



Report on

High level meeting on nutrition

Organized by the UNS Standing Committee on Nutrition and hosted by the European Commission

23rd and 24th November 2009
Royal Windsor Hotel
Brussels

The meeting was a joint Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN), European Commission (EC) High Level Meeting on "Recapturing Malnutrition Reduction" with support from the Institute of Development Studies, Save the Children, and the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement. This meeting constituted a unique opportunity to discuss policy coherence and nutrition architecture during a time of increasing global attention to nutrition. During the two days, participants reflected on ways and means to put nutrition higher on the agenda of both high burden and donor countries. A clear commitment for nutrition by both rich countries and high-burden countries was obtained and basic guiding nutrition principles were reflected upon which hopefully will be translated into action through the preparation of a roadmap for the development of country level action plans.

Objectives of the meeting

The main objectives of the meeting were:

- To put nutrition higher on the agenda of both high burden and donor countries;
- To initiate the development of a roadmap for country level action plans
- To develop basic guiding nutrition principles for nutrition programming and planning.

Expected outcomes

- A set of agreed basic guiding nutrition principles for nutrition programming and planning
- Recognition by both donor countries and high-burden countries of the urgency to act at international, regional and national levels;
- Concrete steps towards better governance on nutrition at global and country level (including agreement on initiation of roadmap).

The agenda of the meeting can be found on <http://www.unscn.org/en/brussels/brussels-conference.php?conference=3>



Background documents and context

Preparatory meeting on 27 May 2009 in the European Commission in Brussels

Meeting on 15 June 2009: International Donors' meeting on nutrition and
European Donors' meeting on nutrition

The key background documents for the meeting were:

- Global Action on Nutrition, Draft Statement of Common Vision and Commitment (11/09);
- Moving towards consensus: A Global Action Plan for Scaling Up Nutrition. Policy Brief (11/09);
- SCN brief on nutrition impacts of the global food and financial crisis
http://www.unscn.org/en/publications/nutrition_briefs/#Nutrition_impacts_of_global_food_and_financial_crises (SCN, 06/09);
- Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security
http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/Summit/Docs/Final_Declaration/WSFS09_Declaration.pdf (FAO, 11/09);
- Reform of the Committee on World Food Security
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/017/k3023e3.pdf> (FAO, 11/09).
- The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition paper 4. Effective action at national level http://www.unscn.org/files/Annual_Sessions/Undernutrition4.pdf (Lancet 2008);
- The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition paper 5. Effective international action against undernutrition: why has it proven so difficult and what can be done to accelerate progress?
http://www.unscn.org/files/Annual_Sessions/Undernutr_5_p82_95.pdf (Lancet 2008);

Synthesis of the debate on "Highlighting nutrition governance issues at national levels, needs and current practices"

A rich set of inside experiences from ten countries (Lao, Malawi, Benin, Brazil, Cambodia, Peru, Guatemala, Madagascar, China, Bolivia) were presented.

1. **Common set of challenges** in terms of trying to get nutrition on the political agenda at national level were raised by the country representatives and all participants benefited from hearing those:

- Generally there is a low level of recognition of the malnutrition problem. It is referred to as a 'silent crisis' as it is invisible to decision makers, both at local and national level.
- There is a failure of leadership in many countries. Challenge is to get some of the top political leaders to take this on their agenda.
- There are problems with nutrition resources, particularly human resources. Many countries have insufficient number of people with experience in nutrition, therefore nutrition posts are vacant. But also financial resources are insufficient for scaling-up relevant nutrition services into national programmes.



- Confusion exists around the terminology on hunger, food security and nutrition: on how they are related and how to conceptualise the problem and address it in government policies.
- Economic growth does not automatically translate into minimizing malnutrition. Policy is needed to transform economic growth into positive effects for the most vulnerable people.

2. Elements of success: With those challenges, a number of success stories were presented on the first day of the meeting with examples where countries had made significant progress in raising nutrition up the political agenda. Some of the ingredients for success that came out from those presentations were:

- Leadership existed, often at the top level of government, particularly at presidential level or at the prime ministers office. Existence of legal frameworks as back up strategies to ensure permanence despite government or personnel changes (as in Madagascar).
- Improved governance at local level, decentralization policy and participation at community level has to go hand in hand with strong national leadership (as in Bolivia).
- A strong emphasis on mechanisms for cross sectoral / cross ministerial coordination, as in Peru, where different groups, councils and other bodies work together.
- Accountability, monitoring and the ability to track progress and hold various players accountable are essential.
- A preparedness across countries to use multiple entry points for nutrition:
 - in Brazil: the food security agenda was a primary entry point,
 - in Peru: poverty was the entry point,
 - in Laos: nutrition was backed onto the economic growth agenda.
- Bolivia highlighted the importance of funding through national budgets with signals of ongoing and efforts for country wide coverage instead of pilots. Furthermore donor flexibility was seen as essential instead of just technical assistance.
- The development of strategic elements and priorities based on data from (policy) research for integrating nutrition in the national development plan could also in many cases be very important (such as in China).

3. Open questions remaining. The following open questions could be identified as not being addressed adequately:

- Little was discussed about what really triggered governments to take leadership on nutrition. There seemed to be a mixture of triggers such as those mentioned by Laos and Malawi. Malawi talked about the food price crisis being a trigger. It would be interesting to further explore that question.
- There was little mention of the role the international community had played in assisting those governments to alleviate nutrition and accelerate progress. In some of the countries the international community had been involved but they were not 'visible' or part of the narratives about how the progress had been made (e.g. Brazil).
- Another issue that would have been interesting was what kind of institutions would be needed at national and regional level to keep the momentum and to initiate new ideas in dealing with the double burden of malnutrition.
- Another issue was related to factors such as natural resources and their degradation (eg water scarcity, plant degradation) and how they are linked to nutrition.
- How can the terms hunger, health and nutrition be repackaged so that they are more generally understood? Which indicators do we need to measure progress?



- How to measure the readiness score to accelerate action in Nutrition (ref Landscape Analysis) for countries in conflict situations?

4. **Requirements of the international community** that were highlighted in the various presentations, included:

- The Paris Declaration principles on aid effectiveness, harmonization and coherence;
- The need for programmes, not projects, adapted to the context specific country needs;
- Leadership, having one United Nations' (UN) leader on nutrition, the UN agencies working together as ONE UN and the importance of:
 - The role of the Civil society movement;
 - Donor coordination;
 - Nutritional bodies at regional level;
 - National development plans relevant to the country specific context.

5. The international community was sensitive to national priorities and needs. Progress has been made in the various countries that talked about their experiences. However, this progress at national level was contrasted by a **failure of international leadership**. It was repeatedly said that there are gaps at international level and extremely weak coordination. On the other side it was emphasized that if the Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) did not exist the global nutrition players would have to create a similar body. The fact that this problem at the international level exists strongly underlines the need to reinvigorate the SCN.

6. There have also been important **gains at the international level** in the last few months: the extent to which nutrition has been incorporated in the food security initiative of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the fact that nutrition is now part of the CFS agenda, and the Global Partnership on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (GPAFSN).

7. Although there have been some important steps forward, it has to be acknowledged that the nutrition community has a long way to go to raise the **political profile of nutrition**. Until now, it has failed to set nutrition high on the agenda of Davos. The World Economic Forum representative reminded the participants that **nutrition needs to be taken from a business and geopolitical risk perspective** in order to change the way people think about it and to stimulate greater interest.

8. Undernutrition, according to John Mason's presentation, accounts for 30% of the disease burden of women and children. It contributes to one third of child deaths every year. It has a significant impact on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and cannot be ignored. This is a testimony to the failure of global leadership to raise nutrition up the political agenda and to resolve governance issues. That was the agenda for the second day of the meeting.

9. As an introduction to the panel discussion on global governance, the SCN Chair highlighted the clear evidence that if there is commitment and leadership in nutrition, countries can achieve their nutrition goals. The SCN Chair urged the creation of a **movement for nutrition** and the integration of nutrition in all sector policies.

10. The Geneva meeting of 25th September had as objectives to highlight the global nutrition challenges for the actors of the nutrition ecosystem, to present the strategies and programme portfolios of UN Agencies dealing with nutrition, to discuss UN global collaboration



mechanisms, and current interagency mechanisms and initiatives such as Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH). Conclusions as presented by the SCN Chair were:

- Nutrition deserves greater commitment and investment
- UN Agencies made it very clear that leadership is required, and they are committed to taking the lead
- The UN Agencies are committed to reform SCN to meet the challenges and to guarantee the involvement of all active players from the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), bilateral and private sector. This has to be a very inclusive process.

11. The UN Agency representatives and the Special Representative on Food Security and Nutrition shared their ideas and reflections on global governance with the participants and are summarized as follows:

- There is commitment of all UN Agencies, including the World Bank and the Special Representative on Food Security and Nutrition to work together to take the lead on nutrition. Collaboration should be daily business and Agencies should be monitored on it.
- Good governance means:
 - harmonization of efforts
 - policy guidance
 - identification of new risks and generation of new knowledge
 - awareness raising
- The Reform process must be transparent, inclusive and always considering what it means for the people on the ground.

12. Many messages from participants belonging to different constituencies on **global governance** were noted, including:

- A strong call for a reform of the SCN, with value added for advancing nutrition.
- Clarity is needed on the way forward, the process of reform, the resources committed by the 4 UN Agencies, and timetables
- Reflection is needed on the functions of the reformed SCN, how it is going assist in delivering ONE UN, what the division of labour will be.

13. The key guiding principles for nutrition policies and programming were presented and discussed: why they are needed, what they are and how they can be translated into operations. Two further principles were suggested: outcome oriented (or efficiency) and accountability. The next steps could be for the SCN to finalize and adopt the guiding principles, followed by sectoral reviews of policies.

14. A **Global Action Plan (GAP)** was presented: it is a framework for action including what should be done, where it should be done and how it should be done; it is not meant to be a vertical initiative and it has a price tag (10.3 billion US\$ per year); by design the GAP does not deal with governance.

15. Comments on the GAP were varied and there was no consensus on the document:

- There was acknowledgement that the people behind GAP were brave
- There was a wide appreciation of the content and the leadership shown in GAP, but a feeling that it is not going to progress any further until a different pathway is adopted:



an inclusive pathway that is not just window dressing, but a substantial, deep consultative process.

- GAP can be modified in order to obtain a larger consensus and it isn't as divisive as it appears to be.
- On substance, GAP has too strong a focus on direct interventions
- Participants confirmed there was a need for a global framework for nutrition, not a plan and it was suggested to change the name of GAP to reflect this
- There was a strong warning from countries not to have a new battle at global level; countries need guidance on nutrition
- Confusion remains on the linkage of GAP with SCN and other structures/initiatives (CFS, The Secretary General's High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis - HLTF, REACH, etc.)

16. The SCN Chair presented **conclusions** of the second day panel discussions as follows:

- Role of UN Agencies: UN Agencies are committed to take the lead.
- A very broad process of consultation on the SCN reform will be organized
- There will be a linkage to the highest level of the UN (Chief Executives Board -CEB)
- The current Secretariat of the SCN will be strengthened
- There is commitment to finance the Secretariat for the next year

17. The EC Representative summarized a number of **key issues** from the European Commission's (EC) perspective:

- To endeavour to place Nutrition higher in the political agenda with a clear road map.
- The need for clear and recognized global leadership in Nutrition to coordinate global initiatives and Partner Countries, International NGOs, civil societies, private sector will need to be properly involved.
- Clearer and more readable coordination modalities between the different nutrition stakeholders notably, the linkages between the SCN, CFS, HLTF must be clarified.
- A clear division of responsibilities and roles between UN agencies and World Bank is needed.
- More attention should be given to make Global Sectoral Initiatives become more nutrition-friendly.
- Facilitate “south south” exchanges of experiences between partner countries to ensure that countries that are lagging behind can use the lessons learned to catch up.
- While the assessment of the impact of Climate Change on Nutrition still needs to be better defined, adaptation strategies must also be “nutrition friendly” and nutrition must not be forgotten during the discussions taking place in Copenhagen.

18. A representative of a Low Income Country (LIC) presented a **call for action**:

- Have leadership and championing at the highest political and all levels
- Realize that nutrition is a crosscutting issue with economic, socio-cultural, political and biomedical dimensions that require a multisectoral approach.
- Some countries have developed nutrition policies and strategic plans with programmatic coverage and allocation of budgets, advocacy and lobbying to create greater awareness at national and community level and to ensure there is realization of adequate nutrition for all.
- Some countries have ongoing and successful programmes and interventions that require adequate capacities in terms of human, material and financial resources including the research agenda.



- The conducive policy environment as a driving force has been recognized; where it is available, progress has been made. There is recognition that the PRSP, UNDAF and the second generation of PRSP have provided a spring board for action. These can be the stepping stones for future action for nutrition.
- The need to reexamine the legal basis /constitution/ policies/ nutrition activities

Still some challenges remain:

- Confusion between food security, hunger and nutrition. Recommendation: Repackage the three with clear language differences. This should be done by SCN.
- Locating nutrition to the health sector: this limits its implementation to disease. Can we have the multisectoral setting it requires? Recommendation: cross cutting setting. Each sector has to define its niche based on its comparative advantage and thus develop one action plan.
- Abstractness of nutrition. Recommendation: we need to explain to our colleagues more clearly what we mean when we talk of nutrition as an economic, social, political and biomedical issue, so that each sector takes its role adequately.
- Lack of specialists to articulate issues. Recommendation: build the capacities and train nutritionists, dieticians, community workers at various levels.
- Avoid paying lip service to nutrition. Governments, development partners and donors need to find mechanisms to deliver adequate nutrition programs.

19. Key points of the closing remarks by the EC are:

- It is essential to have national ownership and leadership
- A multi sectoral approach is essential
- Inclusiveness is important
- Addressing nutrition should not be part of a single sectoral policy but have a wider approach where all the policy instruments are put into its service
- Good fiscal policies need to enable national revenues to be used to design and implement basic social services and at the same time create favorable conditions for economic investment and activity
- We need to address the proliferation of global initiatives which are targeting health priorities in isolation and in competition among themselves
- Emergency and development food aid and rehabilitation have to be linked
- A strong, simple, credible global architecture needs to be set up
- The UN must be ONE: stop the competition among the different agencies. Therefore we have to invest more into strengthening the SCN

Summary of roles and tasks of SCN as identified by speakers and participants:

- Incubator of new initiatives
- Making sure that **policy guidance** is agreed upon and implemented by all the partners
- To be a good antenna of what is happening in nutrition and having a vision of what is going to happen (the emerging issues: e.g. climate change - how are we reflecting these huge planet changes into our policies?)
- To be able to **communicate**. We need to make simplifications to allow us to advocate better for nutrition
- To bring relevant countries to the discussion table (requested by the EC)
- To consider **representation**: it is important to have the UN players together, but it is also important to find a way to create the space for the discussion with all the stakeholders
- To fix and further align, strengthen and reinvigorate the core of the SCN
- The constituent members of the SCN have to redefine the agenda, the priorities and agree on a modus operandi. Particularly the UN Agencies, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have got to come forward with their contributions of staff, resources to strengthen the SCN
- To ensure a forum for the broader partnership to come together (maybe 2 or 3 times a year) is provided for interaction with developing countries, the international community, including civil society organizations
- To follow **3 principles for a new governance**:
 - an international governance structure that has the ability to work across sectors (gender, social safety/protection, food security, health systems, poverty reduction, private sector, climate change and energy)
 - the ability to act at scale (is able to engage with the Sector Wide Approaches (SWAP), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC), and will help to build national programs in all the high burden countries)
 - the ability to link financing to results



Summary of roles and tasks of SCN as identified by speakers and participants
(continued):

- SCN to organize a workshop in the next year, linking climate change and nutrition
- To have an SCN networking event at the World Urban Forum 5 in Rio de Janeiro in March 2010
- SCN should be the body to hold the private sector and each of the member Agencies accountable
- Should SCN be politically neutral (a technical body), or should it also go into the power politics?
- To re-capture that core credibility for SCN
- The reformed SCN needs to deliver ONE UN
- The SCN should adopt the one country-one vote mechanism
- SCN should take into account the positive dimensions of the change that was taken in 2000
- The Copenhagen conference on **climate change**: SCN should make a statement; the window of opportunity is very short
- Policies against Hunger conference in Berlin in 2010: the reformed SCN should be there
- SCN should have a role in establishing a link from local-national-regional to global level
- SCN to finalize and adopt the guiding principles
- The SCN should review initiatives (e.g. Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative) and their function
- The SCN should have some input into the WTO GATS (general agreement on trade and services) i.e. trade of water and health
- The revitalized SCN can lead a consultative strategy process at country and global level to develop an approach to scaling up nutrition
- SCN would be a forum to fill the gaps in the GAP
- The SCN could lead the start of a consultative process on GAP at country and global level, using the guiding principles
- The SCN can stimulate required intersectoral work between agriculture and health
- The SCN can only function with a clear structure set up and with the adequate backing from member states
- The SCN should help clear the confusion between the terms food security,



Annexes

Meeting Agenda

List of Participants

- 1 FAO (11/09): Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security.
- 2 J Mason and R Shrimpton (2009): Regional trends in malnutrition: the evolution of the global nutrition situation. Results for the UN SCN 6th report on the World nutrition Situation.
- 3 Chizuru Nishida, WHO (2009): Landscape Analysis on countries' readiness to accelerate action in nutrition.
- 4 Bounthavy Sisouphanthong (2009) Lao PDR Successful examples of national nutrition policies, programmes and governance mechanisms.
- 5 Mary Shawa (2009): How Malawi has done it. Paper presented at the high level meeting on nutrition.
- 6 Joseph Dossou Hessou (2009): Politique économique de réformes dans le secteur de la nutrition: cas de Benin.
- 7 Adriana Aranha (2009): Zero Hunger. The Brazilian Development Strategy: Economic growth with social inclusion.
- 8 Koum Kanal (2009): Successful examples of national nutrition policies, programmes and governance mechanism in Cambodia.
- 9 Virginia Borra Toledo (2009): National Policy for Reduction Childhood Malnutrition: National strategy CRECER, Peru.
- 10 Lily Caravantes (2009): Buenas prácticas nacionales para el desarrollo integral de la nutrición.
- 11 Simon Rakotonirina (2009): Madagascar. High level meeting on nutrition.
- 12 Chen Chunming (2009): What we do for policy formulation for improving nutrition. Chinese centre for Disease Prevention and Control.
- 13 Mary Shawa (2009): Nutrition governance. The case of Malawi.
- 14 Ana Maria Aguilar (2009): Governance of nutrition, Bolivia.
- 15 Florence Egal 92009): Guiding principles for nutrition planning. SCN High-level meeting in Brussels, 23-24 November 2009.