



**UNSCN**

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

**A world free from hunger and all forms of malnutrition is attainable in this generation**

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## UNSCN Quarterly Update – Issue 2, 2018

### Towards sustainable, resilient and healthy societies



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are profoundly transformative, cutting across technical sectors and providing a united vision for all nations. The 2018 theme of the [High-Level Political Forum 'transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies'](#) provides a closer look at the underlying conditions and drivers necessary to meet the SDGs. It also offers an opportunity for an important political moment to link the efforts happening in Rome, Geneva, New York and recently in Stockholm.

Good nutrition is a building block for sustainable and resilient societies and lies at the heart of human health and wellbeing. An outcome of the [SDG2 Expert Group Meeting \(EGM\)](#) held in June 2017 was that sustainable and healthy diets support not only the achievement of SDG2 but of all the SDGs. "The key messages of the EGM on SDG2 were echoed in the HLPF Ministerial Declaration, the summary of the President of ECOSOC and in the HLPF debates themselves" explained Carla Mucavi, Director of the FAO Office in New York.

At the [UNSCN convened EGM Linking Nutrition with the SDGs under Review](#) in June 2018, experts represented a wide range of disciplines from academia, research institutes, private sector, UN and civil society. Some were nutritionists, some were technical experts from Member States, and others were specialists from sectors that deal specifically with the five SDGs under review (SDG6, SDG7, SDG11, SDG12 and SDG15). "As we know, the challenge of nutrition is not just related to health and food. The complexities driving malnutrition go beyond that; and in my view, for any country to achieve any one of the 17 SDGs, nutrition will have to be in the front and center of their agendas, not just Goal 2 and Zero Hunger" emphasized Ambassador Mario Arvelo, Chair of the [Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#). "This expert group meeting help(s) bring Rome closer to New York – and vice versa - by highlighting the many interlinkages between food security, nutrition and all the SDGs." After one and a half days of deliberations, key messages were delivered to a Member State Briefing on 20 June by Stineke Oenema, UNSCN Coordinator. These outcomes provide concrete, actionable nutrition inputs for the 2018 HLPF and its [related UNSCN-CFS event](#), and beyond, to the plenary of the 45th session of the CFS in October 2018.

One important discussion that fed into the [EGM Linking Nutrition with the SDGs under Review](#) was held a few weeks prior at the [Stockholm EAT Forum](#). On 12 June, the FAO, WHO and UNSCN Secretariat organized a side event on the theme ‘[Actioning Nutrition to drive the 2030 Agenda](#)’ to highlight concrete actions for the UN Decade of Action for Nutrition. The event moderator Francesco Branca (WHO’s Director of Nutrition), Corinna Hawkes (Director of the Centre for Food Policy at City University and co-chair of the Global Nutrition Report), Dr. Shenggen Fan (Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute) and Günter Hemrich (Deputy Director, a.i. of FAO’s Nutrition and Food Systems Division) shared their ideas on how nutrition contributes to the achievement of the SDGs, in particular SDG 11 on sustainable cities and SDG 12 on sustainable production and consumption.

Corinna Hawkes, building on the [Global Nutrition Report 2017](#), described how “nutrition can be a driver and catalyst for the other SDGs”, and emphasized that “achieving the other goals is key for the nutrition goal to be achieved”. She called for “the nutrition community to reach out much more proactively to others and ask ‘how can we help you?’” She invited stakeholders to “make a SMART commitment which is not just about achieving nutrition or their own goal, but achieving their goal *and* nutrition.” The discussion was also an opportunity to highlight the key role of the private sector, and the need for private interests to be guided and regulated by sound policy frameworks, combined with consumer education.

Full details about the [EGM Linking Nutrition with the SDGs under Review](#) and the [Actioning Nutrition to Drive the 2030 Agenda at the EAT Forum](#), including blogs, key messages and follow-up, are available online.

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## [Nutrition Decade takes on water and health](#)

To make the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (herein the “Nutrition Decade”) a success, several actors are coming together to scale-up efforts and increase the political commitment needed to achieve their national nutrition goals, as well as the international commitments through the [ICN2](#), [NCD-targets](#) and [SDGs](#). Action Networks are one such meeting point. As noted in the [Nutrition Decade Work Programme](#), these networks are meant to be “*informal coalitions of countries aimed at accelerating and aligning efforts around specific topics linked to one or more action areas of the Nutrition Decade, through advocating for the establishment of policies and legislation, allowing the exchange of practices and experiences, highlighting successes and lessons learnt, and providing mutual support to accelerate implementation.*”

Norway has been a frontrunner in this area by becoming the first country to establish an Action Network under the Nutrition Decade in June 2017. The first meeting of the newly established [Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition](#) was held on 5 July 2018 and sought to provide a platform for countries to highlight the role that sustainable food from the oceans and inland waters can play in adequate dietary energy and nutrient intake. The objectives of the Network were set out as being to increase the nutritional impacts that fisheries and aquaculture can make as windows of opportunity for the follow-up of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) towards achieving healthy diets. The event saw the attendance of representatives from several government ministries, UN agencies and research institutions. The meeting concluded with more countries, such as Barbados, Guyana, Ireland and Netherlands, signaling their interest to engage further with the Network as members. Norway also announced 15 September 2018 as the registration deadline for all government ministries that may be interested to join. As a follow up, Norway intends to organise another meeting with all registered members of the Network on the sidelines of the 45<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 45) which will take place in October 2018.

Apart from Norway, other countries such as Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Italy and Zambia are already in discussion with FAO and WHO, who form the Nutrition Decade Secretariat, to establish new Action Networks. These Networks will be structured differently depending on the topic (i.e. salt reduction, control of the marketing of foods to children, labelling, school food procurement) and grouping of interested actors. Whether at regional or global level, Action Networks should operate under the leadership of a government institution and engage civil society, academia and the private sector, as appropriate. Tools to assist are available upon request from the joint FAO/WHO Nutrition Decade Secretariat by writing to [nutrition@fao.org/nutrition@who.int](mailto:nutrition@fao.org/nutrition@who.int).

### **Recording the achievements**

At the request of the UN Secretary General (Resolution 70/259), FAO and WHO were invited to inform the UN General Assembly about the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, such as the establishment of Action Networks. As a result, a [biennial report to United Nations General Assembly on the Implementation of the Nutrition Decade](#) was prepared to highlight the outcomes of the first two years. This comprehensive overview provides a snapshot of the progress made in implementing the Nutrition Decade, reflecting key developments at the international, regional and country levels. The related Resolution is currently under discussion by Member States at UN Headquarters and, once agreed, will be made available [here](#).

### **Global guidance from the 2018 World Health Assembly**

The [World Health Assembly \(WHA\)](#) is the top decision-making body for WHO and is generally attended by delegations from all 194 WHO Member States to determine the policies of the organization. While resolutions agreed at WHAs are not binding, they set the bar for Member States to achieve good health and nutrition for their populations. Furthermore, international guidance draws on the top research and global experience sharing, which is of particular importance for lower income countries that do not have the resources available to conduct their own studies.

Two agenda items dealing with nutrition (A71/22: [Maternal, infant and young child nutrition - Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition: biennial report](#) and A71/23: [Maternal, infant and young child nutrition - Safeguarding against possible conflicts of interest in nutrition programmes](#)) were presented at the [Seventy-first World Health Assembly \(WHA71\)](#) from 21-26 May 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland. The outcomes of which resulted in resolution [A71/A/CONF./4 Rev.1](#) on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF). This agreement highlights the importance of breastfeeding and encourages countries to uptake the new implementation guidance on [Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative](#) that emphasizes strategies to scale up to universal coverage and ensure sustainability over time. The guidance focuses on integrating the programme more fully in the health-care system, to ensure that all facilities in a country implement the revised [Ten Steps to successful breastfeeding](#). It was also meant to reinforce the implementation of the WHO Guidance on ending inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, and the new operational guidance for [infant and young child feeding in emergencies](#). However, according to several who attended, the resolution missed some elements crucial for mother and infant health.

For example, the [International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes](#) (herein “the Code”) is only mentioned in Operative Paragraph (OP) 1.3 but does not include language on monitoring and enforcement, which had appeared in the initial draft supported by Botswana, Canada, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Panama, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Zambia.

There was also no mention to subsequent resolutions. The Preamble Paragraph (PP) 12 states "*Also recognizing the ongoing implementation by WHO of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors including in nutrition programs*" but makes no mention of conflict of interest. Finally, references to ending the inappropriate promotion of foods appear but once in OP1.5 urging Member States "*to continue taking all necessary measures in the interest of public health to implement recommendations to end inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children*". These results came despite evidence and recommended action available in the 2018 [WHO-UNICEF-IBFAN status report](#) on the implementation of the Code at national level and the advocacy efforts of civil society actors present at the negotiations.

Another nutrition relevant agenda item during the WHA71 was the Preparation for the [Third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases](#) to be held on 27 September 2018 in New York ([A71/14](#) and [A71/14 Add.1](#), WHA71.2). Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are now the leading cause of mortality worldwide; they are responsible for 71% of global deaths; equivalent to 41 million people. Poverty, the impact of the globalization of marketing and trade of products deleterious to health, rapid urbanization and population ageing are the main drivers of this global epidemic of premature deaths from NCDs.

As stated in the [Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases 2013-2020](#), poor quality diets are among the top six risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease. Specifically, the NCD burden is associated with diets low in fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, seafood-derived omega-3 fatty acids but high in sugar, sodium and trans-fatty acids.

According to the [WHO's Global NCD Progress Monitor](#) and the [2016 Global Nutrition Policy Review](#), governments are making some progress in their response to address dietary risk factors and increased prevalence of NCDs, but not enough to meet the global targets set for 2025.

Awareness raising efforts for good nutrition also took place in the form of the several side events that were held throughout the week. Noteworthy was the week-long Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Nutrition Hub. Meant to provide a space for SUN country representatives and diverse stakeholders attending the WHA to come together to share their experience, discuss critical nutrition issues and to facilitate mutual learning for greater impact at country level. Around 20 different events were held throughout the week, ranging from innovative, highly interactive public events, which were livestreamed to allow for wide participation and uptake, to smaller working sessions giving SUN Country stakeholders an opportunity to exchange with each other. You can access more information about the event [here](#) and watch videos of the public events on YouTube [here](#).

Another significant side event was [NCD Alliance's 'ENOUGH'](#), which was attended by more than 300 people. The event comprised an opening address by Dr. Svetlana Axelrod, followed by two panels focusing on the WHO Independent High-level Commission on NCDs, and priority outcomes for September's UN High-Level Meeting. Dr. Axelrod spoke of how, as global citizens, we can no longer tolerate such slow rates of progress on NCDs, and how Member States must participate in the discussion about NCDs at the highest level. The event was recorded and can be found [here](#). Furthermore, another relevant event which underlined the linkages among nutrition and NCDs was the "Nutrition education and International Diabetes Federation action to tackle obesity and prevent diabetes" event.

#### **UNSCN Brief: Non-communicable diseases, diets and nutrition**

This brief provides short overviews of various technical and policy aspects of the NCDs nutrition nexus, including a condensed chronology of recent political processes in the areas of nutrition and NCDs, a

summary of how nutrition, diet and NCDs are linked, and an overview of key intervention, programme and policy actions for the way forward. The brief and key messages are available [here](#).

## **Noncommunicable diseases in the Philippines - A mission by the Interagency Task Force**



In October 2016, members of the UN Interagency Task Force on NonCommunicable Diseases (IATF on NCDs) established a thematic working group on nutrition. As convener and member of the group, the UNSCN Secretariat articulated its work plan and deliverables. These include i) improve awareness and understanding of the Right to Food and underlying factors of several forms of malnutrition and diet-related NCDs and their policy implications; ii) improve policy coherence among UN Agencies, programmes, funds and related intergovernmental organizations to ensure effective development and implementation; iii) increase coordination of policy and programme

actions related to nutrition and diet-related NCDs; and iv) provide support to countries and regions in developing and implementing national and regional NCD strategies and action plans, as part of a healthy environment and integrated health system. On a regular basis, joint country missions are organized by the IATF to help efforts to scale up the National Multi-sectoral Response to NCDs. The nutrition working group seeks to strengthen the nutrition elements of these mission.

In the Philippines, tobacco use, unhealthy diet and insufficient physical activity are increasing problems. The prevalence of overweight and obesity has been on the rise over recent years and one quarter of Filipino adults have high blood pressure. In response, the government of the Philippines requested the IATF on NCDs to organise a mission to enhance the support of UN agencies, individually and through the UN Country Team, to address the NCD challenges. A key element of the mission was to assess the state of national response to the challenge of NCDs in Philippines, including through exploring the role and the potential of country and regional UN agencies and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches in the implementation of the national NCD agenda.

Filipino officials prioritised three nutrition issues for action. Firstly, the restricting and regulating the marketing of food and non- alcoholic beverages to children, especially in and around schools. This discussion was facilitated by the Department of Education. Secondly, nutrition labelling and sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) tax, an area in which policies currently exist but are not effectively implemented. Work was also done to explore how extra revenue, such as that generated from the SSB tax, could be channelled to increasing the availability of safe potable water in and around schools. And thirdly, the elimination of trans-fats.

The mission included the following agencies: World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN), World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank and Public Health England.

Photo credit: Carlo Roscioli

## Schools as a system for Good Nutrition

“Since the start of the century, the school enrolment rates have increased because many of the issues that we’ve addressed have been successful; however, this has given us new priorities” explained Harold Alderman, IFPRI’s Senior Research Fellow at a Half-Day Seminar on Nutrition for School-Age Children on 16 May 2018. “To a large degree, we often use 20<sup>th</sup> century findings to motivate 21<sup>st</sup> century issues”.

A comprehensive school health and nutrition strategy that expands the objectives to include the challenges of addressing the health needs of adolescents was the focus of the UNSCN paper [Schools as a System to Improve Nutrition](#). It goes well beyond the enrollment and weight gain goals that have traditionally motivated school meal provision, using schools as a system for good nutrition. It also draws attention to countries that are actively encouraging underutilized, nutrient rich crops and species into school food procurement and school meals. Since its release, this document has been used in [several capacity building trainings](#) and is contributing to the development of technical guidance by UN agencies.

School meals are known as a vehicle for getting children to school, keeping them there, and ultimately improving their learning. Good nutrition equals improvements in math, language and cognitive test so school meals are an investment in the future. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of primary school age children not in school declined globally from 100 million to 61 million but progress has stalled since 2007. With all the effort and investment in school meals, why the pause?

Mr. Alderman noted that the ability for school meals to improve nutrition is highly context specific. As such, designing a programme to address all forms of malnutrition is a complicated challenge. For example, school meals contribute to overall weight gain but this might not be desirable in settings where programmes are being designed to reduce overweight and obesity. In those cases, programmes focused on exercise and nutrition, iron supplementation, deworming, and regulations to keep unhealthy foods off school grounds would have a more beneficial outcome. When targeting the two to five year olds, school meals will only impact a certain section of the population because preschools are often out of the reach of poorer children. And there is extensive knowledge about primary school aged children but how do we reach adolescence, those in school and those no longer attending.

Designing the ideal programme for each context is one challenge but so is securing sustainable funding. “If we think about low and low to middle income countries, 29 billion dollars are invested in children under five years of age, 210 billion dollars in education and 1.4-3.5 billion dollars in health and nutrition in children in the age of 5 to 20-year age range” noted Donald A.P. Bundy, Professor of Epidemiology and Development at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “We often think about the apparent high cost of school meals because of the impact that they have on health and nutrition, which is the area with the least information.” However social protection investment and gains in education is well documented so the cost should be borne beyond only the ministries of education. Furthermore, sourcing school meals through public procurement schemes is a return to the local economies.

For further reading, see [Schools as a System to Improve Nutrition](#) and [Chapter 8 Optimizing Education Outcomes: High Return Investment in School Health for Increased Participation and Learning of the Disease Control Priorities, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition \(DCP3\) 2015-2018](#).



Photo credit: @FAO/Giulio Napolitano

## New Resources

GLOPAN's [Improving diets in an era of food market transformation: Challenges & opportunities for engagement between the public and private sectors](#) seeks to stimulate governments and other stakeholders to help build strategies to incentivize the private sector to influence food systems in ways that will improve the food environment, and enable better dietary choices.

[Building Momentum: lessons on implementing evidence-informed nutrition policy](#): The WCRF International Building Momentum series takes the lessons learned from governments who have implemented evidence-informed nutrition policies and collates them with the published literature to succinctly outline how to design and implement a robust nutrition policy. Policymakers, academics and advocates from around the world are interviewed to inform the series, providing essential guidance on how to overcome common barriers and challenges in the nutrition policy process.

The [2018 IFPRI Global Food Policy Report](#) looks at the impacts of greater global integration—including the movement of goods, investment, people, and knowledge—and the threat of current antiglobalization pressures.

Agricultural extension staff interact directly with farmers and other value chain actors, and are therefore uniquely positioned to support nutritious food systems. The INGENAES project and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services have teamed to develop a [Nutrition-Sensitive Extension module](#), the newest addition to the New Extensionist Learning Kit that equips extension staff for work in the rapidly-changing rural context.

## Upcoming nutrition related events

9-18 July: [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#), UN HQ, New York, USA

16-27 July: [5th Annual WHO Summer Institute for systematic reviews in nutrition for global policy-making](#), New York, USA

1-7 August: [World Breastfeeding Week](#), worldwide

30-31 August: [SDG-Conference: Towards Zero Hunger – Partnerships for impact](#), Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands

31 August – 1 September: [Women Nutrition Conference 2018](#), Toronto, Canada

7-8 September: [27th World Congress on Diet, Nutrition and Obesity](#), Auckland, New Zealand

27 September: [Third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases](#), New York

28 September: [International Forum on Food and Nutrition](#), Columbia

15-20 October: [45th session of the Committee on World Food Security](#), FAO HQ, Italy

16 October: [World Food Day](#), worldwide