



United Nations  
System

Standing  
Committee on  
Nutrition



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A Policy Brief

# Priority Nutrition Indicators for the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

Explicit attention to nutrition is needed as the world seeks to accelerate and sustain recent gains in development, and to expand these to include places and people who have been left behind. Without good nutrition, people's mind and body cannot function well. When that happens, the foundations of economic, social and cultural life of society are undermined. Therefore, nutrition needs to be given a prominent role in the Sustainable Development Framework.

The UN Open Working Group's (OWG) proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes nutrition in the SDG 2 on 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture' – with targets to ensure access to nutritious food and end all forms of malnutrition.

There is broad consensus around the priority indicators proposed below<sup>1</sup> that efficiently and comprehensively measure progress in the most critical areas of action to improve nutrition and other development outcomes.

AREA	PRIORITY INDICATOR	SDGs AND TARGETS
GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS endorsed by Member States at the 65 <sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA 2012)	Prevalence of stunting (low height-for-age) in children under 5 years of age	Goal 2, Target 2.2
	Prevalence of wasting (low weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age	Goal 2, Target 2.2
	Percentage of infants less than 6 months of age who are exclusively breast fed	Goal 2, Target 2.2 and Target 2.1 and Goal 3, Target 3.2
	Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years of age) with anaemia	Goal 2, Target 2.2 and Goal 3, Target 3.1
	Prevalence of overweight (high weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age	Goal 2, Target 2.2 and Goal 3, Target 3.4
	Percentage of infants born with low birth weight (< 2,500 grams)	Goal 2, Target 2.2 and Goal 3, Target 3.2
DIETARY DIVERSITY	The percentage of women, 15-49 years of age, who consume at least 5 out of 10 defined food groups	Goal 2, Target 2.1
POLICY	Percentage of national budget allocated to nutrition	Goal 2, Target 2.2a

*1 - These recommendations have been developed through consultation with a wide range of experts and stakeholders: UNSCN member agencies, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bread for the World, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Columbia University, Concern Worldwide, UK Department for International Development (DFID), FANTA/FHI360, Global Nutrition Report, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Micronutrient Initiative, ONE, Sight and Life, Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, US Agency for International Development (USAID), US State Department, World Bank, and 1,000 Days Partnership. This proposal does not necessarily reflect organizational positions.*

At a minimum, the SDG framework needs to include the indicators that measure all six global nutrition targets unanimously endorsed by Member States at the 65<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA 2012). The WHA targets are based on evidence on what is needed to comprehensively address malnutrition. Given the intergenerational nature of malnutrition, it is critical to include the indicator on women's dietary diversity that reflects the nutritional quality of food intake and also the role of agriculture in ensuring the health of people. In addition, in order to achieve the above, the means of implementation need to be strengthened and it is critical to include the indicator on national budget allocations for nutrition. Several of these indicators can also be used to measure progress towards other SDGs and targets, especially towards SDG3 on 'Ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being'.

## WHAT DOES THE INDICATOR TELL ?

### Prevalence of stunting (low height-for-age) in children under 5 years of age

Child stunting is a measure of chronic malnutrition, commonly measured in children under five. It is important to also measure stunting before age two, as this allows countries to intervene early taking advantage of the first 1000 days (from conception) within which nutritional problems can still be corrected.

### Prevalence of wasting (low weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age

This is a measure of acute malnutrition, a consequence of insufficient food intake and/or infectious diseases. Addressing wasting is important because of the increased risk of disease and death for children who lose too much of their body weight.

### Percentage of infants less than 6 months of age who are exclusively breast fed

Breast milk provides all the energy and nutrients that infants need during the first 6 months of life. This indicator measures the percentage of infants who get only breastmilk feeding, no other liquids or food.

### Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years of age) with anaemia

This measures iron deficiency, iron being one of the essential micronutrients. Iron deficiency, particularly among women, is an important and most prevalent micronutrient deficiency. It increases the risk of maternal death and compromises healthy birth.

### Prevalence of overweight (high weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age

This measures childhood overweight and obesity that is rising in all regions of the world. It increases the risk of diet related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), disability in adulthood and premature death.

### Percentage of infants born with low birth weight (<2500g)

This is the most commonly used indicator of fetal growth. Low birth weight contributes to prenatal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, to childhood stunting, impaired cognitive development, and chronic diseases in later life.

### The percentage of women, 15-49 years of age, who consume at least 5 out of 10 defined food groups

This scientifically validated indicator measures the quality of women's diet. Dietary diversity is a key dimension of a high quality food consumption with adequate micronutrient content; and thus, important to ensuring the health and nutrition of both women and their children especially during pregnancy and lactation.

### Percentage of national budget allocated to nutrition

This indicator measures the overall national government's allocation to nutrition expressed as percentage of national budget. The evidence-based solutions to end malnutrition are known. This indicator is recommended to measure the means of implementation made available for nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive actions according to national plans.



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### THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM IS HUGE

Today, 161 million children less than 5 years old are stunted (too short for their age), at least 51 million are severely or moderately wasted (weighing too little for their height) while another 42 million children are overweight or obese. In addition, there are several billion children and adults who are deficient in vitamins or minerals which can lead to anaemia, blindness, cognitive impairment, greater susceptibility to many diseases, resulting in higher mortality. Losses to national productivity linked to these conditions can be as high as 3% of total output per year.



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## RESOURCES

The full UNSCN technical report is available at:

<http://unscn.org/en/publications/nutrition-and-post-2015-agenda/>

The Sustainable Development Goals and Targets as currently proposed are accessible at:

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

The Global Nutrition Report 2014: Actions and Accountability to Accelerate the World's Progress on Nutrition.

<http://globalnutritionreport.org/>

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