

## Nutrition News - Issue 3, 2019

*Nutrition News highlights recent nutrition-related developments supported and/or coordinated by the UN system at the global and country level.*

### UNN analytics anchor discussions on nutrition investment in Mali



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Malnutrition is sometimes invisible to the naked eye and perceived as a technical problem for professionals working in the health sector. When a joint AU/WFP [study](#) (2018) revealed that undernutrition in Mali was attributed to economic losses that equate to roughly 4 percent of the country's GDP, nutrition gained its political wings. Key members of government recognized that conversations needed to go beyond vitamins and minerals and involve several stakeholders at all levels. This together with newly available data pre-empted the national forum that was held from 23 to 25 July 2019 and devoted to "Making nutrition a political and financial priority."

While the event was organized by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance, H.E. Dr. Boubou Cissé, presided over the proceedings, sending a strong signal that nutrition is more than a health issue. The forum attracted over 400 people— all determined to position nutrition as an engine for economic prosperity and human capital development so that Malians have a better future. Among the participants were high-profile international personalities such as the Vice President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the former President of Tanzania, the Global Coordinator of the SUN Movement and the Director/Global Coordinator of the UN [Nutrition] Network, who each brought their experiences, insights and energy

to the table. The three-day event provided an opportunity to reflect on the state of multi-sectoral nutrition governance and coordination in the country. Having benefited from two generous grants from Global Affairs Canada (GAC), starting in 2012 for specialized support in this aspect of nutrition, UNN-REACH experiences were centrepieces of those reflections.

From the opening ceremony, where the UNN Director/Global Coordinator delivered a motivational speech, to the thematic panels, where UNN analytics helped frame the discussions that ensued, the UN Network's value addition was embraced. Dr. Purnima Kashyap, UNN Director/Global Coordinator, spoke to the need to galvanize additional actors in the nutrition arena and the importance of partnership – including with unusual players – a theme that the UN Network Secretariat has been actively promoting during the last year. In Mali, this has resulted in new additions to the UN Network membership base, with UNFPA and UN WOMEN now on board and helping to reach nutritionally vulnerable women, including adolescent girls. In her words, “recognizing that 12 of the 17 SDGs are closely linked to nutrition, improved nutrition becomes a development imperative.” The exchanges between Mali's Nutrition Coordination Unit (*Cellule de Coordination de la Nutrition, CCN*) and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Clusters –Nutrition, Food Security, Health and WASH – demonstrates that humanitarian and development assistance can be aligned. It takes a concerted effort, but the UN Network, remains committed to that cause.

Getting there isn't always easy. July's event illustrated how the UNN's analytical tools and neutral facilitation has set collective action in motion, changing stakeholder behaviour and informing data-driven decision-making. The updated [Multi-sectoral Nutrition Overview](#) (MNO) brought into focus trends over time and inequities between regions/districts, urban and rural populations as well as between girls and boys, taking into account nutrition-related indicators such as food insecurity, infant feeding, teenage pregnancy, access to clean water and poverty. Key findings from the [Policy and Plan Overview](#) were also presented, enabling the integration of nutrition in the National Gender Policy and National Action Plan on Family Planning. This was timely as one of the forum's three objectives was to better position nutrition in national policies and strategies. Results from the [Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping](#) guided discussions on nutrition investment, another central focus of the forum. By putting these pieces together, participants were able to view the full nutrition landscape and understand its sectoral roots. This is helping them determine how and where to intervene– holistically. These UNN contributions seemed to blossom at the forum and be backed by an unprecedented openness to learning together, including experiences in Chad, where UNN-REACH is funded by the EU.

Ultimately, the forum culminated in concrete commitments such as doubling domestic funding for nutrition and the integration of nutrition into Mali's National Development Plan, a first ever. It also helped to articulate a road map for successive action to advance the national nutrition agenda. One of these next steps will be to launch a second wave of mapping in the fall with financial support from UNICEF, who currently chairs the UN Network and is covering the costs of the UNN-REACH facilitator following the expiration of the Canadian funding. This will inform the development of the new national nutrition plan (2019–2023) that is on the horizon, and in turn shape the next era of the country's nutrition history– one that pushes malnutrition into the past.

## Bringing nutrition beyond Rome

According to its mandate, the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) is accountable through regular updates on progress and results to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). On 6 June 2019, UNSCN presented its [annual report](#) for 2018 to the [ECOSOC](#)

[2019 Management Segment](#) in New York. UNSCN reports to ECOSOC every year, along with other United Nations committees, such as the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Non-Communicable Diseases. The reporting by CFS and UNSCN during the same meeting presents a unique opportunity for both committees not just to strengthen the linkages between Rome and New York but also to emphasize and refer to each other's work and show the complementarities. Right to adequate food, the voluntary guidelines for food systems and nutrition and the importance of healthy and sustainable diets were topics that were reported on (see also later in this newsletter).

During her presentation, UNSCN Coordinator Stineke Oenema, underlined the importance of systemic change and food-system transformation to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 to eradicate hunger, as well as all of the other SDGs. Coherent policy, good governance and accountability are essential to achieving sustainable nutrition outcomes and these can only be achieved if nutrition is fully integrated into a range of intergovernmental processes and policies.

“An entry point for change is the promotion of healthy and sustainable diets, as it is a good example of a multiple-duty action,” Ms. Oenema said. “It has the potential to improve health, and it will also contribute to the mitigation of climate change and the reduction of biodiversity loss. Overall, one can say that a healthier diet is the more sustainable choice.”

### News from the Members

During the [forty-first session](#) of the FAO Conference (22–29 June 2019), the highest governing body of the Organization, FAO Members elected Qu Dongyu of China as FAO's new Director-General. Qu Dongyu received 108 out of the 191 votes cast, giving him a first-round majority. Formerly the Vice Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in China, he took up his new position on 1 August 2019, becoming FAO's ninth Director-General since the organization was founded in 1945.

The Conference also endorsed Resolutions establishing an *International Year of Fruits and Vegetables* in 2021, particularly relevant in the context of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, as people should be encouraged to consume more fruits and vegetables, as well as an *International Year of Millets* in 2023 and an *International Year of Rye* in 2025. It further declared 29 September to be an annual *International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste* and 21 May to be *International Tea Day*.

Lastly, the Conference endorsed the **Biennial Theme 2020–2021 – Promoting healthy diets and preventing all forms of malnutrition**, stressing that FAO has a leading role in supporting countries in transitioning towards sustainable agriculture and food systems.

## The Philippines: The land of many islands and nutrition achievements

In spite of the Philippines' emerging economy, high child stunting levels persist (33.4 percent), child wasting levels (7 percent) leave no room for complacency and child overweight doubled between 2003 and 2015 (Global Nutrition Report, 2018). Adult overweight and obesity levels have also risen steeply and less than half of infants are exclusively breastfed during the first six months of a life, an

essential nutrition action that safeguards their nutrition during infancy and from becoming overweight/obese later in life (GNR, 2018). The country's vulnerability to typhoons and earthquakes further complicate the situation, as do the number of isolated and disadvantaged areas in view of its geography.



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While the Philippines is facing multiple burdens of malnutrition, it has in no way shied away from the challenge. It remains deeply committed to the SUN Movement and has taken exemplary action to combat malnutrition at all levels from the President of the Republic to Local Government Units (LGUs). The UN agencies engaged in the UN Network (UNN) have increasingly aligned their efforts on nutrition to help tackle these multifaceted issues effectively and holistically. The country's UNN, comprised of FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, has provided technical assistance to government and advocated for nutrition-smart legislation and fiscal policy. One recent advancement took place on 2 May 2019, with the signing of the implementing rules and regulations Republic (IRR) Act 11148 also known as the "Kalusugan at Nutrition ng Mag-Nanay Act." The law calls for the sustained provision of nutrition interventions through pre- and post-natal health services during the critical 1000 days period from conception to a child's second birthday. It also targets adolescent girls and women of child-bearing age and includes provisions for the breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. The new legislation attracted [CNN media coverage](#), created a buzz in the social media and was an excellent advocacy moment to remind the public and policymakers about the hefty consequences of malnutrition, yet high return on investment.

The signing of the act also coincided with a national forum on *Nutrition in the First 1000 days: Integrate and Scale Up*, organized by the National Nutrition Council (NNC) in Manila. During the event, the Director/Global Coordinator of the UN Network, Dr. Purnima Kashyap, delivered a speech that stressed the importance of engaging multiple sectors in the nutrition agenda and implementing

person-centered programmes, recognizing that “a human body is not compartmentalized into sectors.” Dr. Kashyap painted the picture of how nutrition has the potential to drive the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “explicitly acknowledging the interconnectedness of prosperous business, a thriving society and a healthy environment”. The speech also underscored the need for a systems approach, to branch out and forge new partnerships as well as being open to new ways of addressing multiple forms of malnutrition.

Other measures that the Philippines have taken include the [sweetened beverage tax](#) that was enacted on 19 December 2017. The tax presents a win-win situation whereby public health goals are promoted and government revenue is generated which can, in turn, be utilized for other nutrition-related social programmes such as universal health care. While it is still early, the tax has already contributed to declining sales of sweetened beverages. This will hopefully translate into health gains for Filipinos such as reduced levels of overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs (diabetes) among children and adults. Congressional deliberations on the possibility to extend maternity leave hold further promise and exemplify nutrition’s ties to the labour sector.

The presence of the UNN Director/Global Coordinator at this event helped connect individual efforts, reminding participants how they sum up to a greater whole. These sweeping changes are the fruits of strong government commitment, bottom up accountability mechanisms, a vibrant UNN, flourishing multi-stakeholder engagement and willingness to converge efforts. Undoubtedly important steps forward for the Philippines’ fight against malnutrition, they can also be a source of inspiration for other countries.

## **Towards Voluntary Guidelines for Food systems and Nutrition**

In October 2016, at its forty-third plenary, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) agreed on a [strategy on nutrition](#) aimed at stepping up the CFS’s contribution to the global fight against malnutrition in all its forms. CFS stakeholders subsequently decided to start a policy convergence process to develop Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, to be presented to the Committee for endorsement in October 2020.

The Voluntary Guidelines will be the CFS’s most important contribution to the [UN Decade of Action on Nutrition](#). They are expected to act as a reference document for governments, specialized institutions and other stakeholders, providing guidance on appropriate policies and investments to address the basic and underlying causes of malnutrition. The Guidelines are aimed at ending the current policy fragmentation between the food, agriculture and health sectors, while addressing livelihood and sustainability challenges, helping to make food systems nutrition-sensitive and promoting secure access to safe, diverse and healthy diets for everyone. CFS stakeholders also called for more sustainable food systems in light of their huge impact on biodiversity, climate change and the quality of the world’s air, water and soil.

UNSCN believes that to be effective, the Voluntary Guidelines should be systemic in nature and provide a set of actionable, coherent, consistent and integrated recommendations to promote sustainable food systems globally. This is a challenge, as food systems are complex and context-specific. Crucially, though, they should address inequity, one of the primary causes of malnutrition.

The CFS Secretariat, with the help of a technical task team including the UNSCN Secretariat and several UNSCN members, has prepared a [zero draft](#) of the Voluntary Guidelines based on the recommendations of the [HLPE report on nutrition and food systems](#) and inputs from CFS stakeholders. This zero draft, presented in May, is now being discussed in [five regional consultations](#), which will take place between July and the end of October, to garner regional perspectives. The

process also includes an [e-consultation](#) and all stakeholders are invited to offer input on the zero draft by posting their contributions on the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) website.



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In its contribution, the UNSCN proposed four sets of policy areas that the VGs need to address and that are cross cutting through the elements of the food system. For each area, suggestions are made for actions that have the potential to address several forms of malnutrition and have impact across the food system. See full contribution [here](#). Through the e-consultation, the UNN Secretariat has contributed to consolidated comments from the SUN Movement Secretariat and SUN Global Support System. The e-consultation will remain open until 2 September 2019.

The consultations will inform the first draft of the Voluntary Guidelines, which should be available by the end of 2019. The final Guidelines are expected to be approved by the CFS in October 2020.

## UN nutrition lobbying starts to pay off in Liberia

To address the country's triple burden of malnutrition, action is needed at all levels. Just over one-third of children under five years old are stunted (35.5 percent, Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey [CFSNS], 2018), the vast majority of them are anaemic (69 percent, USAID, 2018) and over half of adult women (52.5 percent) are overweight or obese (Global Nutrition Report, 2018). Legislatures have an important role to play in nutrition and Liberians are banking on them for their health, wellbeing and prospects for a better future. The message was loud and clear to those of the 54th National Legislature that attended a nutrition sensitization workshop in May. After a compelling briefing from the country's Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN) Government Focal Point, the UNN-REACH Facilitator as well as representatives from FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO just weeks earlier, the

House Speaker, Honourable Dr. Bhofal Chambers, stood before his peers to pass along these important messages and put nutrition on their radar.



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The event was testament to the mounting momentum of the SUN Movement in the country since the official nomination of the SUN Government Focal Point and launch UNN-REACH, an intensive UN Network service funded by the Government of Ireland. It was also timely in that the government was in the final stages of developing its budget for the fiscal year. Held in Monrovia, the workshop was jointly organized by Liberia's SUN Movement and UNN-REACH with a view to helping lawmakers make more informed decisions that can halt malnutrition, promote a 'healthier and happier population' and support wider sustainable development.

The event attracted over 60 participants, including high-level government officials such as the Deputy Minister of Gender, Child and Social Protection, Honourable Mamina Carr. Hon. Carr opened the event, providing an opportunity to highlight the relationship between gender and nutrition. Others engaged on specific nutrition issues from six ministries participated, namely: Agriculture; Commerce and Industry; Education; Finance Development Planning; Gender, Child and Social Protection; and Health. The UNN-REACH Facilitator's presence has been instrumental to reaching out to multiple ministries in recent months and setting the wheels of a multi-sectoral nutrition approach into motion. The event was also attended by UN leadership, donors, the SUN Civil Society Alliance Coordinator and other partners, who joined forces to reiterate the importance of active parliamentary engagement, the wide range of causes contributing to malnutrition in the country and thus the need to leverage sector-specific actions.

The Deputy Minister of Finance Development Planning, Honorable Tannah G. Brunson, affirmed government commitment to improving the delivery of health services, and indicated that overall "there is an ongoing effort to increase support toward the sectors and clearly improve the coverage

of nutrition activities across the country.” The challenge is how to do so within real-world budgetary constraints. During the event, the House Speaker formally pledged his support to reduce malnutrition and others pressed for the expansion of nutrition support to adolescents.

Positive signals also came from the United Nations, with participation going beyond those agencies that traditionally engage in the nutrition arena following the UN Network’s efforts to expand its circle. UNDP Resident Representative, Dr. Pa-Lamin Beyai, highlighted the stunting disparities between geographic areas, noting that stunting levels as are high as 41 percent in Grand Bassa county (CFSNS, 2018). He also noted that “what drives malnutrition is everything from governance, poverty, education, water and sanitation, to the health system, agriculture, infrastructure, technology, and women’s empowerment and issues of political will and good governance” urging lawmakers to pursue a systems approach. The engagement of new actors in nutrition is just one type of behaviour change. According to Ms. Kate Brady, Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of Ireland in Liberia, attitude shifts are crucial in view of nutrition’s multi-sectorality with the potential to reap nutrition gains by making sector-specific action more ‘nutrition smart’. This particularly applies to nutrition sensitive actions that are delivered through the agriculture, education, gender and other sectors.

At the end of the workshop, parliamentarians had a better understanding of Liberia’s nutrition situation and the various factors that affect the nutrition enabling environment, including laws and regulations over which they have direct influence. They also learned that their ability to speak about nutrition both in the capital and their respective constituencies can help raise awareness. Inspired by what they heard at the workshop, participating members of the House of Representatives unanimously agreed to become nutrition champions and will work with the House Speaker to identify a lead and co-lead champion to guide these efforts. The lawmakers also agreed to discuss the public health law, currently under deliberation in the House, to sharpen its nutrition lens. On the nutrition investment front, they agreed to submit a proposal to the Ministry of Finance Development Planning for seed money as the national budget is being finalized. Efforts are also underway to explore setting-up a multi-sectoral nutrition pooled fund. In both cases, the hope is that these measures will help to secure more funding for nutrition, including domestic funds which are likely to attract additional external funding. Stay tuned for more nutrition actions from Liberia!

## Improving diets for human and planetary health

Strong evidence is emerging on synergies between health and environment and, as noted in earlier [newsletters](#), UNSCN has been conveying this message at several UN intergovernmental meetings outside Rome, including the UN Environmental Assembly and the World Health Assembly (WHA).

At the [72nd World Health Assembly](#), held on 20–28 May 2019 in Geneva, several sessions related to nutrition and diet, with a focus on non-communicable diseases and particular emphasis on healthy environments and climate change. Member States agreed on a new [global strategy on health, environment and climate change: the transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments](#). The strategy provides a vision and way forward on how the world and its health community need to respond to environmental health risks and challenges by 2030. They also agreed to a [plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing states in the African and South East Asian regions](#). The World Health Organization (WHO), meanwhile, launched the REPLACE Annual Report ‘[Countdown to 2023: WHO report on global trans-fat elimination 2019](#)’, and [Modules of the REPLACE action package](#) that provides a strategic approach to eliminating industrially-produced trans-fat from national food supplies, with the goal of global elimination by 2023. Moreover, the WHA noted the report [Outcomes of the Second International Conference on Nutrition](#) which outlines progress made in the implementation of the Rome

Declaration commitments, with conclusions for the way forward and the [mid-term review of the Nutrition Decade](#).

Beyond the plenary walls, the [Nutrition4Health: Nutrition Innovations Along With NCDs Prevention for Achieving Universal Health Coverage Within the Context of the 2030 Agenda and the UN Nutrition Decade](#) side event discussed the links between human and planetary health and nutrition. UNSCN highlighted the fact that contemporary diets that are high in calories, salt, sugar and animal-based foods and low in micronutrients and fibres are risk factors for the onset of NCDs. In addition, these diets are the outcome of unsustainable food production and thus fail both people and the planet.



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However, the opportunity to change this situation has never been greater: the outcomes of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025 and the SDGs have increased the visibility of nutrition action and pushed for more coordination and collaboration towards sustainable food systems, so as to ensure food and nutrition security for all. The UNSCN Coordinator cited the Nordic and Mediterranean diets as examples of national and regional diets that have the potential to change things for the better.

[The South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative \(SAFANSI\)](#) organized a round-table on [High-impact and Under-represented Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems in South Asia](#) on 17–18 June in Bangkok. More than 120 government officials, civil-society organizations, private-sector representatives, international donors, practitioners and stakeholders from South Asia and beyond debated the role of nutrition-sensitive food systems in improving diets, with a particular emphasis on the role of under-represented and high-impact crops, including indigenous products and small-scale fish species.

Consumption of high-impact and under-represented foods, such as small-sized fish (for more, please see the CFS45 side event on [Improving Food Security & Nutrition Through Innovative Fish-Based Agri-Food Solutions](#)), algae and new and old heritage crops, such as millet and legumes, should be encouraged, as they are often more nutritious but consumed less than dominant crops, such as wheat, maize and rice. In addition, they may contribute to more agro-biodiversity and are often more appropriate to local agroecological contexts.

[Five key lessons](#) sum up the outcome of the round-table meeting: (1) provide affordable, safe, healthy, nutritious and culturally enjoyable food choices for all, (2) ensure no one is left behind, (3) the plate is the target, (4) disrupt the food system and (5) work together.

On 1-3 July 2019, FAO and WHO convened an International Consultation on Sustainable and Healthy Diets which was attended by 24 internationally renowned experts, representing the different FAO/WHO regions, in addition to FAO and WHO technical officers. The objective of the Consultation was to develop guiding principles around what constitutes a sustainable and healthy diet. The idea is to further translate these principles into clear, non-technical information that can be used by governments and other actors in communication and policy-making.

Five background papers were commissioned for the Consultation and reviewed the concept of healthy diet and the evidence about economic, cultural and environmental sustainability of diets. The Consultation agreed on a new term to be used, i.e. Sustainable Healthy Diet (SHD) and developed guiding principles that describe the characteristics of SHD. These guiding principles will be shared with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) through the e-consultation on the development of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, and will guide action in the Nutrition Decade and the achievement of the SDGs. The proceedings of the Consultation will be published by the end of 2019.

## New Resources

- [Climate Change and Land, an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems](#)
- [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 – Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns](#)
- [UNSCN Nutrition 44 – Food environments: Where people meet the food system](#)
- UN Network and the SDGs brief: [EN](#) | [FR](#) | [SP](#)
- UN Network Gender brief: [EN](#) | [FR](#) | [SP](#)
- [HLPE Report #14 – Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition](#)
- [Concept note – Mid-term Review of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition](#)
- [Collaborative Framework for Food Systems Transformation](#)
- [FAO School Food and Nutrition Framework](#)
- [Report of the DBMal Symposium 2018](#)
- [Report of the 2018 IFAD-Save the Children Conference “Leaving no one behind: making the case for adolescent girls”](#)

- [Report of the 2018 UNICEF-GAIN global consultation on Food Systems for Children and Adolescents](#)
- ENN case studies on multi-sectoral nutrition programming at the sub-national level: [Bangladesh](#) | [Ethiopia](#) | [Niger](#) | [synthesis](#) | [video](#)
- [IAEA's Nutritional and Health-Related Environmental Studies Newsletter – August 2019 edition](#)

Call for experts for updating FAO/WHO recommendations on nutrient requirements for children aged 0-36 months - more info available [here](#). Deadline: **15 September 2019**

## Upcoming nutrition related events

- **Jul–Oct:** [CFS Regional Consultations on Food Systems and Nutrition](#), several locations
- **17–30 Sept:** [74th Session of the UN General Assembly \(UNGA 74\)](#), UN HQ, New York, United States
- **23 Sept:** [Climate Summit](#) and [UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage](#), UN HQ, New York, United States
- **24 Sept:** SUN Lead Group Meeting, New York, United States
- **24–25 Sept:** [SDG Summit](#), UN HQ, New York, United States
- **8–9 Oct:** [Healthy Urban Childhoods](#), Uppsala, Sweden
- **14–18 Oct:** [46th Session of the Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#), Rome, Italy
- **14 Oct:** [Iowa Hunger Summit with World Food Prize](#), Des Moines, Iowa, United States
- **16 Oct:** 2019 State of the World's Children Report launch, Rome, Italy
- **16 Oct:** [World Food Day 2019 "Healthy diets for a #ZeroHunger world"](#)

Reminder: The **2019 SUN Movement Global Gathering** will take place in Kathmandu, Nepal on 4–7<sup>th</sup> November. Over 1000 participants are anticipated. Additional information will soon be available.