The Stark Difference Between Siblings – Good Nutrition

Young children are a testament to improved growth through good nutrition.

Tilahun and Shitaye are the proud parents of four beautiful, young girls who live in the towering, rainy hills of Bule District in southern Ethiopia. Genet, their youngest daughter, has grown up to be a strong, healthy two-year old and a hallmark for good nutrition in the neighborhood!

In the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region, where Tilahun and his family live, more than 36% of children under the age of five are considered stunted, or short for their age. From the immediate consequences of acute malnutrition to the long term, adverse effects of chronic malnutrition, manifested through delayed physical, mental, and psychosocial development, the impacts of malnutrition are enormous on the individual, community, and country at large.

The word “nutrition” often brings to mind a colorful assortment of vegetables, meats, and carbohydrates served in just the right proportion to meet the needs of a diversified diet. But maternal and infant nutrition is far more multifaceted and involves factors like access to clean water, exclusive breastfeeding, iron supplementation for pregnant mothers, Vitamin A for infants, among numerous others, without which malnutrition is exacerbated and, at times, fatal.

USAID’s Growth through Nutrition Activity (2016-2021) has been working with the Ethiopian government’s agriculture, health, WASH, and education sectors to improve the nutritional status of women and young children in vulnerable households like that of Tilahun and Shitaye. The project targets mothers and children in the first 1000 days, the period from conception through a child’s second birthday – a critical window of opportunity for a child’s growth and development.

Tilahun and Shitaye’s third child, Meskerem (photographed on the left) is three years older than her younger sister but less than 8cm taller. She received no medical care as an infant, frequently suffered from stomach aches and worms, likely caused by poor WASH practices, and, for lack of awareness, was routinely fed enjera be shero, a flatbread with chickpea sauce. In contrast, her two-year-old sister, Genet, was born at a health post, and received Vitamin A supplements, and deworming medications timely. By WHO standards, Meskerem is severely stunted while Genet is within the normal range of height for age.

When Genet turned four-months-old, the household was targeted by Growth through Nutrition Activity. They were trained on how to grow a homestead garden and rear sheep and chickens, and provided with a package of seeds and seedlings of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables to grow in their garden along with six chickens, and three sheep. Shitaye was also selected to be a member of the project’s Enhanced Community Conversations where groups of 20 community members learn about a range of nutrition related behaviors, such as young child feeding and maternal care, over a course of ten months.

Today, Tilahun boasts of the quintals of potatoes and beans he harvested and plans to save for the next planting season whilst Shitaye exhibits a tray full of fresh eggs she has been purposefully using to enrich her children’s meals. To date, Growth through Nutrition has reached more than 20,500 households like Tilahun and Shitaye’s and is continuing to impact the long term mental, physical, and emotional health of children in four regions of Ethiopia thanks to the support of USAID.

“Just look at the little one! She’s only two years old yet she’s almost as tall as her five-year-old sister. Their nutritional status is incomparable.”

– Tilahun Tino
Farmer and father of four children in Bule Woreda, SNNPR, Ethiopia

U.S. Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov