ACF International Welcomes New Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition

June 7 2013 | ACF International applauds the latest series on maternal and child nutrition published by leading medical journal The Lancet today.

Five years after the initial series launched in 2008, the medical journal’s leading nutrition experts revealed startling evidence reconfirming that severe acute malnutrition remains a critical global health crisis. According to The Lancet, global malnutrition now accounts for 45% all child deaths worldwide: a staggering 3.1 million young lives are lost each year—a half million from wasting, or severe acute malnutrition — making undernutrition the single greatest threat to child survival.

Anne-Dominique Israel, a Nutrition and Health Advisor for ACF, said: ‘We welcome The Lancet’s findings and its call for strident action as we work towards a solution to childhood deaths from undernutrition; a solution which we know is possible in this lifetime because it is preventable, treatable and affordable.’ The Lancet series says that treating a severely malnourished child is indeed more cost-effective than any of the other nine proven nutrition interventions such as providing vitamin supplements.

The series stresses the importance of ensuring that malnourished children have access to proven nutrition interventions that save lives. Nearly 300,000 to 500,000 lives could be saved by scaling up the availability of existing treatment programmes addressing severe acute malnutrition.

For the first time ever, it also affirms the importance of the role of maternal mental health in child survival, with the provision of psychological support and care practices as crucial to a child’s development - something that Action Against Hunger has championed over the past decade.

Lead author Professor Robert Black and his team advocate for this framework to include a multi-sectoral approach that brings key stakeholders from Governments, civil society and communities together to create lasting change. ‘We support The Lancet’s new conceptual framework that goes beyond an exploration of the causes of undernutrition to propose concrete multi-sectoral actions aimed at achieving important childhood nutrition benchmarks,’ said Ms Israel.

‘In addition, reaching adequate funding levels must be a priority if global leaders are committed to effectively tackle child malnutrition,’ continued Ms Israel.

The Lancet estimates that $9.6 billion is needed to tackle undernutrition in the 34 countries that account for 90% of the global burden of malnutrition — down slightly from the $11.8 billion figure cited by the World Bank in 2008. Action Against Hunger’s research suggests that current funding levels represent just 1.2% of the $11.8 billion figure, a far cry from the levels of support needed to properly tackle this global health crisis.

In particular, emphasis must be placed on the importance of increasing the investment in strengthening health systems to provide quality service delivery across a range of health system functions - from governance to financing, health information systems to human resources, logistics to service delivery. Further research is also urgently required to further elucidate the relationship between wasting and stunting.

The timing of the series is particularly profound as world leaders prepare to meet for their annual G8 summit, preceded by the UK and Brazilian governments co-hosting a high-level event on Nutrition for Growth.

Nutrition is the building block of every child’s well-being. Global leaders must unlock the future potential of generations to come.