



One in nine people worldwide do not have enough to eat. Many do not have enough nutritious food. As missionary disciples, we are called to respond to the urgent needs of those who face hunger and malnutrition and to address the root causes of this global crisis. Together, we can lead the way to help children reach their God-given potential by improving nutrition during critical moments of development.

The building blocks of good nutrition

In a small village in western Kenya, a young woman walks from home to home to meet with the mothers in her community. Gaudencia's visits ensure they are applying the nutrition skills they're learning in their weekly mothers' group, including eating vegetables every day and breastfeeding their babies.

Run by congregations of religious sisters across Kenya, Malawi and Zambia, the CRS Early Childhood Development project teaches pregnant women and new mothers the importance of good nutrition in a child's first 1,000 days—from conception until age 2. This period is when the most rapid and critical brain growth occurs, and a balanced diet is necessary to promote physical and cognitive development.

Gaudencia joined the CRS project when her daughter was 3 months old. She

wanted her baby to be healthy, so she quickly absorbed the information being shared in group meetings. Passionate about the role of good nutrition in her child's life, Gaudencia rose to become a group leader and was soon helping other mothers in her community.

"The program has really changed my life," Gaudencia says. "I now have a balanced diet and know the importance of it. I'm teaching others so that they can be motivated and change."

The mothers who participate in the group learn to keep their babies healthy by adding fruits, vegetables, milk and other nutrient-rich foods into their meals. This information also helps them to cook nutritious meals for their entire families, ensuring long-term health in the community.

Enhancing their children's diets has made a visible difference, and the women are reporting positive results. "The mothers share that before the project their

children used to be sick, malnourished," says project coordinator Sister Pauline. "They learned it was because of a lack of good nutrition, and they have started giving a more balanced diet to the children. Their children have become very healthy, they're not falling sick, and the women realize nutrition is key to the development of a child."

Providing pregnant mothers and young children access to—and education about—nutritious food is critical to ensure a healthy future for families and communities.

St. John Paul II said, "The right to nutrition rightly figures among the first and fundamental rights of the person, not only as an integral part of the right to life of each individual, but ... as an essential condition of that right to life." By focusing on early childhood development and equipping caregivers with education and support, we can help provide that essential condition so that all children can thrive.

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