

Laurence Chandy, UNICEF Director of the Division of Data, Research and Policy

Thank you so much. I want to thank distinguished colleagues here for the opportunity to speak at this important event. I speak here as a representative of one of the five agencies behind the SOFI report. The SOFI report is a sublime example of interagency cooperation, not just in bringing together SDG monitoring on hunger and food security and SDG 2.1 with nutrition and SDG 2.2, but in the shuttle diplomacy required to agree text between five agencies – and I want to commend my formidable colleague Chika Hayashi, behind me, who enabled this from UNICEF’s side.

As UNICEF, we are of course focused on the condition of children, and I would highlight some of the key numbers featured in the report: The more than 150 million children affected by stunting in the world; the more than 50 million children affected by wasting; and the 38 million children who are overweight. It’s human nature to be moved by the plight of children; but I want to argue here that children deserve special attention for other reasons too. One, the particular vulnerability of children: We know that children with severe acute malnutrition are at nine times greater risk of dying than well-nourished children. And there are also the legacy effects of children being malnourished, given the inter-generational effects, and the inheritance of poverty when children are not properly nourished.

The last two years of this report have focused on emergencies, conflict and climate, as we’ve heard. As the Cluster Lead Agency for Nutrition, UNICEF sees the strains on the system, and the invaluable impact of emergency response. But as we know, malnutrition is not just an issue that concerns emergencies. The majority of the world’s malnourished children are in fact not in emergencies. That’s why it’s important to stress issues such as improving food systems; strengthening behaviours, including feeding practices and breastfeeding; using school platforms to reach children; increasing the effectiveness of safety nets. Our Executive Director’s Chair of the SUN movement enables us to be a key advocate today for prevention as much as emergency response in tackling malnutrition around the world.

I speak here as the Director of Data, Research and Policy in our organization. Let me give some highlights of the exciting work we’re involved with now, which shows the great progress being made in addressing this challenge. In data, we’re working to support countries in strengthening their administrative routine data systems so that there is regular subnational monitoring of the condition of children in district health monitoring tools such as DHIS2. In research, I attended an event several months ago now, where we have ongoing research taking place examining the disproportionate effect and impact of food shocks on adolescents. And in policy next year, we’ll see the publication of our flagship report, the State of the World’s Children, which next year, will focus on 21st century nutrition. I look forward to working to disseminate that report with the other agencies here. Thank you so much.