
Honduras: Nutrition Profile

Malnutrition in childhood and pregnancy has many adverse consequences for child survival and long-term well-being. It also has far-reaching consequences for human capital, economic productivity, and national development overall. The consequences of malnutrition should be a significant concern for policymakers in Honduras, which now carries a double burden of chronic malnutrition (stunting or low height-for-age) among children under 5 years (23 percent) and overweight/obesity among women of reproductive age (51 percent).

Background

Honduras is a lower-middle-income country of more than 9 million, and it is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with a third of the population living on less than a dollar a day. Dependent on agricultural and manufacturing exports, Honduras was hit hard by the 2008–2009 global economic downturn and a serious political crisis that led to a temporary halt of international cash flows. The country recovered with 3.5 percent GDP growth in 2015, mainly boosted by public investments, exports, and higher remittances (World Bank 2017). Despite a decrease in annual population growth from 2.9 percent in 1990 to 1.7 percent in 2016, there is inequitable access to land and insufficient food production. Significant challenges to human development include natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, droughts and environmental degradation, which ruin crops and prevent access to food and other basic necessities (WFP 2017). Plagued by high unemployment and exposure to natural disasters, the eastern and southwestern regions are among the poorest and most food insecure. Food and nutritional insecurity among most vulnerable populations have worsened because of the ongoing droughts in the southern and western regions of the country, known as the Dry Corridor (WFP 2017).

Currently, Honduras ranks 104th out of 157 countries in progress toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sachs et al. 2017). Challenges to development in Honduras include a high level of insecurity, migration, drug trafficking, and corruption (WFP 2017). Honduras also has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, which costs an estimated 10 percent of GDP (World Bank 2017).

Nutrition and Food Security Situation

In Honduras, 23 percent of all children under 5 years are stunted, according to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (Secretaría de Salud et al. 2013). Stunting increases with age, peaking at 29 percent among children 36–47 months. While stunting among children under 5 improved from 30 percent in 2006, the prevalence of stunting among children 24–35 months increased from 23 percent in 2006 to 27 percent in 2012. The prevalence of thinness among adolescent girls also increased from 9 percent in 2006 to 12 percent in 2012. This is important because childbearing begins early in Honduras. By age 19, 19 percent of adolescent girls had begun childbearing in 2012 which is an increase from 17 percent in 2006 (Secretaría de Salud et al. 2013). This has serious consequences because, relative to older mothers, adolescent girls are more likely to be malnourished and have a low birth weight baby who is more likely to become malnourished, and be at increased risk of illness and death than those born to older mothers (Secretaría de Salud et al. 2013). The risk of stunting is 63 percent higher among first-born children of girls under 18 years, and as such, early motherhood is a key driver of malnutrition (Fink et al. 2014). There is huge disparity in chronic undernutrition according to maternal education and wealth levels—only 11 percent of children whose mothers have secondary education are stunted, while the rate rises to 48 percent of children whose mothers had no formal education. Similarly, 8 percent of children in the highest wealth quintile are stunted, while 42 percent of children in the lowest wealth quintile are stunted. At the same time, more than half of women of reproductive age are overweight or obese, which increases their risk for diet-related non-communicable diseases (Secretaría de Salud et al. 2013). Acute

malnutrition (wasting or low weight-for-height) was stable from 2006 to 2012 at 1 percent among children under 5 years.

The prevalence of early initiation of breastfeeding decreased from 79 percent in 2006 to 64 percent in 2012, while children who received a pre-lacteal feed increased from 31 percent in 2006 to 44 percent in 2012. In addition, the coverage for pregnant women receiving iron decreased from 70 percent in 2006 to 37 percent in 2012 (Secretaría de Salud et al. 2006 and 2013).

An estimated 1.5 million Hondurans are food insecure, in particular those living in the southern and western regions. These areas suffer from environmental degradation yet are home to a high concentration of smallholder farmers (WFP 2017). The causes of malnutrition and food insecurity in Honduras are multifaceted and include poor infant and young child feeding practices, including low prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding, which contributes to high prevalence of illnesses and poor nutrition among children under 2 years; poor hygiene practices and inadequate sanitation services that exacerbate disease; recurrent natural disasters and weather extremes including prolonged drought and hurricanes; a susceptibility to the effects of climate change; and poverty (WFP 2017; Secretaría de Salud et al. 2013).

Honduras Nutrition Data (DHS 2006 and 2012)		
Population 2016 (UNICEF 2017)	9.113 million	
Population under 5 years of age (0–59 months) 2016 (UNICEF 2017)	951,000	
	DHS 2006	DHS 2012
Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years (0–59 months)	30%	23%
Prevalence of underweight among children under 5 years (0–59 months)	8%	7%
Prevalence of wasting among children under 5 years (0–59 months)	1%	1%
Prevalence of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg) (of children whose birth weights are known)	8%	9%
Prevalence of anemia among children 6–59 months	37%	29%
Prevalence of anemia among women of reproductive age (15–49 years)	19%	15%
Prevalence of thinness among women of reproductive age (15–49 years)	4%	5%
Prevalence of thinness among adolescent girls (15–19 years) (BMI less than 18.5 kg/m ²)	9%	12%
Prevalence of children 0–5 months exclusively breastfed	30%	31%
Prevalence of children 4–5 months exclusively breastfed	16%	19%
Prevalence of early initiation of breastfeeding (i.e. put to the breast within 1 hour of birth)	79%	64%
Prevalence of children who receive a pre-lacteal feed	31%	44%
Prevalence of breastfed children 6–23 months receiving minimum acceptable diet	NA	59%
Prevalence of overweight/obesity among children under 5 years (0–59 months)	NA	NA
Prevalence of overweight/obesity among women of reproductive age (15–49 years)	47%	51%
Coverage of iron for pregnant women (for at least 90 days)	70%	37%
Coverage of vitamin A supplements for children (6–59 months, in the last 6 months)	49%	73%
Percentage of children 6–59 months living in households with iodized salt	NA	NA

NA: Not Available

National Nutrition Policies/Legislation, Strategies, and Initiatives

Honduras' commitment to improving nutrition is outlined in the following documents, which are aligned with the Government's Country Vision 2010–2038 and National Plan (2010–2022):

- National Health Plan (2014–2018)
- State Policy: Strategic Plan for the Agri-Food Sector and the Rural Environment of Honduras (2004–2021)
- National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security (2010–2022)

Under the overarching framework of the Country Vision 2010–2038, the National Health Plan identifies three areas of urgent and necessary change: (1) accelerated increase in access to quality health services; (2) increased well-being and health of the population through the reduction of maternal and child mortality; and (3) modification of the structure, functioning, and response of the current health system. The government also established a national committee on food security and nutrition to serve as a mechanism to coordinate strategic priorities across relevant ministries. In 2010, the country passed the Milk Glass for the Strengthening of School Lunch Law, which provides 200 ml of milk to school children 200 days per year. In 2011, the country passed a food and nutritional security law and a law on food fortification, giving the Ministry of Health the ability to declare fortification of foods mandatory for the public good, the power to enforce that decision, and the flexibility to revise fortification levels without the need for an act of Congress (WHO 2017).

In 2010, Honduras created the Presidential Program of Health, Education, and Nutrition "BONO 10,000," with the purpose of breaking the intergenerational cycle of extreme poverty through the creation of opportunities and development of skills and competences in education, health, and nutrition for families (WHO 2017).

The Dry Corridor Alliance agreement, which calls for lifting 50,000 families out of poverty, reducing malnutrition by 20 percent, and building or repairing 280 kilometer (174 miles) of new roads, is the guiding document for all donors to coordinate their activities. The U.S. Government is an integral member of this alliance.

USAID Programs: Accelerating Progress in Nutrition

As of January 2018, the following USAID programs with a focus on nutrition were active in Honduras. The U.S. Government selected Honduras as one of 12 Feed the Future target countries for focused investment under the new U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy.

Selected Projects and Programs Incorporating Nutrition in Honduras		
Name	Dates	Description
Feed the Future MERCADO Program	2014–2019	MERCADO focuses on three departments in western Honduras characterized by some of the highest levels of poverty and malnutrition in the country: Santa Bárbara, Copán, and Ocotepeque. These departments constitute three of the six Dry Corridor (Corredor Seco) departments that USAID has targeted for development, which are collectively referred to as the Zone of Influence (ZOI). The three MERCADO departments form the Northern ZOI. The project is working in six key areas to enable economic growth and nutrition improvements at the household level: 1. Technical assistance and training to enhance the capacity of poor and extreme poor households in production, postharvest management, and marketing. 2. Market access through linking smallholders with input suppliers and buyers to realize new supply opportunities, with emphasis on local anchor firms. 3. Rural financial services through existing and new financial intermediaries, including <i>cajas rurales</i> ; cooperatives; commercial banks; buyers and input suppliers that offer credit; and other service providers. 4. Policy assistance in eliminating constraints that impede rural households from accessing market opportunities. 5. Malnutrition prevention by: enhancing the capacity of rural households to improve utilization and consumption of healthy food; improving living conditions; and reducing health problems. 6. Health and nutrition services to increase outreach and effectiveness of community health and volunteer services (Fintrac, Inc. 2015). In 2017, more than 17,342 farmers and other producers applied new technologies and management practices with Feed the Future’s help, and producers applied improved technologies and management practices on more than 13,082 hectares of land. Feed the Future-supported producers increased the value of their agricultural sales

		by nearly \$20 million over baseline. Feed the Future leveraged nearly \$14 million in new private sector investments in food and agriculture in Honduras, helped train more than 63,000 people in child health and nutrition, and reached 16,008 children under 5 years with health and nutrition services.
Alliance for the Dry Corridor	2014–2018	Many of the families suffering from poverty and undernutrition in Honduras live in the Dry Corridor, an area with dry and variable climatic conditions in western Honduras. Producers in this area are experiencing higher variability in daily temperatures and increased water deficits. Without cultivation methods that address these challenges, farmers could see yields of their staple crops drop by one-third in the next decade. Feed the Future helps farmers mitigate these risks by using improved techniques, drought-tolerant seed varieties, and efficient irrigation systems. Feed the Future also encourages the use of renewable energy by promoting private investment and helping the Honduran government create incentives through regulatory system reform. Additionally, Feed the Future invests in small renewable energy projects in isolated communities that are not connected to the national electric grid (USAID 2017a).
Feed the Future Innovation Labs	Ongoing	The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Climate-Resilient Beans integrates new scientific technologies with traditional breeding approaches to develop heat- and drought-tolerant, high-yielding, farmer-accepted bean varieties. The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Grain Legumes is: developing improved grain legume varieties that are resistant to climatic stresses and disease and insect threats, enhancing soil and pest management practices, and boosting the nutritional and health status of women and young children by supporting improved access to grain legumes. The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Horticulture is improving smallholder farmers’ abilities to grow, sell, and consume nutritious, high-value fruit and vegetable crops by: targeting innovative technologies including postharvest handling, increasing research capacity, improving access to information and markets, and ensuring gender equity (USAID 2017b).
Promoting Food Security and Trade Integration through Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) and Other Agriculture-Related Capacity Building	2011–2019	Implemented by Feed the Future and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this program is providing technical assistance, training, and knowledge exchanges on food safety and market information systems to both the private sector and governmental agricultural institutions in the region to increase productivity, access to markets, and private investment in agriculture and food security in communities and households.
Food for Peace	Ongoing	In 2016, irregularities in the distribution and amount of rainfall contributed to low harvests, inconsistent and limited employment opportunities, and the exhaustion of food reserves in Honduras. The Office of Food for Peace (FFP) supported World Food Programme (WFP) programs to address food-insecure households in Honduras. WFP used International Disaster Assistance funds to provide households with targeted cash transfers and food vouchers, which allowed them to buy food on the local market. In addition, WFP used FFP Title II emergency assistance to meet the immediate needs of those most affected by the El Niño drought. This funding provided for the distribution of 480 metric tons of U.S. in-kind food assistance to vulnerable households (USAID 2017a).

References

- Fink, G., Sudfeld, C.R., Danaei, G., Ezzati, M. Fawzi, W.W. 2014. Scaling-Up Access to Family Planning May Improve Linear Growth and Child Development in Low and Middle Income Countries. PLoS ONE 9(7): e102391. Doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0102391.
- Fintrac, Inc. 2015. *Annual Report #1: Mercado*. Available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KZ88.pdf
- Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Durand-Delacre, D. and Teksoz, K. 2017. *SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017*. New York, NY: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- Secretaría de Salud [Honduras] (SS), Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), and Macro International. 2006. *Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Demografía 2005–2006*. Tegucigalpa, Honduras: SS, INE, and Macro International.
- Secretaría de Salud [Honduras] (SS), Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), and ICF International. 2013. *Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Demografía 2011–2012*. Tegucigalpa, Honduras: SS, INE, and ICF International.
- UNICEF. 2017. *The State of the World's Children 2017*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sowc/>
- USAID. 2017a. "Central America: Fact Sheet." Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/Fact_Sheet-Promoting_Food_Security_and_Trade_in_Central_America.pdf
- USAID. 2017b. "Snapshot: Feed the Future Innovation Labs." Available at: https://feedthefuture.gov/sites/default/files/resource/files/FTF_Innovation_Lab_Fact_Sheet_March_2017.pdf
- World Bank. 2017. "Honduras Country Profile." Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/honduras>
- World Food Programme (WFP). 2017. "Honduras." Available at: <http://www.wfp.org/countries/honduras/overview>
- WHO. 2017. Global Database on the Implementation of Nutrition Action (GINA). "Policies in Honduras." Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/nutrition/gina/en/policies/1452>