

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF MALNUTRITION AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Seizing the opportunity of N4G 2025 to promote nutrition for all

Women and girls are among those most affected by various forms of malnutrition in the world. Today, it is estimated that more than one billion adolescent girls and women worldwide [suffer from undernutrition and the harmful effects of malnutrition](#) such as wasting, stunting, micronutrient deficiencies and anaemia.

At the same time, the efforts undertaken so far have proven insufficient to meet the goals set by the international community regarding nutrition by 2025. The results in terms of anaemia, a form of malnutrition that reflects nutritional inequalities between women and men, are particularly alarming. The WHO estimates that without effective intervention, [anaemia could affect nearly one woman in three as early as next year](#).

Not only do women and girls have specific nutritional needs, but [gender inequalities](#) also prevent them from accessing the nutritional resources and healthcare they require. Therefore, it is essential to place women's rights at the heart of the fight against malnutrition, ensuring that policies genuinely strengthen their ability to access adequate nutrition and effectively address gender inequalities. Moreover, tackling malnutrition through a gender lens is not only a way to improve women's living conditions but also a means to positively impact those of future generations.

In this context, the Nutrition for Growth Summit, which will be held in France in March 2025, presents a unique opportunity to place gender issues at the heart of the discussions and to encourage the international community to commit to improving nutrition for women and girls, affirming their rights, and reducing gender inequalities.

1. Understanding the impact of gender inequalities on access to nutritional intakes and care

The fight against women's malnutrition cannot be thought of apart from the fight for women's rights.

Gender inequalities, which are deeply rooted in societies, as well as gendered cultural norms and practices, are a major obstacle to women's access to food, agricultural and financial resources or even essential services such as healthcare. In doing so, they directly impact the nutrition and health of women and girls by not allowing them to meet their nutritional needs and prevent deficiencies in essential nutrients.

Because of the difficulties they have in accessing the most essential services, women are more at risk of certain forms of malnutrition such as anemia which can nevertheless be detected and prevented in schools and treated within the health system.

2. A two-way relationship: the consequences of malnutrition on women's rights and lives

While gender inequalities have an impact on women's ability to feed themselves and access the care they need, the link between malnutrition, inequalities and women's rights is not a one-way street. Indeed, malnutrition also has an impact on women's living conditions and rights.

Malnourished women and girls must face the consequences of malnutrition on their bodies, which impact their daily lives. This is the case, for example, with anemia, which not only increases vulnerability to disease, but also leads to chronic fatigue and affects the physical and cognitive capacities of those affected. This can have an impact on girls' and women's daily activities, such as going to school or working to earn an income to support themselves. Thus, the nutritional status of women and girls not only affects their health but can also have long-term impacts on their emancipation and empowerment in society.

In a context of crisis and food insecurity, the lack of access to food resources can also lead to an upsurge in early marriages, enabling families to reduce the number of mouths to feed in the household, while some women are forced to resort to sex work to feed themselves. In both cases, food insecurity and malnutrition can intensify violence against women.

3. Promoting both nutrition and women's rights for long-term impact

Taking gender into account in the fight against malnutrition requires a concerted approach and a multi-sectoral response to address the multiple issues that keep women in a cycle of malnutrition and inequality.

Responses to women's malnutrition must cover a range of sectors. Sexual and reproductive health policies, in particular access to family planning, play a key role in enabling women and girls to limit early, unplanned or repeated pregnancies, which are one of the causes of anaemia.

Encouraging girls to stay in school not only has a positive impact on their future and their empowerment in society, it also helps to prevent and detect certain forms of malnutrition, for example by distributing meals and food supplements in schools.

Measures to promote exclusive breastfeeding of newborns, as [recommended by the WHO](#), are particularly effective in preventing malnutrition in young children. However, to ensure that these recommendations are applied, it is necessary to create the right conditions through social protection policies to support mothers; otherwise, these actions are bound to slow down the empowerment of women and reinforce gender inequalities.

At all levels, it is also essential to create the necessary conditions for the empowerment of women, through behavioural and practical change. Empowering women and strengthening their political, economic and social rights is key to enabling them to make the right nutritional decisions for themselves and their children, and to ensuring they have access to the care they need. Involving a wide range of stakeholders - from community leaders and peers to men - in the discussion is essential to achieving this objective.

At N4G 2025, we encourage the international community to:

1. Ensure that gender and malnutrition issues are considered jointly.
2. Commit to reducing gender inequalities in all areas and promote the advancement of women's rights.
3. Make commitments to meet the specific nutritional needs of all women, not just mothers, in all sectors (health, education, employment, agriculture, the economy, social protection, etc.).
4. Fill the gap in available data on women's nutrition to better understand the root causes of women's malnutrition.

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