

10 PROPOSALS FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS INITIATIVE AGAINST CHILD MALNUTRITION IN PERU

The President Elect of the Republic, Dr. Alan García Pérez, has signed a commitment to reduce chronic child malnutrition by five percentage points, from 25% to 20%, reducing the gap between the urban and rural populations by the end of his administration's term. In connection with this effort, the institutions that make up *the Initiative Against Child Malnutrition* have already undertaken activities aimed at reducing this problem, and can already point to experience and evidence demonstrating a positive impact. We are now proposing certain, specific actions that the Government can take during the first 100 days of its term to effectively manage and implement a national strategy for reducing chronic malnutrition.

I. DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM.

Chronic malnutrition has remained nearly constant in the country for the past 10 years, affecting one in every four children under five years of age (approximately 626,386 children). Nevertheless, although national averages show the problem to have remained nearly constant, the gap between urban and rural populations in the interior of the country has grown. Thus, while the percentage of children suffering chronic malnutrition in urban areas has decreased (from 16.2% in 1996 to 10.1% in 2005), in rural areas this percentage has remained virtually unchanged (from 40.4% in 1996 to 39.0% in 2005). The lack of balance in solving this problem is the result of deficiencies in the design and implementation of public policies intended to improve social conditions in the country.

The immediate causes of chronic malnutrition are infectious diseases and insufficient food consumption, together with poor hygiene and feeding practices, the lack of safe water and basic sanitation, and limited availability of quality healthcare services. The structural causes of malnutrition are linked to the family's substandard economic conditions and low educational level, especially that of the mother. Finally, there are systemic causes, namely those connected to the implementation of government policies and actions and related to a lack of social investment, a failure to prioritize the most vulnerable groups, and the inefficient use of Government resources to correct the structural causes.

The Government, the international community and civil society have been engaged in national and regional efforts, but these efforts are very limited in comparison to the magnitude of the problem, and they are seldom comprehensive. Malnutrition is a multi-causal problem and as such it requires a concerted, multi-sectoral response. To date, the Government has approached the problem mainly in terms of food distribution, in which it invests 265 million dollars a year. These programs, however, have not had an impact on chronic malnutrition, do not always reach the poorest populations, and do not sufficiently integrate actions aimed at improving the other causes of malnutrition, such as healthcare, access to safe water and basic sanitation, and education.

As part of the effort to institute Federal policies to guide the long-term actions of governments, the country's political forces have joined with organized civil society to draft a National Agreement, which includes the fifteenth Food Security Policy and addresses child malnutrition as a central issue. In order to implement this policy of the National Agreement, the National Food Security Strategy was approved through Supreme Decree 068-2004-PCM. The main objective of this strategy is to reduce chronic malnutrition and anemia, for which it proposes concerted, multi-sectoral action; however, there has been no follow-up to the implementation of this strategy. To date, some regional governments have been implementing the national strategy, adapting it to their local context, but the political will of regional governments must be accompanied by that of the Federal Government. On the other hand, several non-governmental organizations (such as those that make up the Initiative Against Child Malnutrition) as well as the United Nations system have carried out activities in rural areas of the country that, based on objective evidence, have yielded successful results in reducing chronic malnutrition.

II. PROPOSAL FOR REDUCING MALNUTRITION.

The proposal described below falls within the scope of public management policies, and should serve as a framework for the implementation of specific and differentiated programs, depending on the area in which it is implemented (urban, rural, regional or local, among others). This proposal also fits within the framework of the decentralization process and is linked to national strategies for overcoming poverty and the new strategies proposed by the new government, such as "Water for All" and "Zero Hunger".

A. Political Commitment by the National Government

The drive necessary to achieve a reduction in child malnutrition must be accompanied by strong political will, making it possible to coordinate the actions of the sectors involved and to monitor progress and measure results on an ongoing basis, as a key component of commitment to social policy. So far, several legal norms and arrangements have been developed to improve child nutrition; however, these have been applied only partially or not at all, and without sufficient support to ensure full compliance.

In view of the above, we propose the following:

1. The President of the Republic should ratify and assume the commitment to reduce chronic malnutrition by five percentage points during his term in office, making this one of the principal objectives of his administration, and giving full authority to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to meet this commitment.
2. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) should assume responsibility for the implementation of the National Food Security Strategy that was approved through Supreme Decree 068-2004-PCM. To this end, it must establish clear duties and goals for each of the ministers, and coordinate their efforts in order to meet the objective of reducing chronic malnutrition. To carry out this task, the PCM should entrust the task of coordinating the ministries to the Interministerial Commission for Social Affairs, sufficiently empowering the Commission to carry out this task. Every six months, the ministers should report to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, indicating their progress and degree of fulfillment of their responsibilities and the goals of the ministries.
3. The Multi-sectoral Commission on Food Security (made up of members of the various ministries) should be reactivated as the technical entity responsible for coordinating the actions of each ministry to reduce chronic malnutrition. This commission would coordinate and report periodically to the Interministerial Commission for Social Affairs on the progress of each ministry in the fulfillment of its activities.
4. The President of the Republic should commit to report to the nation, once a year, the results of the fight against chronic malnutrition, on the basis of the following indicators which are currently generated by the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics and the Ministry of Health:
 - a. Prevalence of chronic malnutrition in rural and urban areas; and by region every two years.
 - b. Prevalence of diarrheal disease in rural and urban areas; and by region every two years.
 - c. Potable water coverage in rural and urban areas, and by region.
 - d. Percentage of families who purchase sufficient food to meet food energy needs in urban and rural areas; and by region every two years.

B. Nutritional Program Reforms

In the current decentralized framework of nutritional programs, work has been underway to reform these programs by merging the existing programs (PANFAR, PACFO and Comedores Infantiles) and by incorporating components in addition to food delivery: health, nutrition, and hygiene education, coordination of health services, monitoring, and evaluation.

Progress, however, has been very slow due to politically motivated factors and the resistance of the institutions that currently administer these programs. In addition, the municipal governments that receive benefits from these programs need to administer them, something that they cannot now do successfully due to limited capabilities.

In view of the foregoing, we propose:

5. A concerted plan should be defined for the implementation of redesigned nutritional programs, based on the pilot experience being conducted in the Ministry of Women and Social Development, together with other experience gained and evidence obtained that have demonstrated a positive impact on reducing childhood malnutrition. In this regard, the redesigned nutritional programs must include a significant level of resources dedicated to training intended to change health, nutrition, and hygiene practices.
6. The federal government should initiate the implementation of a program aimed at improving the management capabilities of municipal governments, including the administration of nutritional program resources, focusing on and tracking the results.

C. Quality of Expenditures

The Government is constantly asked to significantly increase resources intended for social investment. At the same time, the Ministry of Economy and Finance has been developing mechanisms and policies for the efficient expenditure of resources in order to achieve visible results. In spite of all this, resources are still being used inefficiently at the local, regional, and national levels.

Thus, for example, municipal and regional governments have federally-funded resources (participatory budgeting and the Mining Canon [tax on extractive industries], among others), which are generally used only for infrastructure works (not necessarily of the highest priority), because governments fail to clearly identify those actions that would allow them to most effectively meet their most urgent needs. In addition, the best use cannot be made of a major portion of the resources received from extractive industry royalties because the projects fail to meet the requirements of the National Public Investment System (SNIP), given the weak capabilities of municipal and regional governments to prepare and carry out social and productivity investment projects.

In light of the above, we propose:

7. Local governments should determine that no less than 30% of their Participatory Budget and funds received from the Mining Canon will be invested in training in nutrition and hygiene, water access infrastructure and basic sanitation, and in improving conditions for the sustainable development of rural economies.

8. The Ministry of Economy and Finance should initiate the implementation of a program that strengthens and offers technical assistance to regional and local governments in the preparation of investment project proposals that will meet the requirements of the National Public Investment System (SNIP) and which are aimed at actions that will contribute to a reduction in child malnutrition.
9. Municipal governments should establish mechanisms for accountability to their organized populace, civil society and other local and regional players with respect to actions carried out to reduce child malnutrition.
10. The national government should create an incentive program to reward municipal governments that achieve more efficient performance in carrying out actions that help to reduce child malnutrition.

The following organizations are signatories to this proposal:

Adra Perú

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

CARE Perú

Caritas del Perú

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Mesa de Concertación de Lucha contra la Pobreza (MCLCP - Coordination Board for the Fight Against Poverty)

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

PRISMA

World Food Programme (WFP)

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