

Civil Society “Manifesto” on Decade of Action on Nutrition

This document conveys the collective position of the platform of public interest civil society organizations and social movements that have actively engaged in the preparatory process for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) and continue to advance its follow-up, including the Decade of Action on Nutrition, in the context of the civil society vision statement on nutrition.

1. Our understanding of the challenges of malnutrition in all its forms¹

A common understanding of the complex and multidimensional challenges of malnutrition in all its forms is the basis for building lasting solutions. It requires a holistic and multidisciplinary analysis that combines both political and technical perspectives.

We understand food as the expression of values, cultures, social relations and self-determination. In nourishing ourselves, and eating with our family, friends and community, we reaffirm our cultural identities, our ownership over our lives, and our human dignity. Nutrition is the basis for our personal development and our overall well-being.

We identify the following as major causes for malnutrition in all its forms. They are closely interrelated and must be addressed in the broader context of their social, political and economic determinants.

1. Lack of access to adequate and diverse diets, decent living conditions, and public services (e.g., health, education, water and sanitation);
2. Widespread violations of women’s and girls’ rights, including sexual and reproductive rights;
3. The generalized sexual division of labour, result of a patriarchal system, which materialises in the invisibility and lack of value attributed to women’s work, both in their role as food producers and their (unequal) role as care givers.
4. Lack of access to and control over natural resources, including land, water and seeds;
5. Promotion of unsustainable food systems based on agro-industrial food production; lack of support for local food systems and markets that benefit small-scale food producers;
6. Unjust international trade and investment rules; eco-destruction and climate-change;
7. Lack of protection of, promotion of and support for breastfeeding;
8. Unemployment, precarious and unhealthy working conditions, wages below subsistence level;
9. Widespread impunity for corporate human rights abuses and inadequate regulatory frameworks to prevent corporate practices that interfere with public health goals;

Based on this common understanding, we propose **four central pillars** around which action under the Decade of Action on Nutrition should evolve.²

Pillar 1: Human rights as framework for the Decade

¹ Based on Civil Society Vision Statement on Nutrition

² Other social policy domains that closely intersect with the four pillars are health, water and sanitation, climate change and social protection.

- Nutrition action under the Decade must be firmly grounded in the universal realization of human rights, including the human rights to food and nutrition, to health, to water, to self-determination, decent work, control over natural resources, and education. Focus must be on advancing the rights of disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including those mentioned below, who are particularly affected by and vulnerable to malnutrition.
- As children are the first victims of malnutrition, the Decade should also focus on protecting and fulfilling children rights, especially the right to survival, the right to health and the right to adequate food and nutrition.
- Strengthening of women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, and the elimination of violence and discrimination against women is key for addressing malnutrition. The realization of these rights has to pass through a recognition of the patriarchal system and a rupture with the sexual division of labour that perpetuates unequal power relations and makes real empowerment of women impossible.
- Small-scale food producers (in their majority women), who provide most of the food for consumption, particularly for marginalised groups, must be placed at the centre of efforts to tackle malnutrition. Widespread violations of their rights, including those relating to access and control over natural resources as well as those related to the rights of agricultural workers, must be urgently addressed.
- Consumers' rights must be strengthened. We define consumers as people who access food through any of the possible means, from monetary exchanges to food aid or assistance. These rights should be strengthened, inter alia, through regulations to prevent aggressive and misleading marketing, especially to children, of unhealthy food and beverages that promote overweight and diet-related NCDs, and breastmilk substitutes. Macro-economic policies (e.g., fiscal and trade) must be aligned with nutritional goals and human rights more broadly.

Pillar 2: Management of malnutrition throughout the life-cycle

- Policies and initiatives must ensure healthy diets throughout the life course, taking into account and addressing the nutritional needs in different phases of life and of particular groups.
- The thousand days from a woman's pregnancy to her child's second birthday, as well as the promotion and protection of women's and girls' rights, are crucial for ensuring women's and child's nutritional well-being, and interrupting the inter-generational circle of malnutrition. Of particular importance in this context is the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding.
- Overweight and diet-related non-communicable diseases must be recognized as severe challenges and progress towards achieving the WHO Global NCD Action Plan accelerated. Indeed, poor diet is now the biggest underlying cause of ill health and disease globally.
- Governments must adopt systemic and multi-sectoral approaches to addressing the underlying causes of undernutrition and the profound social, environmental, economic and political determinants of this situation, so that existing product-based approaches (e.g., vitamin capsules, ready-to-use therapeutic foods) are limited, exclusively targeted to those who actually require treatment, and are implemented in full coherence with broader holistic human rights-based approaches.

- The urgency of acute malnutrition must be addressed through a twin-track approach, by ensuring availability and access to treatment of severe acute malnutrition, but also by establishing proper systemic frameworks that ensure the realization of people's right to food and nutrition and related rights.

Pillar 3: Sovereign local food systems based on biodiversity

- Governments must play a strong role in reshaping food systems that are capable of providing diversified and nutritious diets for both current and future generations, while ensuring secure livelihoods for small-scale food producers, and preserving/ strengthening eco-systems and bio-diversity. This requires a conscious move away from agro-industrial modes of food production based on mono-cropping and high chemical inputs, towards food systems based on diversified agro-ecological practices and small-scale food producers.
- People – producers and consumers – must be at the heart of food systems. Territorial and informal markets should be strengthened, and protected against the influx of ultra-processed foods, including breastmilk substitutes. Public procurement should prioritise fresh produce from small-scale local producers.
- Biodiversity constitutes the foundation of a healthy and diversified diet that responds to a biological and social co-evolution of natural and cultural processes. It must be protected as such. Natural resources must be managed at the community level.

Pillar 4: Democratic governance and global regulatory framework

- Governance of food and nutrition must be firmly located within government-led normative and regulatory frameworks. The effective participation of rights-holders, in particular groups most affected by hunger and malnutrition, in the elaboration, implementation, and monitoring of policies that concern them is key. At the same time, adequate safeguards must be put in place to protect public policy space from undue influence by powerful economic actors.
- Strong inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be in place to measure progress and hold States accountable to their obligations and commitments in nutrition.
- A central pillar of nutrition and food governance must be the regulation of private corporations to prevent their actions from negatively impacting on nutrition and human rights more broadly.
- The implementation of international commitments by States on nutrition, such as the Rome Declaration and Plan of Action and the World Health Assembly global nutrition targets, must be aligned with existing obligations and commitments, including those under international human rights law.
- WHO and FAO have a key role to play in guiding States in their actions under the Decade and should address nutrition in a holistic manner, by strengthening the nexus between health, food security and nutrition and enhancing coherence between the Rome Declaration and Plan of Action and the WHA global nutrition targets. They should do so in coordination with other UN bodies, especially the CFS and SCN. CFS has a central role to play in promoting, in accordance with its mandate, coordinated and coherent food and

nutrition security policies in line with the right to food, and strengthening the nexus between the health and food angles of a holistic understanding of nutrition.

2. Key expectations on the Decade

1. The Decade should be framed around the universal realisation of human rights. The recognition of the interrelatedness and indivisibility of human rights, such as the right to food and nutrition, the right to health, the right to water and sanitation, women's human rights, decent work, or the access to and control over natural resources, is key for addressing the root causes of malnutrition.
2. States and UN agencies should commit to implementing a binding regulatory frameworks to protect public institutions (and officials) from undue influence by powerful economic actors and resulting conflicts of interest. All Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in nutrition and related fields should be placed on hold until reviewed to ensure that no further harm is done. Due attention must also be placed on the devising of safeguards for the interaction with non-State actors within the Decade.
3. States, individually and jointly, should implement policies to address the underlying and structural causes of malnutrition in a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated fashion, while also ensuring access to and availability of culturally-appropriate and sustainable treatment of severe acute malnutrition.
4. States and UN agencies should protect and promote local food and agricultural systems based on food sovereignty, small-scale food producers, biodiversity, deep ecological foundations and sustainable use of natural resources, native seeds and traditional knowledge and practices, as well as local markets and value chains, that are capable of guaranteeing the availability of and accessibility to diversified, healthy and culturally adequate diets for all.
5. States must ensure strong democratic governance for nutrition, both at national and international level. Especially, they must:
 - Guarantee the meaningful participation of civil society, including women's groups, and representatives of constituencies most affected by hunger and malnutrition at all levels of planning, design, implementation, follow-up and review of policies and other interventions on nutrition.
 - Adopt of a consensual architecture of global nutrition governance firmly grounded in Member States decision making and democratic intergovernmental normative and regulatory bodies, with a clear identification of the roles of implementing partners within the UN system and existing coordinating mechanisms, both at international and regional level.
 - Ensure accountability for obligations and commitments related to nutrition, including obligations under international human rights law and commitments under the sustainable development agenda, the Rome Declaration and Plan of Action and the World Health Assembly global nutrition targets, through the definition of a robust, transparent and independent monitoring and accountability framework, based on the direct and experiential participation of rights-holders.
 - Adopt a clear timeline and clear indicators to be included in the work programme in order to regularly assess and track progresses and achievements.

6. WHO and FAO should maintain the momentum on nutrition and provide continued initiative to advance the nutrition agenda by fostering strong commitments from States and other actors for nutrition and their implementation. More specifically, they should:
 - Urge Member States to set ambitious national nutrition targets, informed by global nutrition targets and in line with national priorities and contexts, as well as with international human rights obligations, to adopt concrete plans for their implementation with adequate resources and to collect and provide the data necessary to measure progress towards these national targets.
 - Call on Member States and all relevant actors to ensure an enabling international environment, including the mobilization of adequate resources, for addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition in all its forms.

3. Our involvement and contribution to the Decade: Launching a People’s Decade of Action on Nutrition based on Civil Society’ Vision Statement and facilitate people’s engagement in the UN Decade in accordance to this Manifesto

1. Ensure the effective participation and voice of those most affected by hunger and malnutrition in all its forms in the development, implementation and monitoring of the Decade of Action.
2. Advocate for actions under the Decade to be compliant with all human rights, in particular those directly related to nutrition, including: the rights to adequate food and nutrition, health, women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, social protection, clean water, sanitation and hygienic conditions, access to and control over natural resources, indigenous rights, decent work and self-determination.
3. Advocate for State actions in other policy fields, including trade, investment, finances, and development cooperation, to be coherent with their nutrition commitments in the broader context of their domestic and extraterritorial human rights obligations.
4. Draw attention to and ensure a focus on all basic causes of malnutrition in all its forms in State/ UN actions, as well as in our own actions.
5. Support UN member States in the development of the work programme for the Decade of Action and its implementation.
6. Support UN member States in setting nutrition commitments in active participation with the affected communities, adapted to their national contexts, including national nutrition targets, and aligned to their human rights obligations, and contribute to their achievement through various actions.
7. Participate in holding governments and other actors accountable to their nutrition commitments and other actions/ policies that may harm nutrition outcomes by developing adequate accountability tools and contributing actively in the monitoring and evaluation of the Decade of action by ensuring the voice of communities is heard. The effective participation of the constituencies most affected by malnutrition is key in the monitoring of the Decade.