

## The launch of the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Consortium

The Micronutrient Forum and its partners, supported by Kirk Humanitarian and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, launched the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Consortium (HMHB) <https://hmhbconsortium.org/> at a global webinar on 10th March 2021. The consortium aims to generate momentum for coordinated action on maternal nutrition, initially focusing on scaling up access and use of affordable multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS). Through the combined effort of the consortium members, it is envisaged that more pregnant women will benefit from improved nutrition through MMS, have healthier pregnancies and thereby give their babies a better chance to survive and thrive.

HMHB members represent a diverse community, united in their vision to increase the global demand, supply and delivery of MMS through effective advocacy, networking and knowledge management. Dr Saskia Osendarp, Executive Director of the Micronutrient Forum, explains, "At the core of this initiative is the belief that women and babies deserve our best, and our best requires us to work together through an inclusive platform that brings advocates and experts across sectors and across the world together around one common agenda and a unified voice".

MMS contain 15 micronutrients that are essential to the health of mothers and their babies. The consortium builds on the strong evidence base that MMS are safe, cost-effective and consistently associated with better birth outcomes compared to iron folic acid (IFA) supplementation alone. Recent systematic

reviews have highlighted that, compared to IFA, using MMS can decrease the risk of low birth-weight, 6-month mortality, preterm birth, small-for-gestational age and stillbirth. Despite this, many women in low- and middle-income countries do not have access to MMS, placing their own health and that of their babies at unacceptable risk.

One of the reasons there is limited access to MMS is because it is not yet on the World Health Organization's Essential Medicines List (EML) which includes the medications considered to be most effective and safe to meet the most important needs in a health system. The list is frequently used by countries to help to develop their own local lists of essential medicines. If MMS were on the EML, this would help open the door for countries to improve access. An application has been made to include MMS on the EML to this end. HMHB is asking its members and stakeholders to write letters of support for this application and has more information on its website on how to take action.

On 31st March 2021, HMHB facilitated an online workshop where participants helped to shape an advocacy agenda for MMS, outlining strategies to improve engagement with the maternal health sector and how the upcoming Nutrition For Growth (N4G) Summit (taking place in Tokyo in December 2021) could be leveraged for global policy and financial commitments to maternal nutrition. A living draft of the advocacy strategy for the N4G Summit ("Maternal Nutrition and Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation: A Commitment Guide for Tokyo's 2021 Nutrition for Growth Summit") can be found at <https://hmhbconsortium.org/nn4g-commitment-guide>

## Launch of the Nutrition Year of Action

In December 2020, the Governments of Canada and Bangladesh, in partnership with the Government of Japan, hosted a virtual launch of the Nutrition Year of Action. This began a year-long initiative to address the global hunger and nutrition crisis which will culminate in the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in Tokyo, Japan, during December 2021. The Year of Action falls midway through the United Nations (UN) Decade of Action on Nutrition, with only five years left to achieve the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, and 10 years to reach the SDGs. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already perilous nutrition situation for the most vulnerable, the need for commitment to, and investment in, achieving a world in which all people have access to safe, affordable and nutritious food by 2030 is all the more critical.

At the time of the launch, new data released by the Standing Together for Nutrition consortium highlighted the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on maternal and child nutrition, with an additional 168,000 child deaths predicted over the next two years. Additionally, in the absence of immediate and significant global action, a further 9.3 million children are estimated to be at risk of wasting. Thus, an emphasis on the need for new and revived commitments to achieving the nutrition agenda was made.

To this end, more than US\$3 billion in financing was pledged by various stakeholders with the Government of Canada committing US\$407 million and the Government of Pakistan committing US\$2.18 billion to nutrition programming through to 2025. This was bolstered by various multilateral organisations and non-government organisations with World Vision International pledging an extended US\$500 million to be spent on nutrition by 2025. An annual investment of at least \$700 million per year towards nutrition programming for children, adolescents and women was committed by UNICEF over the next five years and the World Bank committed \$500 million in Early Response Financing from the IDA-19 Crisis Response Window to target countries facing food insecurity crises.

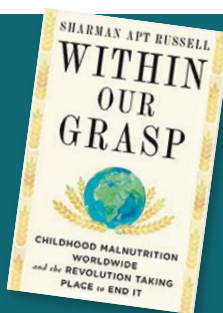
While serving as a basis for renewed action towards eradicating malnutrition, these pledges will meet only a fraction of the global need. As such, the Year of Action provides a platform for further investment via a roadmap of key pledging, momentum building and global moments. With the key pledging moments outlined, namely the UN Food Systems Pre-Summit, the UN Food Systems Summit and the Tokyo N4G Summit 2021, to begin in July, the need to further mobilise resources for nutrition through the coming months is critical to ensuring that the vision for the Year of Action is met.

More information on the launch and a full list of the commitments made can be found here: <https://nutritionforgrowth.org/nutrition-year-of-action-launch-event-recap/>

## Within our grasp: Childhood malnutrition worldwide and the revolution taking place to end it

Sharman Apt Russell has recently published a book<sup>1</sup> that examines the urgent problem of childhood malnutrition worldwide and explains why this is an environmental concern as well as a humanitarian one. Intertwined with stories of scientists and nutrition experts, Russell writes of her travels to Malawi, one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world and also the site of cutting-edge research into childhood malnutrition. She visits Malawian farmers coping with erratic weather patterns due to global warming and highlights an agroecology that relies on more drought-tolerant and nutrient-rich crops.

As she explores new friendships and insights in a country known as 'the warm heart of Africa', Russell describes the programmes that are working best to reduce childhood malnutrition. She explains why the empowerment of women may be the single most effective factor in eliminating childhood malnutrition, which vitamins and minerals are the most essential to a child's development and how much ending malnutrition and stunting will cost. The book is now available from booksellers worldwide.



<sup>1</sup> Russell, S A (2021) *Within our grasp: Childhood malnutrition worldwide and the revolution taking place to end it*. New York: Pantheon Books.