

Malnutrition stunts Swaziland's growth

MBABANE - Around three in every 10 young children in Swaziland are stunted by hunger, and 270,000 workers are physically affected by the lack of food, an official said on Tuesday (30 July), citing a government-backed study.



The report, by the Swazi government supported by the World Food Programme, found that around 3.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) was lost annually due to the long-term fall out from poor health. The figure is equal to US\$92m.

"The real costs are in health and education. Children perform poorly at school, even their intelligence quotient becomes low and they work below their capacity, which affects national productivity levels," said Lonkhululeko Magagula, chief economist in the ministry of planning.

According to the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study, eight percent of child deaths are linked to malnutrition.

Magagula said 12% of children repeat at least one year at school in Swaziland because of hunger and stunted development in Africa's last absolute monarchy.

When it comes to adults, about 270,000, or roughly 40% of workers are physically affected because of chronic malnutrition in early childhood.

According to the report, based on 2009 data, an estimated 37m working hours were lost because of nutrition-related deaths.

Child mortality associated with poor nutrition has reduced Swaziland workforce by 0.7%. The study also says that 69% of all child malnutrition goes untreated.

While nearly 46,000 of 156,000 children aged under five were affected by stunting, this figure rose to nearly two out of every five children aged between 12 and 24 months old.

"Our next step as a government is how we address hunger. We must educate pregnant mothers in malnutrition," Magagula told AFP.

According to the World Food Programme, 40% of Swazis survive on less than US\$1.25 a day.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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