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Activists meet to discuss worsening food crisis for children.

Joint media release issued by: Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Grow Great Zero-Stunting Campaign, and the DG Murray Trust

A group of activists for food access and affordability met yesterday (Thursday 21 September 2023) to discuss the worsening food crisis for children. Convened by the **Nelson Mandela Children's Fund** and the **DG Murray Trust**, the meeting sought to identify urgent measures to combat rising rates of severe acute malnutrition and child hunger.

The activist group includes representatives of **COSATU**, the **South African Council of Churches**, civil society groups and academics. It endorsed the proposal by the DG Murray Trust and the **Grow Great Zero-Stunting Campaign** for government and the food industry to contribute equally in making at least one product label of ten highly nutritious foods far more affordable to poorer households. This proposal requests food manufacturers and retailers to 'double discount' a list of ten best buy foods, with the amount of profit waived by industry matched by a retail subsidy by government.

"Data from the Department of Health shows that there were over 15,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition requiring hospitalization in the 2022/3 financial year", says Dr Linda Ncube Nkomo, CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. "But that is just the tip of the iceberg", she says. "Malnutrition is the underlying cause of about one-third of all child deaths in South Africa today, this despite Section 28 of the Constitution which guarantees the right of nutrition to every child".

The problem of acute malnutrition worsens the chronically high levels of food insecurity in South Africa, with over a quarter of children under five nutritionally stunted. Poor physical growth is just one manifestation of much deeper damage being done to the life-long wellbeing of children, not least to their brain development", says Dr Edzani Mphaphuli, Executive Director of the Grow Great zero-stunting campaign. "If we don't stop stunting now", says Mphaphuli, we shouldn't expect learning outcomes to improve or our economy to grow."

In addition to the double-discounted basket of ten best buys, the group called on the food formula industry to stop extracting massive profits from the poorest mothers, whose own malnutrition makes breastfeeding difficult. Given the high cost of infant formula, desperate mothers water down the milk to make it stretch further, which means that their babies don't get enough protein and vitamins. It also called on government to ensure that every province has an effective programme in place to identify children at high risk and to provide nutritional supplementation to children failing to thrive.



The group undertook to monitor food prices actively and to challenge the food industry to make the third of young children who live below the food poverty line their responsibility too. “We are heartened that NEDLAC has tasked a multi-sectoral committee to review the viability of proposal to double-discount ten best buy foods”, says Dr David Harrison, CEO of the DG Murray Trust. “No sector of society – not government, not labour, not civil society nor industry – should be able to say that substantive proposals to feed South Africa’s children are too difficult, without putting a better option on the table.”

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For media queries or to arrange interviews, contact Corné Kritzinger on 060 679 7964, or email corne@dgmt.co.za. Alternatively, for interviews with the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund or the Grow Great Zero-Stunting Campaign contact Dr Linda Ncube-Nkomo or Dr Edzani Mphaphuli via the details below.

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