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## Hope for a new generation

*For people born today, the SDGs offer hope of growing up in a world where malnutrition becomes a thing of the past. What will this take to achieve?*

By **Corinne Woods**, Director of Communications, United Nations World Food Programme

**W**hen I look ahead to the year 2030, I conjure up a vivid image in my mind of a young girl. If she was born today, she will be just reaching her 13th birthday by 2030. Sometimes, I

imagine her in braids and a school uniform eating breakfast before school somewhere in Africa. Or perhaps walking through the wet humid heat of the morning on her way to lessons somewhere in Southeast Asia, with her books swinging in a bag at her side.

The girl I see in my mind is on the cusp of the most productive period of her life. Perhaps she is preparing for exams. She

▲ Newly displaced refugees wait for food supplies at a processing centre in Qayyara, south of Mosul, Iraq. Undernutrition in the early years causes lasting damage that will impact the rest of that person's life

may even be thinking further ahead to a future career as a doctor, a teacher, a nurse or a lawyer.

At 13 years of age, she won't be so far away from providing a return on the

investment of her parents, her teachers, the community she lives in and the government of the country that is her home. She should be getting ready to embrace a future of opportunity and prosperity.

Everything about this girl – her optimism, her good health and the myriad possibilities available to her – represents what we at the World Food Programme (WFP) are seeking to deliver. And as I imagine her growing up over the next 13 years, I feel confident that we have the roadmap to guide us to the kind of future that she wants and needs.

That roadmap is captured by the second of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or the ‘zero hunger’ goal as we like to call it at WFP. For the girl who lives in my imagination, SDG 2 is her guarantee

and wasting, can cause significant losses in national productivity and economic growth equivalent to anything between 8 and 11 per cent of GDP. That is the kind of hit that no functioning modern economy can sustain for long.

When I think of my girl, I hope that she is one of the ones who strikes lucky. I like to think she is blessed with a healthy mother and has a happy childhood. In my mind, she has chubby cheeks, a winning smile and perfect skin.

I imagine her mother having the money she needs to shop at markets where farmers provide fresh food at a good price so that even the poorer sections of society can afford to buy what they need for a balanced meal. I see her sitting with her

in terms of battling hunger, improving nutrition, supporting farmers, reducing waste and protecting the genetic diversity of seeds, plants and animals. Now, we must come together so that we can speak with one voice about what is required to keep up the momentum and ensure that SDG 2 is the standout global goal.

I can imagine a conversation with my girl in 13 years’ time. I will tell her how we cut through the competing agendas, rose above our ideological differences and, collectively, delivered the kind of change designed to ensure that her life was different, that her opportunities remained open and that she was allowed to reach true fulfilment as a citizen of the world.

### **A solemn commitment**

When we all signed up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we made a solemn commitment to leaving no one behind. The vision I cherish for my girl – whether she is in Africa, Asia, the Middle East or Central America – is that she, and millions like her, will never be left behind.

This means paying special attention to reaching the most vulnerable. There is a good chance that my girl could grow up as a refugee fleeing conflict or natural disaster. She could find herself living in a community afflicted by desperate poverty, or battered by successive climate shocks like droughts or floods. She could have the misfortune of suffering from diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis or malaria. Or she could be a member of a discriminated and persecuted minority.

Undoubtedly, the challenges she faces may be enormous, but together we can make sure that none of them is life-shortening or life-threatening.

As we move through the gears over the next decade and a half, we must keep her at the forefront of our minds. She and her brothers and friends are too important to be left behind.

If, collectively, we remain true to our commitments around SDG 2, we have the opportunity to change her life and feed her dreams, along with the lives of so many others. That is the future I imagine for my girl. ●

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from the world. It is our pledge, as the global community, to deliver by 2030 a life that is free from hunger, where food security is a given, where farms are productive and sustainable and where everyone can get the right kind of nutritious food they need for a healthy life.

### **A lifetime of challenges**

As she grows up over the coming years, my girl will face challenges at every turn. Even before she is born, her fate could be sealed if her mother is undernourished. We know now that there is a critical period during the first 1,000 days from conception to the age of two, where undernutrition can have an impact that will live with her for the rest of her life.

If her mother does not have access to the right kinds of nutritious foods, and if she continues to go hungry during her time as an infant, there is every possibility that her growth, learning and productivity will be affected. This is devastating for her and potentially catastrophic for the economy of the country that she is living in. Undernutrition, leading to stunting

family, enjoying a meal and laughing in the company of her older and younger siblings.

I don’t want her to be one of the two billion people who suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, the 51 million children under five years of age who are low weight, or the more than 150 million who are stunted. My girl must not become just another statistic, because I have vested too much in ensuring that her life is going to be better than so many others who have gone before her.

I want my girl to know that WFP will be true to its commitment to deliver zero hunger by 2030 and that we will work tirelessly with national governments, non-governmental organisations, donor governments and the private sector to ensure that her future is framed by the targets we have set ourselves under SDG 2.

We must make sure that my girl feels the weight of a coalition of the world behind her, carrying her forward to 2030 and the golden future that beckons beyond that milestone. Across the humanitarian and development community we can all stand proud for the work we have done so far