

Media Update

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UNICEF

Press Release

Stunting and Wasting, a Major Threat for Child Survival and Development of South Asian Nations

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Kathmandu, 16 May 2017 – A regional conference organized jointly by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) will identify actions to accelerate progress in the care of severely wasted children, which affects 8 million children in South Asia. It brings together, for the first time, government representatives, UN partners and civil society organizations from across South Asia, together with regional and global experts on nutrition to exchange regional analyses, expertise and experience on addressing wasting in the context of overall nutrition programming.

South Asia remains the epicentre of the global child wasting and stunting crisis. Severe wasting compromises the ability of children to grow and develop to their full potential, contributing to stunted growth and cognitive deficits as well as increased mortality risk. The costs of inaction to families and nations are considerable – stunted children earn 20 percent less as adults compared to non-stunted children, constraining economic growth across the region.

“The first priority is ensuring the healthy growth and development of children. This requires interventions to improve women’s nutrition before and during pregnancy, actions to support breastfeeding from the very first hour of life, interventions to improve the quality of food for young children, and programmes to protect children from infections. And when these prevention efforts fail and children become severely wasted, it is critical they receive appropriate care and treatment to safeguard their lives, growth and



development,” said Jean Gough, Regional Director for UNICEF in South Asia.

Across South Asia, less than five percent of the 8 million severely wasted children are receiving appropriate care and treatment. This low coverage is adding to the burden of mortality and morbidity in young children and limiting the growth and development of the untreated millions. Early detection and treatment of wasting is one powerful action to reduce stunting and its negative impacts.

“Investing in the capacity of communities, community-based organizations and civil society groups to identify and address undernutrition within their communities is the core of our endeavours for a collective approach to nutrition in South Asia. This investment is the key to unlocking the potential of this generation and the next,” said Amjad Hussain Sial, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Community-based approaches are indeed critical to preventing and treating severe wasting. Over 50 countries have adopted community-based management of severe wasting, including Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. This community-based care approaches are already saving thousands of lives and safeguarding the growth and development of many more Children by bringing more affordable services closer to families.

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