



2. Subject for discussion (DA) (Ms B S Masango): Solutions to address severe malnutrition crisis, confronting past failures to coordinate and implement critical interventions to protect children from hunger (114)

Speech by Bridget Masango MP

Honourable Members,

If every child in South Africa was given the basics of food, safety, and a chance to grow, our nation would look very different. We would develop a generation of children that are able to learn, think, and participate fully in the economy.

But today, we face a reality of too many of our children trapped in a cycle of hunger. Not because their parents don't care but because systems meant to protect them are failing. One in four children under five is stunted. That means they are not just short in height; they are short of the nutrients needed for their brains and bodies to flourish. They are living on the edge and one more hardship pushes them over that edge into severe malnutrition.

This crisis did not happen overnight. It has grown because, for years, our efforts have been fragmented, underfunded, and uncoordinated. We have poured money into programmes, but not always into the places and ages where it matters most. We start too late, we monitor too little, and we do not always put the right tools in the right hands. And while we talk, children are dying.

But we are not here today to lament. We are here to take responsibility, to confront the past, and to build a different future, starting now. We can end child malnutrition. But we will need a whole of society approach. The DG Murray Trust recommends three main goals in tackling malnutrition: Make protein-rich foods affordable; Stop babies being born too small; and Strengthening families and communities to feed themselves. These goals aligns with the DA's own social development policy which proposes addressing malnutrition by pegging the child grant at the food poverty line; extending the child grant to include learners who are still attending school over the age of 18 until they complete their National Senior Certificate; extending the child grant to cover pregnant mothers to support child nutrition goals; Using food hubs to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition; and strengthening the link between community outreach programmes with healthcare services.

Malnutrition is not simply halted by enough food, but with enough nutritious food, and the journey to healthy children start with ensuring that their pregnant mothers are not malnourished. Malnourished mothers give birth to small babies, who then face a lifelong struggle to catch up. But we can change this trajectory. We can do so by supporting pregnant women, especially those at risk.

A Maternal Support Grant, essentially giving the Child Support Grant earlier, during pregnancy, will help mothers eat better, attend clinics, and breastfeed.



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We need to work together. There are vibrant NGOs and communities growing food across our country but their efforts are scattered. If we connect extension services with these community initiatives, we can create local food hubs that provide fresh produce to households and early learning centres. This grows dignity, not dependency.

Honourable Members,

Our Constitution promises every child the right to basic nutrition. Not a dream. Not a slogan. A right. And rights demand action.

Yet today, the Food and Nutrition Security Council is yet to live up to the promise. Departments act in silos. The result is predictable and unacceptable. We need the Council to coordinate government, civil society, and business to drive a single, bold national programme. Without leadership, plans remain paper. With leadership, they become food in a child's stomach.

Let me end with this. A malnourished child carries more than hunger. They carry a stolen future. But a nourished child, a child whose body and mind are allowed to grow, is unstoppable. That child becomes a learner, a worker, a parent, and a citizen who lifts others.

Let us no longer be a nation where childhood hunger is normal. Let us become the generation that said enough and meant it.

Our children are waiting and history is watching.

Thank you

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