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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development

Statement submitted by Bahjat Al-Baqir Charity Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ E/CN.9/2020/1.

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Analysing and evaluating the nutritional situation of children under 5 years of age (Baghdad Governorate as example)

Childhood years are considered as most important stages of human beings since they learn and acquire many skills, experiences and behaviours that determine their character and nutritional habits. The most important feature of the child in this stage is the rapid growth during few years, the love of independence and self-fulfilment. Also, increase in nutritional needs as well as psychological and intellectual changes where children are among the most sensitive categories of physiological changes, crises and food deprivation, they are the most affected population group by nutritional status. It is a priority issue for the international community. The World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, and World Food Programme all have mentioned the importance of food to people and as the Sustainable Development Goal 2 calls on states to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". It is undeniable that development's goals are interconnected and related to each other specifically the ones that relate to population variables, nutritional status and food security of the population.

Malnutrition is linked to more than half of all causes of children's deaths. Also, it stunts the physical growth and decreases productivity. Moreover, it causes premature aging and shorter lifespans in developing countries. Malnourished children are more likely to be diagnosed with common childhood diseases which may lead to their death. Malnutrition among children has more negative impacts on their health and future than among adults. Seven out of one hundred suffer food deprivation in Iraq, that is, approximately 2,370,000 people, and most affected are children. The root of the problem is traced back to 1991 since the war broke out and led to destruction of the infrastructure, food shortages, poor sanitation and declining social and economic sectors which in general was negatively reflected on health conditions. This study is important because children in Iraq constitute 14 per cent of Iraq's population (5,733,000 out of approximately 39 million).

a) Problem examined by the study

Revealing the condition of children under the age of 5 years old in Iraq and Baghdad according to malnutrition indicators (weight loss, wasting, stunting, obesity) and analysing their spatial relationship.

b) Theory of the study

Food insecurity is high compared to population and varies in Iraq due to different spatial variations (economic, family size, unemployment, illiteracy, income level, expenditure level, work of household head, mother's educational attainment, poverty, food deprivation, characteristics of housing). Spatial differences of these characteristic had a major impact in the emergence of food insecurity.

c) Method of the study

The sources of this study are from reports and surveys published by Central Office of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, as well as population estimates that are relevant to the subject of this study and United Nations publications. These sources were used to find out the spatial relationship of widespread malnutrition and explain spatial variation with a number of variables. A field study was conducted to study the malnutrition situation in Baghdad; our researchers surveyed 500 people using the Krejcie and Morgantable to determine sample size.

i) Development of nutritional status of children in Iraq

Malnutrition and health issues started to emerge in the beginning of 1990s due to circumstances the country went through and nutritional issues were the major one although the government at the time had policies to deal with the economic blockade. A considerable increase is noted in malnutrition rates among children under age of 5. According to data from Health and Welfare in Iraq After the Gulf Crises, an in-depth assessment made by an international study team, 9 per cent of children under age of 5 suffered underweight, 3 per cent suffered wasting, and 18 per cent suffered stunting in 1991. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys conducted by UNICEF in 1996 found that rates had increased to 23.4 per cent (underweight) and 11 per cent (wasting) and 32 per cent (stunting).

ii) Nutritional status of children under the age of 5

More than 8 per cent of children under the age of 5 suffer from malnutrition (underweight) and 6.9 per cent from acute malnutrition (wasting) and 21 per cent from chronic malnutrition (stunting) and 10.8 per cent suffer from obesity. Children in the north of Iraq and specifically in Kirkuk have better nutritional status and malnutrition rates decrease compared to the south and centre of Iraq. However, Baghdad has the biggest portion of children in Iraq and therefore malnutrition indicators (underweight, wasting, stunting) are high compared to other parts of Iraq.

iii) Nutritional status for children in Baghdad

The number of children under the age of 5 in Baghdad reached 1,120,000 in 2019. Most of them live in poor neighbourhoods and Baghdad is in the top for children with (798,022) who suffer from malnutrition based on four indicators (underweight, wasting, stunting, and obesity). Most of them diagnosed with stunting found in 342,423 children which is equal to 18.8 per cent. Numbers affected by other malnutrition indicators were 132,091 (12.1 per cent) wasted, 205,148 (20 per cent) obese, and 118,360 (10.8 per cent) underweight.

iv) Analysing nutritional status for children in Iraq

In the spirit of moving forward toward accomplishing sustainable development's goals and food security indicators we must strive to decrease severe and moderate food insecurity among all people, including children. Failing to meet these goals is not the only reason that malnutrition still exists, there is also a failure to deal with issues such as mothers' and children's health, AIDS, education, gender equality and various population and non-population variables. Analysing spatial relationship is a step towards formation of policies to achieve goals that have been mentioned which is based on spatial relationship for this phenomenon. After reviewing 500 cases of children diagnosed in Baghdad that were interviewed personally, data were analysed using quantitative methods such as link and factor analysis between dependent variables for malnutrition indicators and independent variables including gender, characteristics of housing, birth delivery, parents' life, breastfeeding, parents' education, vaccines, intake of supplementary food, health status of mother during childbirth, mother's age, child's age, parents' occupation, amount of income, family size, number of children in the family, birth spacing, child's order of birth, and rural and urban environment. Independent variables explained 65 per cent of the cases examined and it was noted that demographic, economic and social variables have more influence on nutritional status for children than health and spatial variables. Also, nutritional status reflects the population situation based on variables that the study examined.

This result explains why severe and moderate food insecurity is high in Iraq. Demographic characteristics which are represented by high growth rate, family size, rise in dependency rate, higher proportion of young and unemployment, low income, poor working environments, low education, skills and abilities of the population all played a major role in increasing food insecurity. Therefore, efforts are needed to bring qualitative and quantitative changes to the population in addition to economic and developmental changes that would lower this ratio. Moreover, there is a need to provide practical guidance to problems that face children and improve their living conditions and work toward having availability of information on the situation of children in order to monitor progress toward relevant sustainable development goals including eradicating poverty and hunger to reduce the proportion of population who suffer hunger. Furthermore, decreasing the malnutrition ratio will lead to achieve another goal which is lowering child mortality for the same age group and improving the welfare and quality of life for children.

Finally, we encourage strengthening partnerships between international and local organizations to mitigate negative impacts and set plans to meet health, psychological and education needs for children. Therefore, Bahajat Al-Baqir Charity Foundation targeted children who live in poor families through its activities. Our foundation started projects in education, health and financial care to people in need. The foundation worked based on the sustainable development goals to make primary school available to all and to address problems of children. For instance, the foundation contributed in rehabilitating 38 primary schools and provided school uniforms to 1,500 pupils in Baghdad. Also, the Foundation built 43 clinics in underdeveloped areas that have served about 1,700,000 people since they opened in 2012.
