



PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENTARIANS COMMIT TO BE CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN

Regional parliamentarian meeting closes with a commitment to Strengthen Planning, Budgeting and Accountability for Nutrition

29 September, 2015, Windhoek- At the conclusion of a two-day meeting convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliament of Republic of Namibia and UNICEF, seventy five members of parliament and representatives of civil society, NGOs and International Development Organisations, from nine countries in Southern Africa committed to do more in ensuring national governments allocate appropriate resources for Nutrition and have viable and sustainable plans to address the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable members of their society, especially women and children.

In a final outcome document delegates reiterated they would continue to work towards advancing nutrition by adopting relevant legislation and helping to shape and oversee the implementation of national plans that would advance every child's right to survive and develop to their full potential. They also committed to act to scale up nutrition measures that are child centred, allocate budgets, consolidate data on the most current nutrition situation and provide better oversight to hold government accountable.

In a region where half the population survives on less than \$1.25 per day, 39% of children are stunted and an estimated 20 million children are considered to be at serious risk of malnutrition, due to climate change and the effects of natural disasters such as drought and flooding, delegates highlighted the need for urgent action by all governments and parliaments.

Delegates acknowledged the importance of investment in nutrition to ensure better and higher financial returns of all development interventions (a sixteen dollar return for every dollar invested), however only a very small fraction of countries' national budgets are currently allocated to nutrition. In many cases, despite efforts to improve access to essential services, many of the poorest are still missing out - faced with indirect barriers that prevent them from benefiting from these public services.



Evidence presented at the meeting indicated that the time between conception and the age of two years (the first 1000 days) is a critically important window period during which improved nutrition and feeding practices, particularly breastfeeding (early initiation within 1 hour of birth, 6 months exclusive breastfeeding, and continued up to 24 months or beyond with safe and adequate complementary food) must be protected, promoted and supported. Failing to invest in the early days is detrimental and has dire financial and economic consequences for entire countries in the long run.

“Parliaments have an important role to play in oversight and ensuring that the nutrition takes center stage in all our deliberations of social issues. To address and advance challenges on nutrition we need strong leadership and more so political commitment and will. When almost over fifty percent of our populations are under the age of 18, many of our countries still suffer high rates of HIV, poverty and unemployment, we need to make sure our development agenda now is determined by our children’s welfare for the future” said Professor Peter Katjavivi, the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia.

Already all countries have embraced the SADC Food and Nutrition Strategy through the development of nutrition plans and policies. The challenge remains that more needs to be done to streamline these plans and laws, educate the public about them and make sure they are resourced and operational – so as to meet the stunting targets established by the World Health Assembly.

“We know that empowerment of women through access to information and access to services outside the home is key to improve nutrition outcomes. What we are calling for is not new. It is simply about reinforcing our collective efforts at all levels to ensure that mothers, including fathers, are empowered with the right information, to enable them to make informed decisions,” said Micaela de Sousa, UNICEF Representative in Namibia.

The delegates also acknowledged that it was critical to have a multi-sectoral approach that includes areas such as health, water, sanitation, social protection, agriculture, finance, and trade to build on what is available to achieve meaningful cost-effective results and move the nutrition agenda effectively.

In the outcome document they agreed they need to prioritise the adoption and implementation of the maternity protection legislation based on the 2000 ILO Maternity Protection Convention that will create



an able environment by “providing sufficient support to all categories of women in the workplace, including those in the informal sector, to follow recommended infant and young child feeding practices.”

The outcome document of the meeting included concrete recommendations for parliamentarians to take a pro-nutrition agenda forward. They committed to being champions for nutrition and for children and families, especially those most vulnerable, by using their positions and platforms to galvanize action and draw attention (using current evidence and data) to the unacceptably high rates of malnutrition that continue to afflict so many of their nations in SADC.

Note to the editors:

The meeting was hosted by the Parliament of Namibia with support from the Inter- Parliamentary Union and UNICEF. Parliamentarians came from Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zambia.

About IPU

Established in 1889 and with Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU – the oldest multilateral political organization in the world – currently brings together 155 parliaments and eight associated regional assemblies. The world organization of parliaments also has an office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations. IPU website: www.ipu.org

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org



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