectiveness of traps used to catch animals for food. Pregnant Onabasulu women are not allowed to eat eggs either. Young unmarried men by contrast are given the most diverse and healthy food and do not have to observe many taboos (see Meyer-Rochow 2009). In the east African country of Tanzania, there are also certain dietary rules for women and men. There exist over 130 different tribal groups that have different traditions and values but what they all share is the norm that good food is generally kept for men. The Massai, for example, consider milk and meat as good food and thus these are eaten overridingly by boys and men. In times of shortage, girls and women do not receive enough macronutrients and micronutrients. This has particularly negative consequences for women who are HIV positive, for example. They find it even harder to meet their higher nutritional needs. As described, malnutrition is one of several reasons why there is a higher incidence of AIDS among women and children if they are disadvantaged by gender-specific food-related rules and bans (Pollard 2013).

There are also taboos that run contrary to the interests of a balanced diet and affect men and women equally. And in some regions women also benefit from the fact that certain micronutrient-rich foodstuffs have negative connotations.

For example, because nutrient-rich berries and wild vegetables are rejected by men, they are only eaten by poor families or by women. Their high nutritional content has a positive impact on women's micronutrient intake.

There is a need for societal changes in particular with regard to existing gender models, to change eating patterns in favour of equality between girls and women and boys and men within a family. Supplementary measures have to be implemented at family level and the level of individuals.

Further obstacles that impede access to a balanced diet for women and girls within the family are certain traditions and practices, for example inheritance. Their causes should, however, be sought at the communal or societal level. These are listed below.

### **How processes at communal or district level influence the nutritional situation of women and girls**

Different causes for why women and girls in particular suffer from malnutrition can be found at communal or district level, although they partly appear at family level too:

- less investment in the education of girls;
- patriarchal inheritance structures;
- traditional common law that limits the rights of women;
- traditional practices such as dowries or bride prices and child marriage, which is linked to the problem of young mothers whose bodies are not ready for pregnancy;
- the dominance of men in communal decision-making structures, who do not or barely consider the practical and strategical needs of women and girls;
- the access of women and girls to land, agricultural inputs, loans, agricultural extension and information, such as storage, transport and marketing strategies, and fair payment in the case of hired labour, is either lacking or hindered;



Food taboos such as the ban on women to drink milk reinforce malnutrition in certain regions of the world.



To improve the nutritional situation of women, they have to obtain access to capacity building, training and extension in the field of agriculture such as here in the project of Bread for the World's Kenyan partner organisation, the Rural Service Programme (RSP).

- the access of poor households, especially those run by women and children, to basic public services such as education, health, sanitation, public legal systems or social security, is either lacking or hindered.

All these factors have a negative influence on the socio-economic situation of women. This leads directly to higher vulnerability to malnutrition. They have to be tackled via political decisions and changes at communal and district level if the nutritional situation of women and girls is to be improved.

#### **Increase of malnutrition of women and girls through processes at a national and societal level**

The following factors and processes at national and societal level have an impact on whether women and girls can eat a filling, healthy and balanced diet:

- if there is a lack of formal national legislation or one that is discriminatory and has a negative impact on the

socio-economic situation of women (for example inheritance and property law);

- if women's rights are not anchored in law and especially if the rights to sufficient and appropriate food and action plans for ensuring this are not implemented; and
- natural disasters and armed conflicts: "Women are typically overrepresented in terms of negative impacts of today's complex emergencies—roughly 70 percent of refugees and people displaced inside their own countries by armed conflict are women and children. Wherever crises have resulted in compromised access to food, the threat of acute micronutrient deficiencies rises; if a population is already deficient in vitamins and minerals when an emergency unfolds, the impact is worse than if preexisting conditions had been satisfactory. [...] In Indonesia, although the drought and economic crisis of the late 1990s did not have a significant impact on child anthropometry (weight-for-age),



child iron status deteriorated sharply during the crisis and still had not recovered to its precrisis level 5 y [sic] later.” (see Hill et al. 2005)

According to the FAO, in 2014 armed conflicts and uprisings were the decisive factors for nutrition insecurity in Iraq, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Syria alone, an estimated 6.3 million people were in need of

sustained food and agricultural assistance in 2014 (see <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/214464/icode/>). Furthermore, women often have tougher access to food assistance than men (see ADB 2013). Frequently, they do not have the necessary information, do not know the procedures that regulate access to aid and are less experienced with aid organisations.



Armed conflicts such as in South Sudan reinforce food and nutrition insecurity of women. When there is a shortage of food, women tend to abstain from food in favour of other family members.

### **The influence of global events and structures on the malnutrition of women and girls - the international level**

Global events that have an impact beyond national borders can also result in poverty or further impoverishment of many sections of the population in developing countries. These include economic crises, but also the structures of international trade relations, which for example can lead to a fall in the price of local agricultural products because of cheap imports, or to the dependence of local small-scale farmers on expensive agricultural inputs such as fertilisers. A further problem is posed by the scarcity of natural resources because of landgrabbing for instance (located here at a global level even if important levels already exist at national level) or climate change.

Poverty and impoverishment worsen food and nutrition insecurity directly and affect women more than

men. Fruit, vegetables, meat and fish are a principal source of important micronutrients. However, if they are not free and freely-accessible from nature for everybody many poor households cannot afford them. People who do not eat enough micronutrient-rich food suffer from disorders linked to malnutrition. This affects women more than men.

Overall, poverty affects women considerably more than men (even if a shift from the “feminisation of poverty” has been demanded since the Fourth Women’s World Conference in Beijing in 1995, this still has not been realised).

Moreover, women are those who, when a family’s nutritional situation becomes critical, eat less food and food of worse quality than male family members. In times of food shortage, women often abstain from eating enough to the benefit of other family members.

In Thailand, after the financial crisis of 1997 the number of mothers suffering from anaemia had risen by 22 percent by 1999, while in Indonesia the number rose by 15 to 19 percent. In Java, it was found that mothers who had abstained from eating nutrient-rich food so that their children would have a better food intake, had higher rates of anaemia (see ADB 2013).

The fact that disasters that cause intensified food shortages can aggravate the situation for those who are already at a disadvantage, can be illustrated by an example from the Philippines: The risk of death in the first two years after a severe typhoon was three times higher for girls if they had older brothers than for those who had none (see ADB 2013).

Landgrabbing has intensified significantly since the global finance and economic crisis of 2007 and 2008. Both states and companies are trying to buy or lease land. It is estimated that between 10 and 30 percent of arable land worldwide is affected by land-grabbing. “Women are at a particular disadvantage here because their voice often counts for little in communities” (see HBS, IASS Potsdam, BUND 2015).

When strategies are developed to combat micronutrient deficiency attention has to be paid to the international level because the consequences of decisions and events at a global level can be felt in individual families and households. Indeed, a large part of these global causes are taken into account by the concept of food sovereignty, but as was stated at the outset the gender-differentiated view is often lacking (see Chapter 5).

## Chapter 4

# Lacking sustainability and effectiveness

### Current approaches to nutrition

A fundamental criticism of many food and nutrition security programs is that the structural causes of food and nutrition insecurity are not dealt with, and therefore there is a lack of sustainable solutions. Individual interventions such as the administration of highly-concentrated vitamin supplements or the fortification of food with micronutrients, as propagated by the WHO are typical examples. The impact of food supplements is short-term. Thus, direct food programs with food supplements only reduce stunting by about 20 percent (see Bhutta et al. 2013). A study conducted by Terre des Hommes and Welthungerhilfe (DWHH) also found that isolated food fortification measures cannot solve complex and mostly chronic food and nutrition insecurity problems (see Hodge et al. 2014).

The 1,000 Days programme, which is promoted and implemented by different UN organisations such as the World Food Program or UNICEF, as well as by many other organisations these days, assumes that interventions that have an impact on nutrition during the first 1,000 days of an infant's life, which include the pregnancy and first two years after birth, are decisive for an infant's survival and health. The program aims at decreasing child mortality and improving the immune system of children as well as diminishing their risk of contracting transmissible diseases or suffering from severe mental disabilities. Important elements are:

- that babies be exclusively breastfed during the first six months and that mothers continue to breastfeed until the end of the infant's second year,
- advice and training about nutrient requirements, the nutritional content of food, food preparation and the appropriate feeding of a baby,
- access to high-quality and sufficient food for malnourished mothers,
- food supplements for small children and women, in acute cases.

However, the 1,000 Days programme cannot have a lasting impact if it is based on top-down approaches and does not foster local people's own initiative and self-help capacities. The potential of women, like that of men, must not be ignored or even undermined. A programme such as 1,000 Days cannot replace necessary structural changes (see Lemke, Bellow 2011).

In the area of integrated agricultural development, therefore, the FAO strongly promotes multi-sectoral approaches whose objective it is to ensure an adequate and balanced diet. Accordingly, food-based intervention strategies include approaches for improving nutrition within a household by securing access to, and consumption of, a varied diet that is rich in micronutrients. This is supposed to be achieved by better agricultural production and increased productivity that also make micronutrient-rich food more accessible. These agricultural approaches are supplemented by awareness-raising programs on the importance of a micronutrient-rich diet and strategies for raising the bioavailability of micronutrients. Bioavailability denotes the proportion of nutrients that the body can absorb from food.

There is no longer any doubt that the parameters of food production and nutrition have to be combined and developed together to achieve lasting results. This is supposed to be achieved with nutrition-sensitive agricultural approaches. In 2014, some 40 scientists met at a conference organised by the IFAD, the World Bank, the FAO and REACH to discuss the large-scale expansion of integrated interventions involving nutrition and agriculture. They came to the conclusion that a comprehensive model for agricultural development was necessary in order to abolish malnutrition, including undernutrition and overnutrition. This model should include partnerships with other sectors (for example health, water and sanitation, as well as education). There is also a need for the careful consideration of social context, especially the status of

### Fortification of food with micronutrients

Food is sometimes fortified with important micronutrients. Most widespread is the fortification of salt with iodine. Evidence shows that this has led to a reduction in iodine deficiency. Other examples include grain-based food, such as energy bars, which are distributed to children in primary schools via the World Food Program.





Malnutrition causes illness and illness exacerbates malnutrition. Therefore, municipal administrations have to build up basic health services and raise awareness about health and hygiene practices, as well as food.

women, as well as environmental protection and the protection of biodiversity.

The UNSCN's 2013 Key Recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture cover important aspects for eliminating malnutrition in girls and women: empowering of women in agriculture, improving their access to resources and strengthening their decision-making powers in the household. Moreover, it is pointed out that context analyses could take gender dynamics and gender roles into account (see UNSCN 2013b).

These recommendations have not been adequately implemented in practice. Moreover, they are often too limited as shown below.

## Insufficient measures in the area of public health

Good health care is essential if food and nutrition deficiencies are to be avoided or dealt with adequately. Many illnesses exacerbate the already existing consequences of malnutrition, for example:

- Diarrhoea can result in micronutrient deficiencies even if a diet is adequate and balanced.
- Malnutrition in people who have no or little access to good healthcare and who have to live for an extended period in unhygienic conditions can lead to acute health problems. When deficiencies already exist,

these can be exacerbated by diarrhoea. Conditions are extreme in refugee camps.

- In regions where malaria is endemic, there is a higher incidence of anaemia as a consequence of malaria. The increased need of micronutrients cannot be compensated for by a higher intake of micronutrients. This increases the probability that a patient will die (see Spandl 2006).
- Access to health services remains restricted to groups that are already particularly susceptible to illness. For example, to
  - people in rural, especially remote, regions,
  - people in impoverished regions or districts with a lack of infrastructure,
  - people with disabilities,
  - women and children.

Moreover, frequently the existing health services are not attuned to the health and treatment needs of girls and women.

## **Traditional gender stereotypes and unequal opportunities**

Instead of questioning gender stereotypes and supporting culture-sensitive transformation processes, rural development measures frequently exacerbate stereotypes and unequal opportunities. Insight that has long been known is often not acted upon consistently. In 2012, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter wrote: “[...] men are currently insufficiently sensitised to the importance of caring for children and for their nutrition needs in particular...” (De Schutter 2012, Para. 5).

He thus implicitly referred to the need to involve men more intensively in family care and household tasks and to change social gender constructions. He pointed out that the elimination of the structural causes for the discrimination of women was a necessary step to secure their food and nutrition.

A further important aspect, which has long been acknowledged, is the active participation of women in fighting hunger and malnutrition. To involve women actively and have them participate in multi-stakeholder,

consulting or participation processes, as well as in training and consulting, the way in which women organise themselves has to be taken into account as well as the obstacles to their organising themselves. There has to be a fundamental revision of traditional gender stereotypes and the gendered division of labour in development cooperation. According to a 2010 study by the World Bank and the IFPRI in the Philippines, men tend to organise themselves in production groups such as cooperatives, while women come together in self-help groups, discussing issues not related to agriculture and maintaining social networks (see Godquin, Quisumbing, cited in ADB 2013). Whether women or men choose these forms of organisation because they correspond to their interests and needs and/or because extension and development organisations promote them because they reflect the gendered division of labour remains to be examined.

It is necessary for national and international consultants to put behind them traditional ideas of gender-specific role attribution so that such structures are overcome. The issue of water illustrates how traditional concepts have to change. Even when women play a significant role in agricultural production, water for agriculture is considered a domain of men. Women are taken into account if water for household use is concerned. Thus, in line with gender stereotypes, men are advised to form water committees to oversee and manage water use in agriculture. The advice often comes from international consultants whom women have little access to. As a consequence, women are addressed exclusively through awareness-raising measures about the use of water and hygiene in the household (see IFAD 2007).

More open gender constructions are not only necessary in the area of reproductive work, but in all areas of life, if food and nutrition insecurity is to be eliminated. This requires raising awareness among boys and girls, men and women, and at all levels: at the level of target groups, at the level of project workers and at the level of communal, regional, national and international decision-makers.

Thereby, the problem of “feminisation of responsibility” has to be addressed: women bear the responsibility and burden of many activities, but they do not have any decision-making powers. This applies to at least three areas directly linked to food and nutrition security:

- private household including nutrition and care work (reproductive work),

- agriculture, especially subsistence agriculture, but increasingly agricultural production for sale/export (productive work), and
- the sustainable management of natural resources.

“In the end, the delegation of responsibility for survival from the state to private households or local communities and municipalities leads to a feminisation of responsibility. Neo-liberal globalisation and the environment crisis increase the pressure to take responsibility on those providing care at the end of the chain [...], those who are responsible for the health, provision or protection of an intact immediate environment and the supply of food” (Wichterich 2003, p.11).

Thus, often women only have a chance to participate in “end-of-pipe strategies”. Such strategies do not address the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. They only address symptoms. There are still many examples of measures that are planned and implemented without taking women into account and without adequate consideration of gender dynamics – even if these measures are supposed to reach women explicitly, as important actors in agriculture for instance.

There are numerous examples of strategies and programmes, which explicitly intended to improve the situation of women but which worsened their situation instead (see Arimond et al. 2011, pp. 48/49). Papua New Guinea provides an example of how state measures to increase fishing quotas and market value actually worsened the food and nutrition security of women. There are regions in which land and fisheries rights are being increasingly formalised, privatised and individualised. As a consequence, the traditional collective rights of clans, which have matriarchal structures, have been transferred to individual men. Women lost their property and their user rights have worsened considerably (Matthews et al. 2012). Detailed gender impact assessments before the implementation of such measures would prevent such negative effects on the food and nutrition security of women.

Moreover, there exists no goal for explicitly eliminating undernutrition and malnutrition in girls and women. Such a goal would have to be based on the human right to food of women and girls. An explicit goal of this kind would consequently require carrying out detailed gender-differentiated analyses of the fundamental causes of undernutrition and malnutrition in women and girls and the development of strategies based on their results.

As long as this does not happen systematically, fighting symptoms will remain the practice.

## Fragmentation in analysis and strategy development

Each branch of science has its own strategies concerning the fight against malnutrition. The food and nutrition sciences look at the need for nutrients, eating habits, provision of food, its preparation and consumption, among other things. In the agricultural sciences, improving yield, the diversification of crops or biofortification – the fortification of food through breeding – play a big role. In economics, global, regional and local economic relations and events are analysed and strategies developed which are supposed to guarantee that food becomes accessible at affordable prices everywhere in the world. And some social scientists are interested in analysing the situation of men and women and their relationship with each other so that strategies, for better attaining gender equality for example, can be developed accordingly.

But even if the importance of cross-sectoral and gender-differentiated approaches is recognised, the developed strategies do not seem to be adequately integrated. In order to achieve integration, analyses need to be done in a systemic way and strategies have to reflect and connect interdependencies. Moreover, organisations that promote integrating gender perspectives in analysis and strategy development generally have not managed to do so outside of their institutional gender units. Gender units are often cut off from other institutional structures which should also be involved if integrated approaches are to be achieved. Therefore, despite the FAO having a gender unit, there is no reference to the importance of gender-differentiated analyses and strategies in the fight against undernutrition and malnutrition in the key aspects of its report “The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014”. Women are only referred to as part of the typical pair of “mothers and children under five”, thus in their function as those who give birth and care for children, but not as holders of rights relating to food, decent work and wages, education, let alone to ownership of land. The following formulation is a typical description of the theoretical basis of many approaches for fighting hunger and silent hunger: “Hunger reduction requires an

integrated approach, which would include: public and private investments to raise agricultural productivity; better access to inputs, land, services, technologies and markets; measures to promote rural development; social protection for the most vulnerable, including strengthening their resilience to conflicts and natural disasters; and specific nutrition programmes, especially to address micronutrient deficiencies in mothers and children under five” (FAO 2014b).

## Food and nutrition security for girls and women needs gender equality

The University of Hohenheim and the non-governmental organisation FIAN offer two gender-based explanations for why the nutritional situation of women and girls is not improving:

1. “[...] the structural isolation of women’s rights from the human right to adequate food within the legally-binding language of key international human rights treaties. This “disconnect” is primarily reflected in the invisibility of women in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the omission of women’s right to adequate food in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”

2. “The second “disconnect” is intertwined in the first and exposes the isolation of nutrition, which is over-medicalised, over-processed and not integrated into local food systems and cultural traditions, from the right to adequate food due to an inordinate focus on foodstuffs and their production and to the exclusive linking of nutrition to the right to health of women and children” (see [www.fian.org/fileadmin/media/publications/2013\\_Gender\\_Nutrition\\_and\\_the\\_Human\\_Right\\_to\\_Adequate\\_Food\\_book\\_synopsis.pdf](http://www.fian.org/fileadmin/media/publications/2013_Gender_Nutrition_and_the_Human_Right_to_Adequate_Food_book_synopsis.pdf)).

Undernutrition and malnutrition in girls and women are also seen to be exacerbated by the predominant conviction that state and international trade relations can exert a greater influence over food and nutrition security than local and regional systems, which leads to inefficient political approaches.

Moreover, the conceptual division of “food” as something that is produced and “nutrition” as a concept that plays a role within the framework of macronutrient and micronutrient coverage and health (FIAN 2013) is considered obstructive. There is seen to be a lack of a legal reference framework that clearly defines the right of women and girls to food, as well as of an explicit goal for realising the right of women and girls to food – as a contribution to gender equality.

Lack of gender equality and ongoing discrimination against women and girls is the reason why women and girls have worse access than men and boys to sufficient and balanced food in many parts of the world. They are also disadvantages regarding the availability and use of food. Gender equality and food and nutrition security as an aspect of gender equality are not visible in the strategic logic of UN organisations that are leading actors with regard to food and nutrition (FAO, WHO, UNSCN, UNICEF etc).

Depending on the approach, the strategic path towards women’s empowerment is always referred to as part of another goal:

1. Empowerment of women as producers of foodstuffs so that they can produce better, i.e. more balanced, food for everyone;
2. Empowerment of women as caregivers for the family or household so that they can ensure that the family can eat a better, more balanced diet.

### Biofortification of basic foodstuffs

“The biofortification of basic food plants is a new approach for fighting micronutrient deficiency. Plants are bred in such a way as to contain higher amounts of micronutrients. This approach particularly targets developing countries where many people in remote rural areas are hardly reached by other micronutrient programmes.” (Qaim & Stein 2009)



Measures for empowering women as food producers are for example:

- access to credit,
- access to agricultural means of production,
- agricultural extension by women for women and access to agricultural information.

Measures for empowering women in a caring role are for example:

- information and training regarding healthy nutrition and healthy preparation of food and storage of foodstuffs;
- time-saving techniques in agriculture so that mothers have more time for their caring roles.

In certain areas, these measures come up short when it comes to improving the nutritional situation of women and girls. It is not enough for women to receive credit for means of production such as seeds or fertilisers as well as information that is relevant for agricultural production. Measures have to go hand in hand with the redistribution of decision-making powers. If this does not happen, men often maintain control over the use of credit or income because they are considered to be the prime decision-makers.

Women are encouraged to provide better nutrition for the family and acquire knowledge about what is important for their children's healthy development. However, through their socialisation they are used to giving more and better food to their sons than their daughters in times of scarcity. Women are exposed to food taboos that apply to girls especially or to dowry systems that make girls a cost factor. If men and boys eat before women and girls in the family, the latter suffer when there is not enough food to go around. The simple fact that women know what is important for a child's healthy development does not make any difference in such cases.

## Doing business with the fight against hunger

Nutrition and food and nutrition security are becoming more important topics on the political agenda. In neither the agricultural nor the nutritional sector, however, does there exist a relevant target for achieving gender equality with regard to nutrition. In the political wrangling over households and investments the costs that arise if certain measures are not implemented are used as an argument. This is supposed to highlight the importance of their funding and implementation.

In this explanation, the fact that people have an elementary right to balanced and sufficient food is superimposed by an economic argument where human rights and humanity are invisible.

In the agricultural sector, growth and increased productivity remain the central parameters for decision-makers, a large majority of whom remain men. They have little motivation to integrate gender equality into their set of goals (see Meerman/Garrett/Wüstefeld 2013). Moreover, there are strong economic interests that go against well-functioning smallholder agriculture, where women and men alike have access to land, credit and seeds, produce food for consumption and for the local and regional market and are largely independent of expensive inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides and seeds.

In the area of nutrition too, economic interests play a role in the elaboration of programmes for food and nutrition security that should not be underestimated. One example is the large-scale distribution of ready-made products with industrially fortified micronutrients as supplements (Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food, RUSF), as are seeds fortified by micronutrients (see Lemke/Bellows 2011).



Bread for the World is part of the “We are fed up” alliance that organises a protest for sustainable agriculture and nutrition every year during International Green Week.

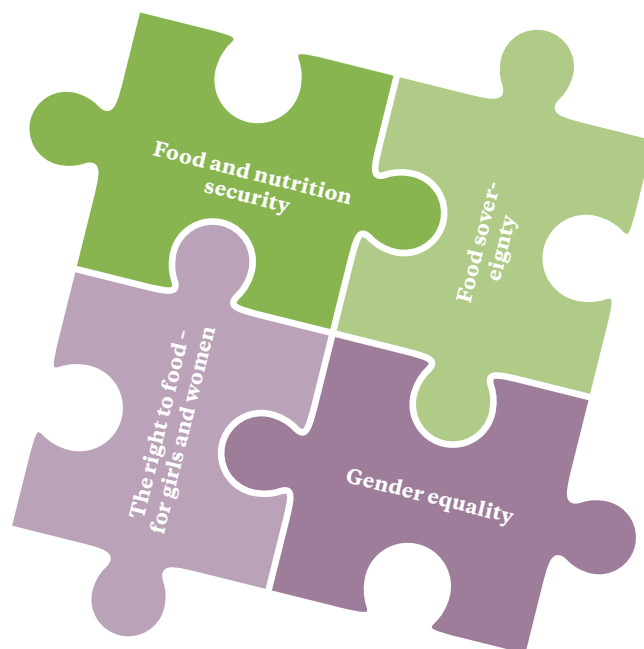
Further problems are trade and speculation on basic foodstuffs. In a 2014 interview, Jean Ziegler, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2000 to 2008, described the power of big corporations as follows:

“Ten corporations controlled all traded basic foodstuffs last year, that is rice, maize and grain. This is a reason why structural reform is never successful. The banks – for exam-

ple Deutsche Bank – suspended food speculation in part but re-introduced it shortly afterwards. With the justification that their customers had demanded this because the profits are so high. We’ve failed against these wrongdoers” (Jean Ziegler in an interview with Laura Bähr, Jakob Buhre, 16th October 2014, <http://www.planet-interview.de/interviews/jean-ziegler/46415/>).

## Chapter 5

# Important concepts for eliminating malnutrition in girls and women



There are four concepts that are useful for better ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of measures and programs for eliminating malnutrition in girls and women: Food and nutrition security, food sovereignty, the right to food of women and girls as well as gender equality. The first three concepts, however, have to be broadened to include gender perspectives.

### Mainstream - the concept of food and nutrition security

The concept of food security has been developed and broadened since the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome. It is now recognised by all the relevant UN organisations as well as by many other organisations in the version proposed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2012: “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (see CFS 2012).

Food and nutrition security includes many key elements that are important in the fight against the undernutrition and malnutrition of girls and women. They are most affected, yet have not been adequately and sufficiently targeted. From the beginning, the conceptual

framework lacked a gender mainstreaming approach and the systematic consideration of gender aspects. Therefore, the gender perspective has had to be made explicitly visible in retrospect. The concept of food and nutrition security is supported by four conceptual pillars: availability, access, use and stability with regard to food, the latter can refer to prices but also to timeframes.

The concept implicitly recognises the restrictions that hinder access to sufficient and appropriate food. However, it does not cite any gender differences. In the case of girls and women, these can be concretised by the following examples to highlight the gender perspective:

- physical access is hindered if violent upheavals make it particularly dangerous for women and girls to get to the market or the field or if their mobility is strongly restricted by long distances and a lack of a transport infrastructure;
- social access is hindered when girls and women cannot eat enough appropriate food because of an unfair distribution of food within the family;
- economic access is hindered when poverty prevents people from buying foodstuffs that are important for a balanced diet (accessibility); women-headed households are particularly affected by poverty.

In order to achieve food and nutrition security, macronutrient and micronutrient needs have to be covered. Moreover, there has to be an awareness of the different



The decision-making power of women as resource managers is key in the fight against silent hunger - as small-scale farmers, women have know-how about various cultivation methods; as decision-makers in a household they know what foodstuffs are important for a balanced diet.

and sometimes higher needs of girls and women. Nutrition has to be provided accordingly (use). The concept of food and nutrition security differentiates between quantity and quality and thus addresses the problems of undernutrition and malnutrition. It also recognises the necessity of taking cultural eating habits into consideration. It takes into account hygienic conditions, which are vital for maintaining health, as well as a safe environment. This implies that girls and women should be protected from gender-based violence and should have access to gender-sensitive healthcare (use).

Constant and continuous food supply (stability) is a particular challenge for poor women-headed households. This also applies when households are headed by women for a season or extended periods of time because of the labor migration of men.

Food and nutrition security as a goal, as formulated in the concept, appears comprehensive. However, it only takes effect in practice when each single aspect is observed explicitly and approached strategically. This can only happen when the specific situation of girls and women, as well as boys and men, is described and taken into account in a differentiated way.

## **Food sovereignty - a concept for protecting the rights of small-scale farmers and indigenous communities**

Another approach to development and agricultural policy is pursued by La Via Campesina, an international movement founded in 1993 that brings together peasants and indigenous peoples, which introduced the concept of food sovereignty into the international debate at the 1996 World Food Summit. It is based on a fundamental critique of the increasing domination of people's nutrition by the agricultural and food industries through trade, liberalisation and privatisation policies.

In its concept of food sovereignty, La Via Campesina places great emphasis on strengthening local, self-determined and sustainable production and consumer structures. This includes demanding a country's right to protect local producers against cheap imports as well as protecting the rights of farmers against the privatisation of communal land, water, seeds, animals and biodiversity. It addresses problems such as landgrabbing, the patenting of seeds and natural resources, which are part of a region's biodiversity (for example medicinal plants), and genetic engineering or the privatisation of commons (see <http://viacampesina.org/es/index.php/temas-prin->



ci-pales-mainmenu-27/soberanalimentary-comercio-main-menu-38/314-que-es-la-soberania-alimentaria).

A concept of food sovereignty based on gender equality could include the following amendments (formulated and italicised by the author of this text) to the existing definitions:

“Food sovereignty is the peoples’, Countries’ or State Unions’ RIGHT to define their agricultural and food policy, without any dumping vis-à-vis third countries. Food sovereignty includes:

- prioritising local agricultural production in order to feed the people, access of peasants and landless people, *especially landless women*, to land, water, seeds, and credit. Hence the need for land reforms, for fighting against GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms), for free access to seeds, and for safeguarding water as a public good to be sustainably distributed. This requires agricultural and legal reforms that take women into account, to ensure equal rights to property, access to and control over resources.
- the right of peasants, *male and female*, to produce food and the right of consumers, *male and female*, to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced.
- the right of Countries to protect themselves from too low-priced agricultural and food imports.
- agricultural prices linked to production costs *on the basis of wage structures that treat women and men equally*: they can be achieved if the Countries or Unions of States are entitled to impose taxes on excessively cheap imports, if they commit themselves in favour of a sustainable farm production, and if they control production on the inner market so as to avoid structural surpluses.
- the populations, *especially women*, taking part in agricultural policy choices.
- the recognition of the rights of women farmers, who play a major role in agricultural production and in food” (La Via Campesina 2003).

In practice, women in the movement, especially in Latin America, have had to fight hard to make the rights of women visible in the context of food sovereignty. This includes ensuring that women’s rights are not only reflected on paper, but also in the internal structures of organisations, including La Via Campesina. They have made progress but there is still a lot to be done (see IDS, BRIDGE 2014, p. 38).

A concept of food sovereignty linked to small-scale farming structures in which women and men have the same chances of access to resources and control over them, seems to be very important for eliminating malnutrition in women and girls. A study that examined the relationship between agrobiodiversity and food and nutrition security in Tanzania came to the conclusion that small-scale subsistence agriculture focused on traditional vegetables had a positive influence on the diversity of women’s diets in rural areas (see Keding 2010, pp. 135/6). Furthermore, ecological agriculture which protects and uses natural resources sustainably is of great importance if micronutrient-rich food is to be produced and consumed. A new meta-study, considered to be the largest analysis of ingredients in organic products, found that organically-produced plant-based food was considerably richer in micronutrients than in conventional products [...]. Depending on the group of elements, the concentration of micronutrients in fresh and processed organic products was between 18 and 69 percent higher than in conventional products (Niggli 2015).

The concept of food sovereignty and the right to food explained below are based much more on an empowerment approach, which ends dependencies and promotes the autonomy of men and women, than the concept of food and nutrition security.

## The right to food - for girls and women

The right to food does not only perceive nutrition as a human need but as a human right that has to be enforced. Thus, hunger and malnutrition represent the biggest human rights violation in the world, which has to be overcome with utmost urgency. The right to food was established as a human right in Article 25.1 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN Charter). It was refined by Article 11 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the 1993 Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Action and the General Comment on the ICESCR adopted in 1999. In 2004, the FAO adopted the “Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national security” (RtFG) which provide a wide range of measures for enforcing the

right to food. Although many states have committed to these voluntary guidelines, civil society actors frequently have to advocate and lobby to ensure that the state and its institutions fulfil their responsibilities in this regard and make sure that the population, without exception, can satisfy its food and nutrition needs adequately and appropriately.

The human rights approach to the right to food comprises important strategic elements towards increased sustainability such as awareness raising and capacity building of duty bearers and education of rights holders – all aimed at realising the rights. However, FIAN and researchers at the University of Hohenheim have argued that this alone is not enough (see Chapter 4): They call for an explicit elaboration of the human right to food of women and girls in all relevant international conventions and agreements. The integration into national legislature and guidelines on implementation are considered crucial. That this has not taken place so far can be attributed to a lack of political will on the part of decision-makers in various countries, and the economic interests of powerful corporations.

## Gender equality

The concept of gender equality applies to everyone, regardless of gender, age, socio-economic status or cultural background. However, at the same time, it also acknowledges that throughout their entire lifecycle women and girls are most affected by gender-specific discrimination, even if boys and men can also be affected. In its strategy paper on gender equality in German development policy (2014), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) highlighted the great significance of strategically supporting women's rights as a central goal of human rights and development policy. The strategy paper links gender equality with:

- a more equal sharing of decision-making power and responsibility, as well as access to resources and work at household and community level,
- a democratisation of gender relations and a critical debate regarding the dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity,



Women have a right to food – not only as mothers but in their own right.

- a transformation of gender stereotypes and norms at national level and the questioning of patriarchal power structures, in order to shape the scope for action of women and men more justly (see BMZ 2014, p. 6).

Since the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the elimination of gender inequality and discrimination against women has been considered a self-contained development goal. At the UN World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, it was concretised with relation to the right to food and sustainable food and nutrition se-

curity and closely linked to the participation of women in productive resources (land, water, credit and technology). The importance of strengthening the decision-making powers of women as resource managers has been repeatedly highlighted (see BMZ 2014). In the past few years, however, there has been increased talk of regression with regard to gender equality. Thus, in the fight against the silent hunger of women and girls, consistent gender mainstreaming, as well as the definition of gender equality as an explicit goal, are of elementary significance.

## Gender mainstreaming in the context of malnutrition and undernutrition

The implementation of gender mainstreaming requires:

1. integrating gender perspectives into relevant concepts (food and nutrition security, food sovereignty) and policies that play a role in the fight against hunger and silent hunger;
2. collecting gender-differentiated information and data for calculating micronutrient needs and analysing the incidence of micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences;
3. conducting gender-sensitive situational analyses when programs, projects and policies are designed;
4. conducting gender impact assessments before measures in programs and projects are implemented and at policy level;
5. considering gender-sensitive concepts and information when developing policies, strategies, programs and projects for eliminating undernutrition and malnutrition;
6. considering the structural causes of undernutrition and malnutrition of women and girls when developing programs and policies;
7. developing monitoring and evaluation systems with gender perspectives;
8. the active participation of women and girls in the analysis and planning and implementation processes of programs and projects, as well as in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including in the discussion of results and adaptations.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

This study has named many factors that contribute to the undernutrition and malnutrition of girls and women. In order to eliminate these effectively and sustainably, a paradigm shift, which can be instituted by fulfilling certain strategic tasks, is necessary. Policies and strategies for eliminating undernutrition and malnutrition have to take on the structural causes of, and factors for, undernutrition and malnutrition in girls and women explicitly, and must do this on the basis of a systemic understanding of interconnected effects in each respective socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical context.

State and non-state programmes and projects for improving the food and nutritional situation in a country, region or community have to take into account the appropriate nutrition of women and girls and the realisation of their right to food. This requires a detailed causal analysis with regard to women and girls and targeted measures for empowering women and girls based upon it and adapted to each respective situation.

The concepts of food and nutrition security and food sovereignty, broadened to include a gender perspective, provide important conceptual reference frameworks for development policy for doing this by, for example, prioritising sustainable protection and use of resources, local and regional food production, promoting small-scale agriculture, as well as protecting agrobiodiversity and agroecology. What is decisive within this framework is that policy-makers create and support legal bases and structures for shaping gender relations anew, by ensuring that the reproductive work and knowledge of women are recognised and valued by society. In this process, boys and men have to be sensitised to problems and involved in the shaping of altered gender roles and relations. There are approaches of transformative masculinity for boys and men and experiences of such work that can be used for reference.

In developing and implementing strategies for fighting malnutrition, the greatest possible amount of participation by women and girls will contribute to lasting success. Participation and co-determination can, however, only be ensured if women and girls have the chance to introduce their own viewpoints and represent their interests. Furthermore, it might sometimes be necessary for women and men to express themselves separately from each other. Moreover, women and girls have to be put in a position to develop and implement possible solutions themselves. In so doing, the workload of women should not increase but actually decrease if possible.

Strategic considerations for eliminating undernutrition and malnutrition in women and girls should focus on four areas in particular: the lasting economic empowerment of women, the improvement of their social status and the promotion of their political participation and decision-making. Positive effects in these areas are a necessary precondition for the improved nutritional situation of women and girls.

The fourth area concerns violence against women and girls. This is one of the risk factors for malnutrition whose scope around the world is alarming. It has to be assumed that violence against women plays a role in most contexts. Yet, as a rule, this is a factor that is not openly addressed. Violence against women should therefore per se be taken into account when programmes and projects are being designed and a sensitive way of dealing with this issue has to be found.

An approach based on human rights fosters gender-sensitive programme and project work. Measures for raising awareness among stakeholders with regard to the right of women and girls to an appropriate diet, self-determination, physical inviolability and health, as well as advocacy and lobbying for the legal consolidation and realisation of these rights help improve the situation of women and girls. In this context, the development of the capacities of public institutions for implementing women's rights has to be considered.

To do justice to all the mentioned aspects, strategies for fighting undernutrition and malnutrition have to be put into practice at all levels, from the individual and family level to national and international level. Moreover, they have to be interlinked horizontally (across sectors and organisations) and vertically (interlocked globally, nationally, regionally or locally).

Furthermore, targeted gender mainstreaming for all processes of fighting malnutrition generally and malnutrition in women and girls in particular are important. Those responsible have to ensure that there is enough gender competence on hand, through gender experts as well as experts who have acquired gender competence in their specific subject areas (e.g. health, nutrition, agriculture, climate).



## Consequences for Bread for the World's advocacy and lobbying

In order to eliminate malnutrition in women and girls, policy-makers at national and international level have to develop a framework that fosters structural changes for achieving gender equality and equal opportunities for women and girls. From the point of view of Bread for the World, the following priorities need to be set:



These landless women are demanding land for survival in Dinajpur, Bangladesh. They were supported by the Community Development Association, a partner organisation of Bread for the World.

1. The international community of states should pay particular attention to malnutrition in women and girls. The causes of this malnutrition are given insufficient consideration by strategies that focus on malnutrition but disregard the gender perspective. Health, agriculture and nutrition systems should be reformed so that the political, economic and social causes of malnutrition in women and girls in particular are eliminated. This includes carrying out gender-differentiated causal, situation and impact analyses, including gender-disaggregated data collection.
2. International agreements, as well as national law, have to be developed or reformed in such a way that women and men are ensured equal access to productive resources, especially land, financial services, agricultural technology and information, as well as business skills and employment possibilities.
3. Women-headed and child-headed households have to be supported specifically and their autonomy has to be strengthened so that the food and nutrition needs of all their members are completely covered all year round. The same goal should aim to specifically support and empower female small-scale farmers.
4. Access to basic public services such as water, as well as to gender-sensitive health services and social security systems, has to be made available to improve the nutrition and health of women and girls.
5. The active participation of women as recognised and respected actors in consultation, organisation and decision-making processes that are relevant for realising their right to food and health, as well as achieving their social and economic participation on an equal footing, has to be ensured at all levels. Women and girls should feel empowered to develop their own solutions.
6. The elimination of violence against women and girls in all its forms should be considered an important field of action in the framework of development towards more equal rights and equal opportunities. This includes the commitment to women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, as well as protection from violence through corresponding laws and law enforcement.

## Chapter 7

# Glossary

**Dumping** occurs when manufacturers export a product to another country at a price either below the price charged in its home market or below its cost of production.

### Malnutrition, undernutrition

- **Undernutrition** is defined as the outcome of insufficient intake of food and calories. Small children under five are particularly affected. Undernutrition can be detected if babies have a birth weight of under 2,500 grams (low birth weight), or if children are underweight, dangerously thin for their height (wasting) or if they are too short for their age (stunted).
- People are said to be malnourished if their diet does not provide sufficient micronutrients. These are vitamins, minerals and trace elements. **Malnutrition** can occur whether people are underweight, have a normal weight or are overweight. Underweight people tend to suffer from undernutrition and malnutrition at the same time.

**Macronutrients** are proteins, fats and carbohydrates. They supply the body with vital energy.

**Micronutrients** are vitamins, minerals and trace elements (for example iron or iodine).

In many countries, a bride's family has to pay a **dowry** to the groom's family. It is often of considerable value. Therefore, daughters are often associated with financial burden for a family, whereas sons contribute to a family's prosperity via the dowry. There are some examples of courageous mothers of sons who no longer demand a dowry because they want to change the structures in their village.

### Gender Impact Assessment (GIA)

A Gender Impact Assessment is an ex-ante evaluation, analysis or assessment of a measure, project or program that takes into account their presumed effects in a gender-differentiated way or examines the effects on gender relations. Attaining gender equality is the goal of work with GIAs.

### Global Gender Gap Index

The Global Gender Gap Index was introduced by the World Economic Forum to provide a framework for cap-

turing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities around the world.

### Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

The SIGI is compiled every year by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It is supposed to trace the status and changes in discrimination against women in individual countries in order to shape more effective development policy. It now takes 160 countries into account. It covers five sub-indexes which are themselves based on different parameters:

1. Discriminatory family codes, 2. Restricted physical integrity, 3. Son bias, 4. Restricted resources and assets, 5. Restricted civil liberties.

### Stunting

Stunting is an internationally recognised nutrition indicator, which refers to a body's low height-for-age. It indicates physical underdevelopment in children under five.

### Wasting

Wasting is defined as the involuntary loss of 10 percent or more than the original body weight, for example through persistent diarrhoea.

## Chapter 8

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## Chapter 9

# Abbreviations and acronyms

BfdW	Bread for the World
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
DWHH	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German Agro Action)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSNAU	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit
GINA	Gender Informed Nutrition and Agriculture
GMOs	Genetically Modified Organisms
HBS	Heinrich Böll Foundation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
RtFG	Right to Food Guidelines
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UNSCN	United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAD	Vitamin A Deficiency
WB	World Bank
WFP	United Nations World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
WRA	Women of reproductive age



**Brot für die Welt -  
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