

Contribution to the preparation of the European Commission Communication on “Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance”

17 December 2012



Recommendations of the Red Cross EU Office on behalf of its members: National Red Cross Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)⁽¹⁾

The Red Cross EU Office⁽²⁾ welcomes the commitment of DG DEVCO and ECHO to work together in order to enhance maternal and child nutrition in external assistance.

The aim of this position paper is to present the Red Cross Red Crescent definition and perspectives on Maternal and Child Nutrition and contribute to the European Union consultation.

Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity remain ever-present threats to the lives and livelihoods of countless vulnerable people throughout the world. Their causes go beyond access to sufficient nutritious food and include structural factors such as chronic poverty, social unrests, conflicts, lack of investment in agriculture, poor sanitation and access to safe water, climate change, volatile fuel prices, commodity speculation and the ebb and flow of global market forces.

Responding to malnutrition risks and reduce mortality and morbidity rates among children under five and pregnant and lactating women is one specific field in which the Red Cross Red Crescent is actively engaged. Its activities in this sector are guided by the IFRC Policy on Food Security and Nutrition and inspired by the IFRC Strategy 2020. National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies work at the community, country, regional and global level together with beneficiaries, civil society organizations, governments and international partners to tackle the root causes of malnutrition and food insecurity and strengthen the resilience of local communities around the globe.

The Red Cross Red Crescent understands that to be successful, tackling malnutrition requires an integrated, multi-sectoral approach, that combines a variety of functions and sectors including disaster risk reduction, emergency and public health, water and sanitation, awareness raising and education, livelihoods and food security across overlapping phases of action. The Red Cross Red Crescent strongly believes that action should not only focus on acute malnutrition, but have a strong emphasis on chronic malnutrition.

Our Principles

We are guided at all times by our Fundamental Principles:

- Humanity
- Impartiality
- Neutrality
- Independence
- Voluntary Services
- Unity
- Universality



Odile is feeding her children Stephane and Etienne at the the nutrition recovery and education center in Djibo, Burkina Faso.

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It is hoped that the Communication “Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance” strengthens the response and the coordination of the EU and its Member States, clarifying at the same time the roles played by DG ECHO and DEVCO when addressing the issue of malnutrition. This will be particularly needed in situations of complex emergencies and during the transition between relief, rehabilitation and development, when flexible funding mechanisms should be adopted.

It is to be noted that the IFRC Policy on Food Security and Nutrition and the summary of the IFRC World Disaster Report 2011 “Focus on Hunger and Malnutrition” are, in this regard, valuable references.

1. Including the Norwegian Red Cross as members of the Red Cross EU Office.
2. We regret that, due to a late involvement of the Red Cross EU Office in the consultation process, it was not possible to have a proper consultation with the full membership of the Red Cross EU Office. We would like to underline that the present document aims at presenting a preliminary position and hope to be able to submit additional inputs to this debate in the future.

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REF. RCEU 12/2012 – 002

Comment on the Guiding Principles

- It is important that the proposed communication is coherent with, complements and builds on the experience and wide range of EC policies, tools and methodologies which apply to external development and assistance. These tools include, but are not limited to: the EU Food Security Policy Framework and the Communications on Humanitarian Food Assistance, Resilience, Social Protection, LRRD, CSOs, and Sustainable change in transition societies.

- Partnership with the private sector:

While recognizing the relevant contribution of the private sector in the fight against malnutrition, it is important to stress that such contribution should not be detrimental to the development of local economies and capacities, especially when referring to small-scale farmers. The role of the private sector needs therefore to be further clarified and should be the subject of dedicated initiatives setting the guidelines for the public-private partnership in EU external assistance.

Comment on the Scope and Objectives

The critical period of growth and development are the 1,000 days from conception to a child's second birthday. The problem of stunting has its roots in poor nutrition during this time: undernourishment during the foetal period contributes up to half of a child's failure to grow by the age of two.

As the nine months in the womb is part of this critical 1,000 days, the mother's own nutritional status has a strong influence on her baby. If the mother is stunted, anaemic or has a poor diet during pregnancy, she is likely to give birth to a small and undernourished baby. Every year around 13 million babies are born with low birth weight and are at increased risk of dying at or soon after birth.

Since the period from conception to birth has such a powerful influence, ensuring that pregnant women are adequately nourished is very important to the well-being of both mother and child. It is therefore suggested that a specific objective targeting pregnant women is mentioned. Lactating women should also be mentioned in the specific objectives, as exclusive (for the first six months) and continued (up to 24 months) breastfeeding plays a critical role in the nutrition of babies and toddlers.

It will be important to set clear indicators with regard to the Specific Objective "Reducing mortality and morbidity due to undernutrition", as it is difficult to define if mortality or morbidity is directly due to undernutrition, as it is usually linked to other health diseases such as diarrhea or malaria, and therefore not counted as malnutrition.

Comments on the Strategic priorities

Strategic priority 1: Enhance mobilisation and political commitment for nutrition

- At international level, Policy Coherence for Development (PDC) should be maintained by implementing the principles of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and the Paris and Accra Declarations. The international fora listed in the presentation surely represent an important occasion for the EU to raise the global attention and foster concrete actions towards improved nutrition.

In 2013, one of the main international occasions for the European Union to do so could be the International Conference on Nutrition, ICN+20. The ICN+20 will be important regarding decisions on

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ensuring nutrition objectives, concepts and considerations and their incorporation into policies and programmes to enhance a global multi-sectoral nutrition framework.

- At the country level, EU Delegations could play an important role in advocating Governments to adopt or reinforce national legislations aimed at preventing micronutrient deficiencies through appropriate programming and public health interventions (e.g. iodisation of salt). As investing in agriculture is essential for reducing hunger and promoting sustainable agricultural production, a stronger support to local farmers and small scale agricultural enterprises should also be considered, together with actions that help creating an enabling environment for empowering women, such as legal frameworks which protect women's rights (e.g. land inheritance rights, workplace policies supporting breastfeeding), incorporating a gender dimension in agricultural policies to enhance nutrition outcomes, and stimulating access of women to credit.

Closing the gender gap is important not just for women, but also for agricultural output. IFPRI estimates that improving women's access to resources could raise output by at least 10 per cent. On women-run farms, FAO estimates yield gains of up to 30 per cent.

Strategic priority 2: Scale up actions at country level

Providing emergency, life-saving interventions while at the same time focussing on long-term resilience in the communities is at the basis of the twin track approach promoted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent. A long-term, integrated, multi-sectoral and inclusive approach to food security and nutrition, ensuring the participation of and support for women and, more generally, the most vulnerable ones should be adopted. Such an approach should include, among the others, health, water and sanitation, and behavior change activities.

- Distribution of food assistance and nutritional screening and referral of children under five and pregnant or lactating mothers should run at the same time with measures intended to protecting livelihoods and assets, such as food/cash for work programmes, provision of fodder for livestock and more long term oriented interventions such as development of regional food security and early warning policies, investments in diversify and sustainable agricultural practices, women's groups, and community training and education. These longer term activities should also contain elements of nutritional awareness.

- In light of the strategic engagement and structured dialogue with non state actors and community based organizations promoted by the Communication on CSOs, Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, with their peculiar auxiliary status towards governments and grassroot level volunteers in 187 countries shall be seen as privileged interlocutors and operational partners in the development and implementation of policies and strategies aimed at scaling up actions at the national and regional level.

Strategic priority 3: Knowledge for nutrition (strengthening the expertise and the knowledge-base)

- Efforts need to be made to increase the evidence base on best practices in the field of nutrition, while also concurrently reviewing individual country strategies in order to assess the lessons learned on specific nutrition interventions.

- Standardized early warning systems and information sharing mechanisms such as IPC mapping should be promoted and strengthened starting from the community level.

Our Practice

The Red Cross Red Crescent analysis starts at the community level and focuses on community resilience.

The Red Cross EU Office

November 2013

OUR MISSION

To mobilise support for Red Cross work for the most vulnerable

Representing National Red Cross Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies⁽¹⁾

28 National Societies in the European Union and Norway form part of the world’s largest humanitarian network, and employ over 250,000 staff. They also engage well over one million volunteers, and have more than eight million members. The Red Cross EU Office represents their interests, as well as those of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), before the European Union (EU) and its institutions.



We work to increase Red Cross influence on European Union policy, legislation and practice so as to improve the humanitarian situation of the most vulnerable, and aim to increase EU resources for our work at home and abroad in order to maximise the reach and scope of our global network through a coordinated approach.

We also serve our members on EU-related issues, by monitoring the legal framework in which they operate, promoting information and knowledge sharing, and providing capacity building and a tailored approach to technical support.

Our activities span across four areas:

1. Disaster and Crisis
2. Development Aid
3. Asylum and Migration
4. Social Inclusion

OUR VISION 2020:

‘The Red Cross is a unique and trusted partner to the EU institutions in terms of policy dialogue and programming. It speaks with a common voice and acts in the interest of vulnerable people across the European Union and around the world!’

In line with its “Agenda for Change”, future EU development aid spending should target countries that are in the greatest need of external support where these resources can really make a difference. This includes fragile contexts, in which the Red Cross can make an important contribution when public services have collapsed.

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Development Aid

We support Red Cross Societies in all aspects of their relations with EU institutions regarding their development programmes in areas such as food security and nutrition, water and sanitation, health, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, climate change and migration. We monitor EU development issues that are relevant to the priorities of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. At this crucial time, when priorities regarding post Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are being discussed, we also advocate for a fair and sustainable approach to development by the European Union and its Member States that puts vulnerable and poor people first, addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability, and builds resilient communities and civil society capacities.

1. Our members include Austrian Red Cross, Belgian Red Cross, British Red Cross, Bulgarian Red Cross, Croatian Red Cross, Czech Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, Estonian Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, French Red Cross, German Red Cross, Hellenic Red Cross, Hungarian Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Irish Red Cross, Latvian Red Cross, Lithuanian Red Cross, Luxembourg Red Cross, Malta Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Polish Red Cross, Portuguese Red Cross, Romanian Red Cross, Slovak Red Cross, Slovenian Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.