

INVESTING IN GIRLS: MARKET OPPORTUNITIES BY SECTOR

Nutrition

Scale of nutrition-related issues facing girls

Malnutrition is a significant global health issue. Women and girls are more likely to suffer from nutritional deficiencies than men and boys, due to reproductive biology, social norms and poverty. An estimated one billion women and girls globally are malnourished.¹ Girls in particular have higher nutritional needs than boys during their adolescent growth spurt and the onset of menstruation. Malnutrition weakens women and girls' ability to survive childbirth, makes them more susceptible to infections, and leaves them with fewer reserves to recover from illness. Early marriage and pregnancy, when adolescent girls' bodies are still growing and changing, lead to a vicious cycle of undernutrition in the next generation. Infants born to mothers with anaemia are at greater risk of premature birth, low birth weight and impaired cognitive development, all of which can affect their ability to learn and earn, entrenching the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition and poverty.²

Girls may suffer nutritional deficiency where they have low social status. In some settings, girls' diets are negatively affected by cultural traditions favouring men and boys, and further exacerbated by poverty. If families are unable to provide enough food, they may force girls into early marriage to reduce the burden on the family, making girls more likely to become pregnant. In many societies, girls tend to eat the least amount and the least nutritious food, and to eat after male family members have eaten. Sometimes boys are given the food that is richer in iron, putting girls at higher risk of iron-deficiency. Food insecurity can also drive girls to trade sex for food, putting them at increased risk of sexual violence as well as HIV and other infections.

Key statistics

- The proportion of women of reproductive age with anaemia is 40% in Bangladesh, 35% in Nepal, 52% in Pakistan, 46% in Myanmar, 23% in Ethiopia, 27% in Kenya, 22% in Rwanda, 37% in Tanzania and 29% in Uganda.³
- In Tanzania, UNICEF found that 75% of adolescent girls had anaemia during their first pregnancy.⁴

Market opportunities in the nutrition sector

Businesses can engage in several different activities to promote better nutrition for adolescent girls, including nutrition-sensitive workplace policies, research and development, delivery of nutritious food products, education and behaviour-change communications. Businesses have the potential to make good nutrition an aspiration among adolescent girls through the market engagement and marketing strategies they develop.⁵ Until recently, nutrition programmes in South Asia, and worldwide, have tended to neglect the unique needs of adolescent girls in favor of prioritising pregnant and lactating women and children under five. While this focus is gradually shifting, relatively few examples exist of successful business models that address the specific nutritional needs of adolescent girls.

Impact of an investment in nutrition for girls

Investing in nutrition can yield real returns in national economies. Malnutrition is a significant economic burden to countries, as it costs billions of dollars in lost productivity and healthcare. Countries may lose as much 2–3% of potential GDP growth as a result of iron, iodine and zinc deficiencies.⁶ Research has shown that every US\$1 invested in nutrition returns on average US\$30 in schooling and productivity.⁷

An investment in nutrition could help girls (this generation and the next) to:



EARN: Improved nutrition can increase the chances of girls doing well in school and thereby increase their career prospects. Research has also shown that improved nutrition correlates with women being 10% more likely to run their own business.⁸



LEARN: Irregular school attendance by malnourished and unhealthy children has been identified as one of the key factors in poor educational performance. Children who are hungry find it more difficult to concentrate and to perform complex tasks.



BE HEALTHY: Healthy diets are important to support an adolescent girl's growth spurt and meet her body's increased need for iron during menstruation. As the negative effects of iron deficiency are often passed on to children, tackling anaemia during adolescence – along with preventing or delaying teenage pregnancy – will help to break the inter-generational cycle of growth failure.⁹

Example from a SPRING nutrition businesses

Founded in 2002, **Shreenagar Agro Farm** is Nepal's leading agriculture company, providing seed, feed, services and market linkages to farmers in the poultry, livestock and aquaculture sectors. The company wanted to diversify its branded egg product to reach lower income households through local retail shops, beyond their existing high-end packaged eggs sold in department stores.

Through SPRING, Shreenagar developed a new egg brand, Sunaulo Anda. The brand name and design were informed by SPRING research with adolescent girls. The marketing campaign targets girls through creative nutrition workshops in schools, a vibrant Facebook campaign and a fun, engaging new brand focusing on the benefits of eggs. As a result, Shreenagar's egg sales have increased and eggs have now become a stronger income stream for the business. The business has also developed some key strategic partnerships to expand egg distribution to low-income schools and communities. Collaborations to promote nutrition through increased egg consumption include Suahaara, One Egg Org, Tyson Group and Baliyo.

Case study taken from SPRING's report: [Building businesses for girl impact](#)

This brief is a combined summary of the SPRING East Africa and South Asia region-specific nutrition briefs, which will be published in September 2019.

Notes

- 1 Nutrition International (2016). 'Unlocking the Potential of One Billion Women and Girls.' <https://www.nutritionintl.org/2016/03/unlocking-the-potential-of-one-billion-women-and-girls/>. Accessed 22 July 2019.
- 2 Elder L. and Ransom E. (2003). 'Nutrition of Women and Adolescent Girls: Why It Matters.' Population Reference Bureau (blog). July 21.
- 3 World Health Organization data retrieved from data.worldbank.org.
- 4 UNICEF (2011). 'Adolescence in Tanzania'. United Nations Children's Fund. Available: https://www.unicef.org/tanzania/Tanzania_adolescents_for_young_people.pdf.
- 5 Dasra (2015). 'Three Square Meals: A Just Diet for India's Adolescent Girls.' Dasra. March.
- 6 Horton S., Alderman H. and Rivera J.A. (2008). 'The Challenge of Hunger and Malnutrition'. Copenhagen Consensus 2008 Challenge Paper. Copenhagen Consensus Center.
- 7 SUN, 'An Introduction to the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement.'
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 UNSCN (2010). 'Progress in Nutrition.' Sixth Report on the World Nutrition Situation. United Nations System Standing Council on Nutrition.

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