



# The First 1,000 Days: A Crucial Time for Mothers and Children—And the World

*Roger Thurow*

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Based on compelling new scientific and social science research on early childhood malnutrition, a new generation of activists have been inspired to re-think old approaches to ‘feeding the world.’ The new target in the assault on malnutrition: the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, starting from gestation. Proper nutrition during the 1,000 days can profoundly influence an entire life, particularly an individual’s ability to grow, learn and work. It can also determine a society’s long-term health and prosperity. The 1,000 days is where everyone starts out equal, and where the world’s inequalities begin.

On Sept. 21, 2010, during the United Nations General Assembly, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton joined with her counterpart in the Irish government to launch the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative. It demanded national leaders across the world to commit to the 1,000 days and work together across issues and sectors to improve nutrition. “There is a unique convergence of the science and research about what works and what needs to be invested in,” Clinton said. “It is now time for us to get into action.” By the end of 2013, 45 countries in the developing world embraced SUN, and nearly 100 humanitarian organizations joined in partnership.

For SUN to truly rise, however, it demanded a fresh development model anchored in a new ethic of cooperation in the oft-dysfunctional humanitarian community. Over the previous decades, most every organization active in this realm had mainly fixated on its own pet projects, which were almost always deployed in scattershot isolation from others. Nutrition, for example, had traditionally been seen as a health issue, not an agriculture issue or a development/poverty-reduction issue. Clean water had its own cheering section, as did sanitation, as did education, as did infrastructure. The 1,000 days offered a time and place where all these elements of development could come together—where they needed to come together. But would they?

In *1,000 Days*, award-winning journalist and world hunger advocate Roger Thurow examines the importance of the 1,000 days and the progress of the new global movement to end early childhood malnutrition. Thurow zeroes in on particular initiatives involving a small group of mothers and children in four diverse places—a small village in northern Uganda, Uttar Pradesh in India, Quetzaltenango in the western highlands of Guatemala, and Chicago, Illinois. The narrative will open a new front in the great aid debate, providing a fresh answer for the contentious question: Why haven’t the hundreds of billions of dollars spent on development aid been more effective? Because so very little of it has been focused on nutrition and the 1,000 days. And what, once we do focus on them, are the obstacles to success in various contexts and cultures? Through the inspiring and heartbreaking stories of mothers, and activists, trying to surmount the odds, Thurow reveals the stumbling blocks on our path to a better future.

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