



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

FIGHTING MALNUTRITION: ONE OF THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE INVESTMENTS A COUNTRY CAN MAKE

Parliament of Namibia, Inter Parliamentary Union and UNICEF host regional parliamentary meeting to galvanize action and advance nutrition goals in Southern Africa

25 September, Windhoek.- In an effort to forge greater commitment to invest in nutrition, over 60 parliamentarians from fourteen Southern African Development Countries, will be gathering for a two-day meeting from 28 to 29 September 2015, in Windhoek, Namibia. Hosted by the Parliament of Namibia in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF, the forum aims to build consensus amongst parliamentarians on leveraging resources for scaling up and strengthening nutrition programmes and policies. The meeting will stress the crucial role parliamentarians can play in contributing to the reduction of malnutrition and stunting rates, from enacting laws and regulations, influencing the shape of national development plans and determining national budget design and allocations.

In a region where more than half the population survives on less than \$1 a day, about 33 to 35 percent of the population is malnourished, with continued existence of chronic food insecurity and high levels of poverty. The situation is worsened by the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS leading to the loss of agricultural labour force, including the frequent droughts and floods – leaving many people in the region without food and in need of humanitarian assistance. Women, children and youth are reported to be the most vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity in many SADC countries.

The majority, if not all, of the middle income countries in Southern Africa, including Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa are characterized by the most severe income inequalities in the world.

However, most of the SADC Member States have adopted policies and strategies in accordance with SADC Protocol on Health and the SADC Health Policy Framework 2000, with visible impact on improving nutritional status of their citizenry and addressing the SADC's long-term goals of eliminating poverty.

“We have evidence that shows that malnutrition is not merely the result of too little food, but is caused by a combination of factors: insufficient energy, protein and micronutrients; frequent infections or disease; poor care and infant feeding practices; inadequate health services; unsafe water and sanitation; and frequent natural disasters. We therefore need a holistic and systematic approach in addressing this by influencing the shape of national development plans,” said Micaela Marques de Sousa, UNICEF Representative in Namibia.

Following the MDG Summit in September 2010, the international community including many countries in Africa, came together to launch the “Scale-Up Nutrition” (SUN) initiative, a global call for greater national ownership and stewardship of nutrition interventions and better coordination of nutrition activities. The Southern African Development Community also recently finalized its strategic



framework for nutrition; the SADC’s Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2015 - 2025), which provides a further roadmap for addressing food insecurity and poverty especially among the most vulnerable populations

“Parliaments can make a critical contribution to the efforts being made on the ground. They have the power to enact laws and policies that can shape the way we respond to challenges such as malnutrition,” said Professor Peter Katjavivi, the Speaker of National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia. “This meeting takes place at an opportune time, when we all (as government from the region), have committed to implementing the SADC’s Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2015 - 2025). We will be sharing and learning from each other.”

Members of parliament will be able to use this platform to share lessons learned, discuss the latest evidence from the region and gain a deeper understanding of the tools at their disposal to respond to and advocate for the reduction of malnutrition in their respective countries.

“We know from our experiences here in Namibia that for any national plans and strategies to work, they need to be owned and led not only by the Government but by Parliament as well. They need to be seen as an investment that is cost-effective, easy-to-implement, with educational and practical follow-up components, that can be put in place at the grassroots level, allowing communities to take the matter of nutrition into their own hands, monitor their children's growth and organize to secure what they require to meet their daily needs,” said Christine //Hoebes, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s office and co-convenor for Nutrition.

The implementation of the SADC’s Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2015 - 2025) will require resources in the form of human, material, technical and financial resources. It is hopeful that the meeting will bring about a strong recommitment from participants with tangible outcomes that will ensure the development of satisfactory, comprehensive and complementary national food and nutrition security policies and strategies.

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Note to the editors:

Parliamentarians attending this event are from Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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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