

16th July 2010, Harare - Tinashe, a single mother of three living in Mbare township in Harare, the Zimbabwean capital, regularly misses a meal so as to stretch her US\$90 a month income, and occasionally gives her children food left over from her employers' meals at the middle-class household where she is a domestic worker.

"My children are at the stage when they should be growing tall, but that is not the case - they are underweight," said Tinashe, who did not want her surname used. Her wages pay the rent and the school fees, but there is never enough money to put regular meals on the table, she told IRIN.

Many households endure the same experience. "Nearly 12,000 child deaths each year may be attributable to maternal and child under-nutrition", the latest Zimbabwe Food and National Nutrition Survey noted.

The survey was produced by the UN Children's Agency (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the British government's Department for International Development (DFID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Helen Keller International, which works to prevent malnutrition and blindness.

"The prevalence of chronic malnutrition is now 33.8 percent and, according to World Health Organization standards, that means one in every three children is chronically malnourished - a significant public health threat," said George Kembo, director of the Zimbabwe Food and Nutrition Council. "Only 8.4 percent of children under two years - meaning one in 10 children - is receiving a diet that is minimally acceptable."

UNICEF's country representative, Peter Salama, said in terms of the survey more than a third of Zimbabwe's children under the age of five were chronically malnourished and consequently suffering from stunted growth. Children in rural areas were found to be more affected by malnutrition than those living in urban areas.

"The data emerging from the survey provides irrefutable evidence of the magnitude of the problem of malnutrition in Zimbabwe. These levels of malnutrition are unacceptably high. They represent not only a challenge to reaching our development goals, but will also constrain economic growth," he said.

The survey did not expect the country to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set by the UN, of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and reducing child mortality, unless the prevailing situation changed.

A range of factors contributed to malnutrition. "Exclusive breastfeeding is considered the cornerstone of child survival and development. If universally practised by over 80 percent of the

population, it can result in 13 percent reduction of under five mortality," Kembo said.

Sanitation

Harare's sanitation woes remain a vexed issue. In recent years poor maintenance of the sewerage and water reticulation systems, and unaffordable water purifying chemicals, have been blamed for outbreaks of cholera, a waterborne disease, that have claimed the lives of thousands of people.

Residents have consistently complained that they were charged for water that was either not delivered or unsafe to drink, and have subsequently refused to pay their water bills.

The mayor of Harare, Muchadeyi Masunda, told IRIN the city would be forced to disconnect water supplies for non-payment of bills, because there was "nothing for nothing".

It is a circular argument. Masunda said residents had to settle their accounts, so the city could purchase water treatment chemicals, in order to supply safe drinking water.

Source: [IRIN](#)