



## UN Nutrition Network helps actors find their place on the nutrition map

THE **UN NUTRITION NETWORK** IS ACTIVE IN 60 COUNTRIES, WHERE IT IS PROMPTING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE TO ADDRESS ALL FORMS OF MALNUTRITION

Addressing malnutrition requires a holistic and interconnected view of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that goes beyond Goal 2. The necessary transformation set out by the SDGs requires engagement with multiple stakeholders – as different sectors (e.g. health, education, agriculture, employment, water, sanitation and hygiene, gender equality and women’s empowerment) must align, harmonize and coordinate to achieve the SDGs.

The **UN Nutrition Network** (herein UN Network) serves as a platform for operationalizing integrated action and partnerships for nutrition.

The **UN Network** plays an integral role in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in all 60 countries and promotes progress towards the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025 by supporting country-driven action. It brings additional value to the UN System by leveraging its relationships with a diverse array of stakeholders from government – including Parliamentarians – to civil society, and business, donor and research communities.

In this context, the UN Network is uniquely positioned to facilitate a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder

approach to nutrition, helping actors break away from fragmented approaches to malnutrition and disrupting the *status quo*. Action will be most effective when taken collectively to scale-up both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions from national to community levels.

Nutrition is virtually related to all of the SDGs. With that said, the following pages outline how **nutrition is directly embedded into 12 of the 17 SDGs**, thereby illustrating how it is both a maker and marker of sustainable development.

## UNPACKING THE LINKS BETWEEN NUTRITION AND THE SDGS





- Good nutrition increases productivity of individuals and societies, contributing to economic growth (Alderman *et al.* 2013; World Bank 2006).
- Conversely, undernutrition can reduce individual lifetime earnings by as much as 10% or more (Alderman *et al.* 2013; World Bank 2006). For instance, child stunting is associated with reduced hourly adult wages (Hoddinott *et al.* 2013) quantified as up to 20% less (World Bank 2006).
- According to the Cost of Hunger studies, child undernutrition can reduce a nation's GDP by 1.9 to 16.5% (AU Commission, UN ECA and WFP, 2013).
- Obesity can result in lost productivity and increased health care costs, estimated at nearly 8% of GNP in China (Popkin *et al.* 2006) compounding already challenging situations.
- Poverty reduction also helps governments generate resources which can be invested in social programmes that address all forms of malnutrition in the greater context of development gains.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Public Works Programmes; price subsidies; microcredit; unemployment insurance; and unconditional cash transfers – all undertaken with a nutrition lens.



- After a prolonged decline, world hunger is on the rise again. The number of chronically undernourished people in the world has increased in 2017 to 821 million (FAO, 2018).
- Today, nearly 1 in 3 persons globally suffers from at least one form of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight or obesity – and a large part of the world's population is affected by diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (WHO, 2017; The Lancet, 2016).
- Diet is the number 1 risk factor in the global burden of disease (Murray *et al.* 2015). Healthy diets are as fundamental to address stunting and micronutrient deficiencies as they are to prevent overweight and obesity (and diet-related NCDs). And, healthy food systems are the basis for healthy, sustainable diets.
- Achieving a world without malnutrition by 2030 will require multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral action, including a food systems approach, particularly within the context of the triple burden of malnutrition.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Food processing (including fortification); food labelling; cash transfers; food vouchers; Right to Food; public-private partnerships; food safety legislation; maternity protection; and International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.



- Good nutrition contributes to good health and well-being.
- On the other hand, there is a vicious cycle between illness and disease, and malnutrition (World Bank, 2013), with malnutrition presenting health risks and sick individuals having heightened nutritional needs to help them combat infection.
- Each year, undernutrition contributes to over 3 million deaths among children under 5 years old, which equates to approximately 45% of preventable child mortality (Black *et al.* 2013; Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group, 2013).
- Some vitamin and mineral deficiencies are associated with increased occurrences of infectious diseases, such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and other acute respiratory infections (WHO and UNICEF, 2013; Black *et al.* 2008).
- Furthermore, severe infectious disease in early childhood can lead to acute wasting and even cause irreversible stunted growth” (Black *et al.* 2013).
- Chronic nutritional deficits early in life, starting with pregnancy, can not only lead to stunting and irreversible cognitive impairments, but they also augment the risk of obesity and NCDs later in life (Adair *et al.* 2013; Black *et al.*)
- A healthy diet can help to prevent diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer, further illustrating the links between nutrition and NCDs (WHO, 2015).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Maternal/infant/child nutrition and health counselling; Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI); iron/folic acid supplementation; oral rehydration treatment with zinc; management of severe acute malnutrition; deworming; nutrition counselling for people living with HIV/AIDS and TB; counselling on healthy diets to prevent overweight, obesity and NCDs; and universal health care.



- A child's ability to learn and a child's nutritional status are linked.
- Good nutrition can increase one's IQ (Black *et al.* 2013). Iodine deficiency alone is associated with up to a 15-point IQ reduction at the population level (WHO, 2013).
- The *Cost of Hunger* studies have shown that stunted children have lower education outcomes than their non-stunted counterparts and that 7-16% of repetitions in school worldwide are attributed to stunting (AU Commission, UN ECA and WFP, 2013).
- In contrast, access to education can support improved care practices such as exclusive breastfeeding, dietary patterns, and ultimately, nutrition outcomes (Ruel and Alderman, 2013).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** School meals; deworming; nutrition and health education; and WASH interventions in schools, increasing attendance at schools, technical and vocational education.

## 5 GENDER EQUALITY



- Gender equality and women's empowerment are inextricably linked to nutrition. Gender equality can drive as much as 25% of child nutrition gains.
- It is important to take measures that help girls start school in a timely fashion and keep them in school. This not only helps them increase their earning potential in adulthood, but it also prevents early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (The World Bank, 2009), which can be detrimental to the nutrition of an adolescent girl and her baby.
- Income-generating activities are often targeted to women, recognising that they tend to spend a larger portion of additional income and other resources on household nutrition, health and education, which can support nutrition gains (World Bank, 2007; Mucha, 2012; UNSCN, 2010).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Prevention of adolescent pregnancy; Family Planning; take-home school rations targeting adolescent girls; microcredit targeting women; and land tenure reform.

## 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



- Access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation are essential to safeguarding nutrient absorption, and thus contribute to improved nutritional outcomes (WHO, UNICEF and USAID, 2015).
- Limited or lack of access to safe water increases the risk of waterborne disease, which impedes nutrient absorption and may thereby compromise one's nutrition.
- A growing body of evidence indicates links between poor sanitation practices (open defecation) and malnutrition (stunting) (Compendium of Actions for Nutrition, 2016; Global Nutrition Report, 2014; Spears, 2013; Woodruff *et al.* 2014).
- In some settings, collecting water can be time-intensive with the burden disproportionately falling on women (Graham, Hirai, and Kim, 2016). This can detract from time that caregivers may dedicate to proven nutrition actions, such as exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and continued breastfeeding thereafter up to age 2.
- Decisions around water use should be driven with a goal to achieve sustainable, equitable, and nutritious food systems.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Infrastructure systems for water and sanitation; handwashing education/promotion; household water treatment; food hygiene promotion; and provision of water during special circumstances.

## 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



- While the links between economic growth and nutrition are well-documented, the literature shows that economic growth alone will not resolve malnutrition (Heltberg, 2009; Haddad *et al.* 2002). In many countries, high child undernutrition levels (e.g. stunting and wasting) are observed even among households in the highest wealth quintile.
- In terms of decent work, actors may consider the cost of a minimum nutritious diet in addition to traditional macroeconomic considerations (inflation, labour supply and demand) when defining or adjusting national minimum wage.
- Exposure to chemicals on the job or duties that require heavy lifting may not be suitable for pregnant and lactating women and may even compromise their health and nutritional status. They may also jeopardize the nutrition and health of the foetus and their infants.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Minimum wage; maternity protection; ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention No. 155 (1981); microfinance/credit; entrepreneurship; and eradicating forced labour and slavery, human trafficking and child labour.

## 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



- Good food environments confer quality diets, which contribute to good nutrition. This can, in turn, increase the demand for sustainable food production.
- Nutrition and sustainable diets are core elements of both sustainable consumption and production, underscoring the importance of employing a food systems approach.
- The transformation of food systems, policies and practices, should guarantee sustainable and nutritious diets. Efforts to reduce post-harvest food losses and consumer food waste can also help promote increased food security and food safety, and further support nutrition gains.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Food systems management, including reducing losses at all levels; promotion of small-scale farmer rights, organic agriculture; locally produced foods for consumption; regulations on the availability of ultra-processed foods; and support indigenous knowledge of local foods, including underutilised varieties.

## 13 CLIMATE ACTION



- The future availability of nutritious foods is being threatened by climate change and environmental degradation.
- Climate change impacts diets and food systems, as climatic conditions can affect livelihoods and the types of foods crops harvested for human consumption.
- Did you know that diets affect climate change (UNSCN 2017)? Approximately 19-29% of the human-induced greenhouse gas emissions are derived from food production and consumption, with animal source foods being the main contributing factor (Steinfeld *et al.* 2006; Vermeulen *et al.* 2012; Tubiello *et al.* 2014; CBD 2015).
- Similarly, 70% of fresh-water use is attributed to food production and consumption (UNSCN 2017), stressing water resources in some locations.
- Like malnutrition, climate change tends to affect the most vulnerable regions and populations, exacerbating already difficult circumstances. (HLPE, 2010).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Climate change mitigation and adaptation (including promotion of underutilized crops; promotion of sustainable food consumption patterns; improved water management); and impact reduction and early warning.

## 15 LIFE ON LAND



- Alarming gaps in access to natural resources (e.g. land and forests, water and sanitation and energy) among small-scale food producers and other vulnerable groups undermine food security and nutrition. "Enhanced access to natural resources will contribute to food security, improved nutrition, stability and resilience" (SMS, HLPF Brief, 2018).
- Good nutrition can foster environmental sustainability, in that healthy diets often exert less pressure on ecosystems from food production to processing to marketing.
- Protecting biodiversity is not only crucial for environmental sustainability, but also for good nutrition, recognising that the nutrient content of foods can vary vastly among different species.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Protection of biodiversity; food composition data for locally available plant foods, adapting land tenure/rights in accordance with *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance Tenure* to support healthy diets; sustainably manage forests; and combat desertification.

## 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



- The 2017 report on the *State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World* has shined a light on the nexus between conflict, food security and nutrition. It illustrates how "conflict affects food security and nutrition, but also how improved food security and more-resilient rural livelihoods can prevent conflict and contribute to lasting peace".
- Experience shows that high levels of undernutrition are often found in conflict-affected areas (Howell *et al.* 2018; Carroll *et al.* 2017).
- Conflict can disrupt or impede recommended infant and young child feeding practices, such as exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life, which are integral to good nutrition in infancy, early childhood and in later stages of life.
- Improved nutrition governance, including action supported by the UN Network, can reinforce greater efforts to increase accountability and inclusive stakeholder dialogue across sectors.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Food assistance; livelihoods support; nutrition support in emergencies; and strengthening institutions to address inequalities, injustice and violence.

## 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



- Due to the multi-dimensional nature of nutrition, a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach is required to address malnutrition in all its forms.
- Combatting malnutrition can only be ended through effective partnerships and coordinated action across all SDGs.
- In many ways, nutrition community is exemplifying how partnerships can be leveraged for shared development goals. Multi-stakeholder engagement lies at the core of the SUN Movement to which the UN Network actively involved. At the country level, UN Network support is pivotal to maintaining momentum on multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral nutrition processes that foster the achievement of shared nutrition results.

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Collective actions building on comparative advantages; establishment and strengthening of multi-stakeholder nutrition coordination platforms; and promoting a systems approach (e.g. food, health).

The time is now. The **UN Network** is calling upon all UN agencies to engage in nutrition at country level as part of efforts to bolster integrated action, leveraging nutrition as an enabler to achieve the SDGs.

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To learn more about how the **UN Nutrition Network** is supporting country-level action visit <https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/> or write to [unnetworkforsun@wfp.org](mailto:unnetworkforsun@wfp.org)

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