

Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days

“State of the World’s Mothers 2012” Report from



Interpreting and Discussing the Report:

Reflection Questions and Service Project Ideas for Youth in Grades 6-12

The 2012 State of the World’s Mothers (SOWM) Report shares the latest data about conditions for women and children around the world and presents affordable solutions to address identified needs. This year’s report focuses on nutrition. Nutrition during the mother’s pregnancy and the child’s first two years of life provides the opportunity for a child to develop his or her full potential mentally and physically.



“Ensuring a child receives adequate nutrition during this window [first 1,000 days] can yield dividends for a lifetime, as a well-nourished child will perform better in school, more effectively fight off disease and even earn more as an adult.”

--Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development

The Mothers’ Index (pull-out section after page 52) provides a snapshot of which countries in the world are performing best and worst in supporting mothers and children. The Index identifies health, education, political status, children’s well-being, and economics as key factors in the well-being of mothers around the world.

This report also looks at six key nutrition solutions that have the greatest potential to save lives. The *Infant and Toddler Feeding Scorecard* (page 31) ranks 73 developing countries on measures of early child nutrition. The *Breastfeeding Policy Scorecard* (page 43) examines maternity leave laws, the right to nursing breaks at work and other indicators to rank 36 developed countries on the degree to which their policies support women who want to nurse their children.

Along with your students, refer to the report and Index to evaluate the status of women and children’s health and then discuss the provided questions. Use our activity suggestions below to spark ideas for the students to advocate actively for child nutrition and equal opportunities for women locally and globally.

Choose from these questions and activities for grades 6-8 and 9-12:

General Discussion Questions on the Index:

1. In the index, which “Least Developed” countries are ranked as performing the worst in supporting mothers? What factors were used to determine the score for the Tier III countries?
2. Which “Most Developed” countries are ranked as the best places to be a mother? What factors were used to determine the score for the Tier I countries?
3. Why does the index divide the countries into the three tiers? Why do you think the different tiers don’t use all the same factors?
4. Why isn’t the United States higher on the list? Look at the numbers in each column to see where the United States scores lower than the top ten countries. What factors lower the United States ranking? How do the U.S. maternity leave policies compare to other countries? (For more in-depth discussion of this, refer to the Breastfeeding Scorecard for Developed Countries, which shows the U.S. rated last.)
5. What could we change in the United States to raise these scores? Can youth advocate for any of these issues? How?
6. What needs can you identify from the data in the Tier III rankings? What action can we take to raise the rank of mothers in the ten lowest ranked countries?

Small-Group or Individual Investigations from the Index and Report:

7. Compare the statistics in one column, such as female life expectancy at birth, across several countries. What observations can you make about life expectancy? Are the countries with the lowest life expectancy also the lowest ranked overall? **Teacher Note:** Have different students analyze different columns then share their observations with the class.
8. Choose one of the countries ranked as performing as the ten worst. Make a chart comparing the data from this country with the same categories in the data from the United States. Write two statements that compare and contrast data. Write a summary statement comparing the data from the two countries.
9. What role does nutrition play in the health and power of mothers? (See pages 12-15.) How can we take action to impact nutrition in the Least Developed Countries?
10. The report says that “one of the most effective ways to fight child malnutrition is to focus on girls’ education. Educated women tend to have fewer, healthier and better-nourished children” (SOWM, page 8). In the Tier III statistics, compare the column of “Ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school” to the Mothers’ Index Rank column. Is there a correlation between gender parity in school and the state of mothers? (Note on reading the index: In the “Ratio of girls to boys” column, the number 0.66 means “for every 100 boys, there are 66 girls enrolled.” The number 1.06 means “for every 100 boys, there are 106 girls enrolled in primary school.”)
11. Read about the low-cost “lifesaving six” nutrition solutions (SOWM, p. 23) and view the graph on page 26. For which of these factors can young people take action?
12. Some countries perform better than their national wealth would indicate. (See page 20.) What factors might contribute to the better (or worse) status of mothers and children in these countries? See the chart on page 17 for “Determinants of Child Nutrition and Examples of How to Address Them.” What are the underlying causes, and how can these be addressed?

13. One in four of the world's children are chronically malnourished, or stunted. Examine the map on page 15 showing the Stunting Rates of different countries. Compare the countries with high and low stunting rates indicated on the map with the factors on the Index. What factors seem to correlate?

Reflection Questions:

14. Why do you think Save the Children chose to publish this report? Is it important to let people around the world know this information? Why or why not?
15. Do you think the ranking system is fair? Why or why not?
16. Do you think the mothers in the countries with the lowest rankings can choose a better life for their children? What choices do you think they have?

Service Project Ideas:

1. Organize and carry out an advocacy campaign that encourages girls and women in the United States to participate in government. Research and share statistics and raise awareness of the issue of insufficient representation of women's and maternal interests. Use social media, print materials, letter-writing, and live events to communicate and advocate for change and personal action.
2. Advocate for better maternity leave for mothers in the U.S. Create a PSA and use social media to spread the campaign.
3. Organize a forum on women's and children's nutrition locally and/or globally. Use the data from the SOWM Index to select topics for the forum. Invite speakers who are experts in the featured areas, or have students research and present on the relevant issues. Invite people to attend the forum. Include a clear request for action from the attendees with details on how people can help women and children.
4. Choose a country from the Tier III group (the Least Developed Countries) of the SOWM Index. Contact a local, national, or international organization that already works with that country. Find out what their needs are related to the "lifesaving six." Hold a fundraiser or collection drive to send to mothers in the featured country (collect only what the partner organization is willing to send). Raise awareness of the issues of mothers in that country, then advertise and hold the collection drive for specific items. Work with the partner organization to send the items to the agencies that can distribute the collected items.
5. Hold a fundraiser to raise money for newborn and child survival globally through Save the Children. See www.goodgoes.org for more details.
6. There may be other people in the lives of youth who take on the role of mother in some ways. These may be aunts, teachers, grandparents, or neighbors. Write a letter to someone who acts like your "other mother." Tell that person what she (or he) has done to support you and how you feel about it. Send the letter to share your thanks.
7. Safe water is essential to good health. Many developing countries have inadequate access to clean water. Conduct research to find organizations that help dig wells and improve sanitation in developing countries. Find out what they need and how you can help mothers around the world get access to clean water for drinking and cleaning. This may include a fundraiser or penny drive.

8. Investigate needs locally and nationally related to women's and children's health and nutrition. What are the food needs of local shelters? What are the federal policies for women and children's nutrition (WIC)? Investigate why women in the U.S. choose not to nurse their infants when it is clearly the healthiest option. Organize a collection drive or advocacy to support mothers and children where the investigation shows a need.