

Zimbabwe Embraces the Cost of Hunger Study

“Whilst as a country we have been proactive in developing and operationalizing strategies, conducting the necessary food and nutrition assessments, the missing link has been to establish the cost of hunger and undernutrition to the country's economic growth and development,” said Mr. O.E.M. Hove, the chairperson of the Expanded Technical Committee for Food and Nutrition Security during a discussion to validate the preliminary results of the Cost of Hunger study in Zimbabwe. This validation exercise took place at Bulawayo Holiday Inn on 10 February 2017.

Giving a brief background to the study Ms. Siboniso Chigova, the Food Safety and Nutrition Standards Officer at Food and Nutrition Council, said the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study was an initiative led by the African Union Commission (AUC) and supported by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

“The multi-country study aims to demonstrate the level of social and economic impact of child under nutrition estimating losses associated with health care provision, education and productivity”, she said.

The Government of Zimbabwe through the Food and Nutrition Council initiated the development of an evidence based Cost of Hunger Study for Zimbabwe. The process of developing the Cost of Hunger in Zimbabwe started with the



Mr. O.E.M. Hove, Chairperson of the Expanded Technical Committee on Food and Nutrition Security in Zimbabwe



Siboniso Chigova, Food and Nutrition Council

country expressing an interest to participate to the African Union (AU) in May 2016. From there experts were trained in June in Maputo, Mozambique followed by the establishment of a National Implementation Team (NIT). Data collection process took place in August 2016. The main objective of the study was to influence policymaking and inform all other stakeholders by, among other interventions, publishing and sharing the findings at various national and regional fora on the importance of addressing the problem of under nutrition.

“In spite of progress made in reducing stunting in the past 15 years, stunting in Zimbabwe remains high, with 27 percent of children stunted (ZDHS, 2015), a rate classified as 'poor' by the standards of the World Health Organisation (WHO). With irreversible damages to the brain and body of those affected, stunting does not only cripple the future of thousands of children, it is also undermining the development of the entire country”, said Mr. Joao Manja of WFP in his support statement to the Cost of Hunger validation process.

The COHA is a model that is used to estimate the additional cases of morbidities, mortalities, school repetitions, school dropouts, and reduced physical capacity that can be directly associated to a person's undernutrition before the age of five, and the associated costs to an economy. It is a model that illustrates that child under nutrition is not only a social but an economic issue.



Joao Manja, WFP

The Cost of Hunger, as an advocacy tool, seeks to highlight that **'it is cheaper to invest in nutrition than to treat undernutrition'**. This initiative will build on the country's initiatives and make use of the survey results from all the relevant assessments conducted to assist in advocating for action to advance the nutritional cause.

Presenting the preliminary results at the workshop Mr. Gwati Gwati, a Health Economist in the Ministry of Health and Child Care, underscored that a child who is undernourished is at risk of suffering from cognitive and physical impairment, which impacts the quality of life as a child and an adult within the society. "Stunted children are more likely to repeat grades in school or even drop out", he said. Undernourished children are more susceptible to recurring illness, which will increase public health and family costs. The preliminary results revealed that about 4.9 percent of all grade repetitions are due to the higher risk faced by stunted children. This has resulted in a loss



Mr. Gwati Gwati, Ministry of Health and Child Care

amounting to USD12.35 million which could have contributed towards other developmental facets of the economy.

The theory indicates that when a child is stunted, this will impact them when they enter the labour force. On the whole, stunted workers are less productive than non-stunted workers, and are less able to contribute to the national economy. The argument then becomes that it is not only better but also cheaper to prevent stunting than to address its effects.



Farm workers at SIRDC

The statistics on the effects of stunting on key social and economic facets such as education, health and productivity are very worrisome and need urgent attention. Total economic loss was estimated at US\$1.6 billion in 2015, which is 11.2% of GDP.

The country will benefit more from investing in the first 1000 days (from conception to 2 years) which is a window of opportunity for brain development and linear growth. It is encouraging to note that preventing and reducing stunting, especially during the 1000 day period has emerged as one of the most critical National priority to Zimbabwe as reflected in the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimASSET), the Government's economic turnaround blue-print, cluster number one.

With the COHA preliminary results having been validated by the Expanded Technical Committee on Food and Nutrition Security the next step is to write and finalise the full report followed by development of communications and advocacy tools. In an effort to reach wide and diverse critical stakeholders, the report will be launched at a date to be set and announced in the near future.



The Multi-stakeholder team at the COHA Validation Workshop, Bulawayo Holiday Inn

For the report not to be a classic shelf-document, a response strategy to the issues raised needs to be developed and operationalised. This will be done through a multi-stakeholder process making sure that each sector is recognised in the document.

With the Government heavily resource constrained it is critical that the development partners continue to complement Government efforts and scale up the nutrition cause if the country is to significantly reduce stunting by 2025. With each sector playing its critical role, there is nothing that can stop Zimbabwe from realising the set target on the reduction of stunting.

Analysis and Validation Workshop in Pictures:



The GIS Team



Presentation from the Education Sector



Group work; the Education team



Group Work: The Economics team



The Consultants



Group Work; Demographics Team



Its serious business in the Education group



Group photo for the COHA analysis team and members of the Expanded Committee on Food and Nutrition Security



Mr. O.E.M. Hove, Chairperson of the Expanded Technical Committee on Food and Nutrition Security



Mr. G.D. Kembo, Chairperson of ZimVAC directing the proceedings at the workshop



Members of the Expanded Technical Committee on Food and Nutrition Security



Its listening time for COHA National Implementation Team (NIT)