

## **Saving lives of children depends on bridging “nutrition gap”, says World Vision**

- **2.8 million children under five years of age die every year from malnutrition**
- **Existing solutions simple, inexpensive, yet often neglected**
- **Next week G-20 governments must make nutrition objectives a priority**

**OTTAWA, Ont. (Oct. 27, 2011)** — Every day more than 7,500 children under the age of five die as a result of malnutrition. This is worse than any famine, yet these deaths go unnoticed. According to a new World Vision report, [\*The Best Start: Saving Children's Lives in Their First 1,000 Days\*](#), simple solutions exist to prevent child mortality, but they are not reaching families in their homes and communities quickly enough.

“Overcoming malnutrition can be straightforward and relatively inexpensive. It doesn’t require medical breakthroughs. The answers are known, but there’s still a serious gap between knowing and doing,” says Caroline Riseboro, vice-president of public affairs, World Vision Canada.

“The first 1,000 days can determine the course of a child’s life. Poor nutrition can hinder brain development, delay motor skills, and slow down physical growth. It causes poor performance in school and can lead to real struggles to earn a living later in life,” says Riseboro, adding that children weakened by malnutrition often die from preventable causes such as diarrhea and pneumonia.

Based on field research in Bolivia, Ethiopia, Cambodia and Ghana, *The Best Start* draws on World Vision’s experience addressing the devastating effects of malnutrition on children and families. It highlights solutions and how they can be better integrated into agriculture, health, education and food security policies to reach families in their homes and communities.

“Most health planning leaves women and children on the sidelines,” says Riseboro. “Decision-making happens at the national and district government levels, without determining the actual needs at the family and community level. Only an integrated effort can win the war against malnutrition.”

Community-level, cost-effective programs do, however, save lives. A World Vision education program for community volunteers in India, for example, boosted vitamin A for young children from three to 100 per cent. Vitamin A deficiency in children under five kills almost 500,000 children a year, yet vitamin A can be provided to 80 per cent of children in developing countries for only \$1.20 per child per year.

### **G-20 leadership summit**

Next week's G-20 summit presents an important opportunity for governments to close the gap between systems and pledges on the one hand and families and communities on the other.

To do so, nutrition must be a key objective on the G-20's table. For example, as the G-20 leaders discuss plans for emergency food reserves to better deal with crises such as the famine in Somalia, it must prioritize the nutritional needs of women and children, especially those under two years of age.

"Families caught up in a drought or famine often rely on food aid for extended time periods. If this food has limited nutritional value, children could be eating daily and still be malnourished," explains Riseboro.

### **Facts:**

- Globally, 195 million children under the age of five are "stunted", meaning they have low height for their age due to malnutrition.
- Twenty-four countries account for more than 80 per cent of stunting worldwide.
- Every year, 1.5 million children in the developing world die from diarrhea; zinc can reduce deaths from diarrhea by about 25 per cent.
- Good nutrition in developing countries can boost economic productivity by as much as three per cent.

### **Resources**

Media can download the full report, photographs and case studies by [clicking here](#).

### **Contacts:**

Tiffany Baggetta - mobile 416-305-9612; [tiffany\\_baggetta@worldvision.ca](mailto:tiffany_baggetta@worldvision.ca)

Britt Hamilton – mobile 416-419-1321; [britt\\_hamilton@worldvision.ca](mailto:britt_hamilton@worldvision.ca)