



UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION**  
*Task Force on Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation*

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Status Report- March 2008

Background

In March 2006, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the SCN approved its new Strategic Framework and Plan of Action and called for the creation of three Task Forces (TF) to support the SCN in the implementing five priority areas of action. The role of the Task Forces would be that of “harmonizing and capitalizing on the related work being done across the various constituents of the SCN... and providing support to the Working Group activities of relevance”. FAO and WFP were identified as co-chairs of the Task Force on Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation (TF-AME).

At the following 34<sup>th</sup> SCN annual Session held at FAO in Rome in February/March 2007, a draft concept note was circulated to the prospective members of the TF-AME to start defining its objectives, outputs and activities. The TF-AME Co-chairs presented the concept note and raised a number of issues to be considered, including one important suggestion that the inter-agency TF-AME must add value to ongoing initiatives. The concept note was later developed in more detail and became a draft work plan for a core group of Task Force members who met in early 2008.

The Task Force’s objectives

Based on the priorities set forth by the Action Plan in the context of the TF-AME the following were proposed as the TF’s main objectives in its “Areas of Work” document:

Area of work 1: establish an agreed upon **minimum set of core indicators** that measure food deprivation and malnutrition and that would be acceptable to all members – the indicators would cover the three key areas of **food, care and health**.

On the basis of this, one of the main activities of the TF would be that of facilitating (and guiding) the process of coming to an agreement on such a core set of indicators that would meet the needs of constituents coming from different sectors and that could be used for assessment, monitoring and/or evaluation purposes in different contexts (e.g. crisis-affected, transitional, post-crisis or chronic food insecurity situations) and at different levels (community/household, country, global).

Area of work 2: serve as an effective **sounding board** for the SCN Working Groups and inter-agency activities (such as the HNTS) - this would also entail providing suggestions to, or peer reviewing, agreed activities and outputs.

The above could entail reviewing the SCN WG’s work plans and providing any necessary support or feedback on issues related to AME. The same would apply for the other SCN

Task Forces (Advocacy/Communication and Integrated Approaches). Liaising with other relevant interagency initiatives was considered to be of key importance.

Area of work 3: provide a **forum** where members can **exchange information** on AME best practices, tools and methods.

This could occur in different ways: through an informal email forum, a formal web based forum, newsletters, periodic meetings, ad-hoc meetings, etc.

The above key areas of work and associated objectives were further discussed during the TF-AME's first meeting held in Rome at the end of January 2008. In the meantime, the TF decided to start working on one of the activities suggested in the document: that of establishing a minimum set of core indicators. A paper drawing from a review of the existing literature and with the objective of producing a preliminary inventory of indicators was thus commissioned for discussion during the Task Force's meeting in January.

### The Task Force's start-up activities

In preparation of the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the SCN (Hanoi, March 2008), the Task Force members held a two-day meeting in Rome (31Jan - 1Feb 2008). The meeting was aimed at:

- Taking stock of key efforts undertaken in AME by selected global initiatives and identified gaps to be addressed;
- Promoting an improved understanding of priority areas of work and focus needed for TF-AME;
- Identifying follow-up actions addressing priorities of the TF-AME.

In its Action Plan, the SCN called for the TF to liaise with a number of ongoing initiatives already active in the field of AME, such as the NICS (Nutrition Information in Crisis Situations), the Realization of the Human Right to Food (RtF), and others. A key objective of the TF was to obtain a good understanding of the type of assessment, monitoring and/or evaluation work these different initiatives were carrying out, the indicators used, while also assessing synergies and/or possible duplication with work planned by the TF-AME. The first part of the workshop was thus dedicated to information exchange. People knowledgeable of various initiatives (some of whom are TF members), including NICS, HNTS (Humanitarian Health and Nutrition Tracking Service), SMART (Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition), REACH (Renewed Effort Against Child Hunger), IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) and the Right to Food Unit in FAO were invited to make presentations, while highlighting areas where the TF-AME could provide support to these initiatives. During its discussions, the TF was able to establish that some areas of work where the SCN Action Plan called for TF action are actually well taken care off by partner institutions already working on the above-mentioned initiatives (e.g. NICS, RtF).

Having better defined those initiatives that might benefit from the TF's support, and conscious of the need to prioritize the vast amount of potential activities to work on, the members then identified a small number of "concrete" activities to focus on in the short and medium term:

- ✓ Of importance to the members was the need to provide guidance on the MDGs (as also mentioned in the SCN Action Plan), particularly to MDG 1, target 2. For this reason, one

of the **first** activities suggested for the short and medium term was that of developing a statement and a review paper on stunting as the “principle evaluative indicator of poverty reduction”. A short statement on the importance of using stunting as the main indicator for endemic poverty has been produced specifically for review by the SCN Steering Committee, and TORs are being developed for the review paper.

- ✓ Being aware of requests coming from country level for simple and clear guidance on a number of key assessment, monitoring and/or evaluation indicators, the **second** activity for the TF will focus on preparing a number of fact sheets on selected food and nutrition security indicators or measures. A template was developed and the first 4 fact sheets on: MUAC, Stunting, Dietary Diversity and Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS), have been written.
- ✓ In response to a request coming from the field and following a growing concern amongst the nutrition and food security community of the need to develop appropriate benchmarks to be used in different contexts (e.g. emergency versus development contexts), the **third** activity of the TF-AME will aim to produce a study and/or review of selected indicators and thresholds used in the IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification), and by other or similar tools. The request is a result of a recent drive to adapt the IPC tool to the development context alongside the emergency contexts where it is already used. This is in line with one of the TF’s principles of linking experiences from the emergency contexts with development settings and visa versa.
- ✓ A **fourth** activity where the TF-AME believes it can be active is in supporting a revision of Module 3 of the SMART (Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition) guidelines (the Food Security Module). This module is currently underutilized and difficult to link to the anthropometry and mortality modules, and while some NGOs have already tested Module 3, a more detailed gap analysis is needed, in addition to an assessment of what is needed for updating and/or revising the module on food security and capacity building.

The TF members discussed the above mentioned paper aimed at producing an inventory of food security and nutrition indicators and attempted to establish a core (or minimum) set of indicators. After a long discussion, it was decided that given that many indicators are context-specific, and that others require further discussion on recommended use or application, it was at this stage not feasible to come to “useable” conclusions on a recommended ‘core’ (or minimum) set of indicators for purposes of assessment, monitoring and/or evaluation. This was particularly difficult for the many diverse development settings; it was recognised that in emergency settings, it should be easier to arrive at such a core list. A decision was thus taken to discontinue working on the paper itself, and rather to use the document and materials reviewed for the original exercise to develop an annotated Repository of all documents related to food security and nutrition indicators, clearly specifying the indicator(s), amongst a range of 17 main indicators, contained in the different documents.

### [Links to the 2007 “Areas of Work” document](#)

In regard to its original work plan as laid out in its “Areas of Work” document, the priority activities established by the TF-AME currently fall largely within the **first Area of work** – associated with indicators – and particularly area 1b that focuses on the needs of end

users/clients of the indicators and on the use (or specific context) of the indicator itself. This appears to be the area of highest demand stemming from field requests.

With respect to **Area of work 2**- i.e. that of serving as a sounding board for the SCN Working Groups and other inter-agency initiatives – much will depend on the future demand and general *modus operandi* of the TF. In the short term, the TF's efforts in this direction will be that of gaining visibility and credibility by producing the results it has set for itself and by communicating these well (see point below). This should in turn generate momentum and demand for future work. The 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the SCN itself is seen as a good platform to start liaising with key partners, especially from different Working Groups.

Given the early stages of development of the TF, **Area of work 3** (providing a forum for discussion) was only touched upon briefly during January 2008 meeting as the TF considered the definition of its substantive areas of work as a priority. There was consensus on the need to work on some communication tools, while it was also recognised that this required resources (dedicated time and funding). As an initial step, the TF agreed that a webpage within the SCN website would be feasible. How the TF would best communicate in future with the wider SCN constituency is certainly an aspect that will need further discussion.

### Membership of the TF

The guiding principle for membership is to ensure that the TF includes representatives of the SCN's three constituents - UN agencies, governments and NGOs/civil society. Currently the TF is made up of 14 members belonging to these three different constituencies. Other partner representatives are more than welcome to join and contribute to the work of the Task Force!

Current TF members include: Mark Smulders (FAO, chair), Agnès Dhur (WFP, co-chair), Sean Kennedy (IFAD), Bruce Cogill (IASC Nutrition Cluster), Yves-Martin Prével (Institut de Recherche et Développement, IRD), Janine Coutinho (Brazil), Marie-Claude Dop (FAO), Margot van de Velden (WFP-Senegal), Helen Young (Tufts), Jacqueline Frize (independent), Judith Appleton (independent), Grainne Moloney (FAO-FSAU, Somalia), Cristina Lopriore (FAO), and Claudine Prudhon (SCN Secretariat).

### Summary and Next Steps

To sum up, the TF so far has worked on:

- An annotated Repository of documents related to food security and nutrition indicators
- 4 fact sheets on the following indicators: MUAC, Stunting, Dietary Diversity and Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS).
- A short statement on stunting as the main indicator for endemic poverty
- A two-page flyer/brochure on the Task Force's work

Over the next six months, the TF plans to produce (i) a review paper on stunting, (ii) a study/review of selected indicators and thresholds used in the IPC and (iii) support the revision of the SMART Food Security module.

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