

By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition and leave no one behind



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United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

April 2017

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By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition and leave no one behind



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture - SDG 2

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages - SDG 3

One out of three people in the world suffer from at least one form of malnutrition - GNR 2016



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Acknowledgements

Prepared by Stineke Oenema, UNSCN Coordinator, with generous support and inputs from UNSCN members, observers, and partners.

The paper is available on the UNSCN website at www.unscn.org.

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Background

In 2015, the world agreed to eliminate all forms of malnutrition by 2030. To accelerate progress toward this goal, the United Nations have adopted the first ever UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, from 2016-2025. In the years running up to 2016, several nutrition targets were agreed upon. To date, these targets remain unmet. On the contrary, for at least one form of malnutrition, the challenge is increasing: if current trends continue, the absolute number of overweight people will have increased from almost 2 billion today, to 3.3 billion by 2030, equal to one third of the projected world population. At the same time, approximately 800 million people remain undernourished. Among children, a highly vulnerable group, 156 million are too short for their age, 50 million are too thin, and 42 million are too heavy.¹ Severe weather and other climate change-related events exacerbate the situation, increasing the number of people at risk of malnutrition by millions.²

The world needs to step up its efforts to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms. More sectors - beyond health and agriculture - , more actors – beyond the traditional ones - and more countries need to be involved. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for transformational change, which can only be achieved by comprehensive and coherent shifts in actions, programmes and policies addressing both underlying and immediate causes of malnutrition. This agenda puts people, their health, well-being, dignity and rights at the centre of the strategy, while also prioritizing sustainable management of natural resources. The 2030 Agenda places nutrition as a lynchpin connecting “People, Prosperity, Planet, Partnerships, and Peace”.



¹ UNICEF, WHO, WB (2016). Joint malnutrition estimates.

² Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (2016). *Food systems and diets: Facing the challenges of the 21st century*.

Purpose and scope of the paper

This paper discusses precisely this lynchpin role, that is, the centrality of nutrition in the current sustainable development agenda. It provides an overview of the numerous and inter-related nutrition targets that have been agreed upon by intergovernmental bodies, placing these targets in the context of the SDGs and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. As such, this paper does not give a full technical analysis of the nutrition landscape but rather connects the dots between the various identified areas for policies and action and the Sustainable Development Agenda. It aims to inform nutrition actors, including non-traditional ones, regarding opportunities to be engaged and connected in a meaningful way.³

Good nutrition is a human right and the foundation of well-being

People: Good nutrition during the first 1000 days of a child's life is critical to achieving full physical, intellectual and human potential in adolescence and adulthood.

Every man, woman and child has the right to adequate food and nutrition.⁴ Good nutrition (as opposed to malnutrition) is included in the human rights to food and to health and is the foundation of human health and wellbeing. It is a moral imperative to work towards the elimination of malnutrition, considering current knowledge, techniques and means of mobilisation and communication. Malnutrition, which includes undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity, affects all countries regardless of the nature of the malnutrition problem and income levels. Reducing its causes and effects is requisite for achieving the SDGs. Good nutrition is associated with mental acuteness and higher individual earnings. These outcomes in turn support macroeconomic and societal growth. Conversely, malnutrition impairs individual productivity, which acts as a drag on national growth. Malnutrition represents a pernicious, often invisible, impediment to the successful achievement of SDG targets (UNSCN, 2014).

Prosperity: One dollar invested in nutrition gives a rate of return of \$16 (GNR, 2015).

³ A concurrent, complementary UNSCN paper reviews the current global nutrition architecture and suggests roles for UNSCN to improve global governance for nutrition. UNSCN (2017). *Global Governance for Nutrition and the role of UNSCN*.

⁴ The Right to Food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restricted sense, which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1999, p.2).

The nutritional problem

During the past decades, the world has made modest progress in reducing undernutrition. However, this progress has been uneven across regions, population groups and gender. Moreover, prevalence rates and absolute numbers for overweight and obesity have increased tremendously. Today, multiple forms of malnutrition are occurring in the same country, the same community, the same household and even the same person. These complicated scenarios are occurring in increasingly challenging contexts. Tens of millions of refugees from (civil) wars, terrorism, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, as well as human rights violations and inappropriate socio-economic policies are currently at increased risk of malnutrition.⁵ In addition, environmental problems such as climate change, pollution of air, water and soil, and decreasing biodiversity are creating conditions that threaten the health and nutrition of people. It is estimated that by 2050, 25 million more children than today will be malnourished due to climate change.⁶ These conditions also pose a major challenge to sustainable development.

The scale of the problem

Two billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. Almost two billion people are overweight and this number is still rising (GNR 2016). Approximately 800 million people are undernourished. Stunting still affects 156 million children and 50 million are wasted, including 16 million who are severely and acutely malnourished. Overweight affects 42 million children and this number is increasing (UNICEF, WHO, WB, 2016).

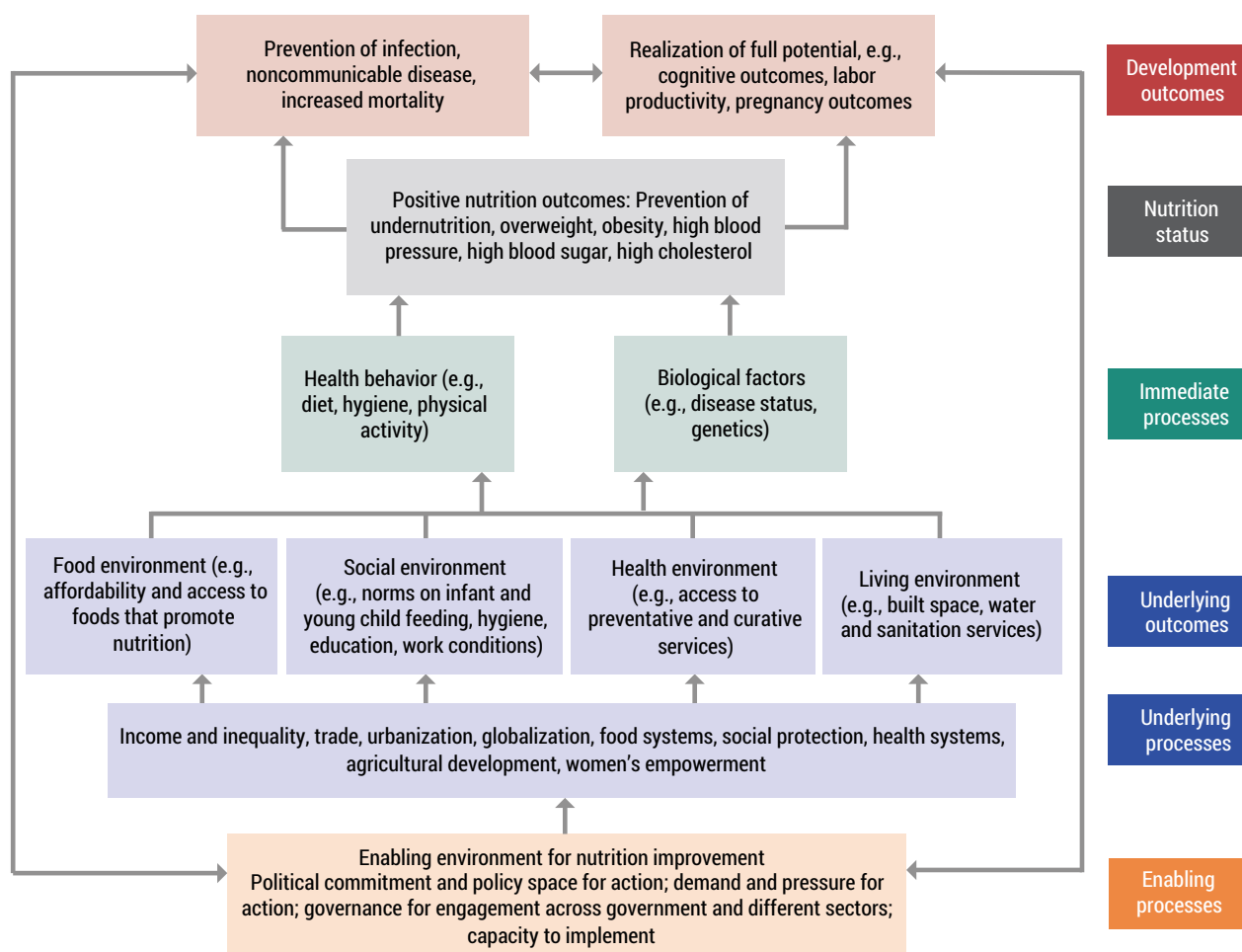


The many manifestations of malnutrition derive not just from a lack of sufficient, nutritious and safe food, but also from a host of interacting processes linking health, care, education, sanitation and hygiene, access to resources, women's empowerment and more. See Figure 1.

⁵ FAO and WHO (2014a). *Rome Declaration on Nutrition*. Second International Conference on Nutrition. Rome.

⁶ Nelson GC, Rosegrant MW, Koo J, Robertson R, Sulser T, Zhu T, et al., (2009) *Impact on Agriculture and Costs of Adaptation*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington DC.

Figure 1.
The underlying drivers of malnutrition⁷



Agricultural diversification, marketing and dietary diversity

A growing evidence base indicates a positive association between production diversification and diet diversity among some smallholder farmers. However, there are inhibiting factors that can be framed as a vicious cycle comprising unsustainable intensification of production practices leading to land degradation, reduced productivity, decreased purchasing power and reductions in food crop production. Population growth and shrinking farm holdings are two root causes. For poor farmers trapped in this cycle, public sector support for major cereal crops and related market signals are strong disincentives to production diversification. Indigenous crops (e.g. sorghum, local vegetables) are crowded out by “substitute” products, for which demand is stronger and production is facilitated (e.g. maize). The end result is reduced availability of/access to diverse foods, and increased prevalence of monotonous, low nutrients diets [FAO (2016), *Diversifying production and diets. Easier said than done*].

⁷ Reproduced from the Global Nutrition Report 2016. International Food Policy Research Institute. 2016. *Global Nutrition Report 2016: From Promise to Impact: Ending Malnutrition by 2030*. Washington, DC.

Figure 1 shows that the underlying and root causes of malnutrition are complex and multidimensional. They include *inter alia* poverty, inequality and discrimination. In addition, nutrition services (both curative and preventive) have not been sufficiently integrated into health services. Modern and industrialized food systems are increasingly challenged to provide adequate, safe, diversified and nutrient rich food requisite to healthy diets.⁸ To the contrary, they have increasingly provided people with highly processed foods that contain insufficient fiber, and too much salt, sugar and the wrong types of fats. Underlying factors for malfunctioning food systems are *inter alia*: unequal access to and control over resources, as well as unsustainable production and consumption patterns leading to environmental degradation. Weak guidelines and insufficient enforcement of national policies, regulations and laws have allowed industries to produce and market unhealthy products, whereas consumers lack the awareness to differentiate unhealthy from healthy dietary options. At the same time, economic and agricultural environments have not been conducive to small-scale food producers and processors producing adequate food for themselves and the market. This basic lack of security prevents people from building sustainable, resilient livelihoods. The unequal position of women throughout the problematic aggravates the specific nutritional challenges of women themselves and of their families. FAO (2013) states that food system policies and interventions are rarely designed with nutrition as their primary objective,⁹ hence nutrition does not factor in as a primary concern in current supply-chains.¹⁰



⁸ WHO Healthy Diet Fact Sheet, Fact Sheet No. 394 is available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs394/en/>

⁹ FAO (2013) *The State of Food and Agriculture, Food Systems for better Nutrition*. Rome.

¹⁰ UNSCN (2016) *Investments for Healthy Food Systems. A framework for Analysis and Review of Evidence on Food Systems Investments for Improving Nutrition*.

Reaching the global nutrition targets

The global nutrition targets as agreed by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2012,¹¹ the global Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) targets, the NCD Action Plan,¹² and the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) Framework for Action provide a clear direction for action in fighting all forms of malnutrition. These targets have been partially integrated into the SDGs, in which nutrition should be seen as crosscutting and essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Peace: Improved nutrition helps to break the intergenerational cycle of inequity and poverty and thus contributes to a more peaceful society.

The WHA targets are precise, concise and comprehensive, and are formulated in a practical way to encourage application by policy makers and other decision takers. From a more technical point of view, it is interesting to connect them with the development of scientific insights and approaches to tackle malnutrition in all its forms. Several scientific publications¹³ have indicated the importance of addressing and preventing undernutrition during the first 1000 days of a child's life: from conception to the second birthday. If during this period the foundations for good nutrition are not properly established, irreversible damage will result and the child will not be able to grow to her or his full potential. Building on the 1000 days cycle, specific attention should go to adolescent girls and women of reproductive age. Evidence exists of the positive effects of a number of specific nutrition interventions during that time period (e.g. exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months; introduction of complementary foods after 6 months, proper hygiene practices, deworming, fortification of salt with iodine), however this does not mean that there are no other entry points to improve nutrition. Moreover, even with coverage of 90% of direct nutrition interventions, only 20% of stunting deficits would be addressed.¹⁴ The life cycle approach¹⁵ is helpful because it explains that at each stage of life, nutrition can and should be addressed in order to break the cross-generational cycle of malnutrition. The life cycle approach also shows that at several stages of life people, especially women, have different nutritional needs.

Figure 2, picturing the life cycle approach, shows how the first 1000 days are critically important. However it also shows how investments in nutrition must extend to people beyond children under two, considering the changing needs and nutrition related risks at later stages in life, such as adolescence (girls) and women of reproductive age. In addition, it calls attention to underlying causes of malnutrition and the need to address those. Addressing underlying causes can only be done with the involvement of key sectors such as health, agriculture, water and sanitation, social protection and education. These sectors should be involved taking into account the specific needs and roles of women in order to work towards sustainable and inclusive solutions.

¹¹ Reaffirmed by the World Health Assembly in 2016 (A69/A/CONF./5 Add.1). Geneva: WHO.

¹² World Health Organization (2013). *Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2013-2020*. Geneva. Available at: http://www.who.int/nmh/events/ncd_action_plan/en/.

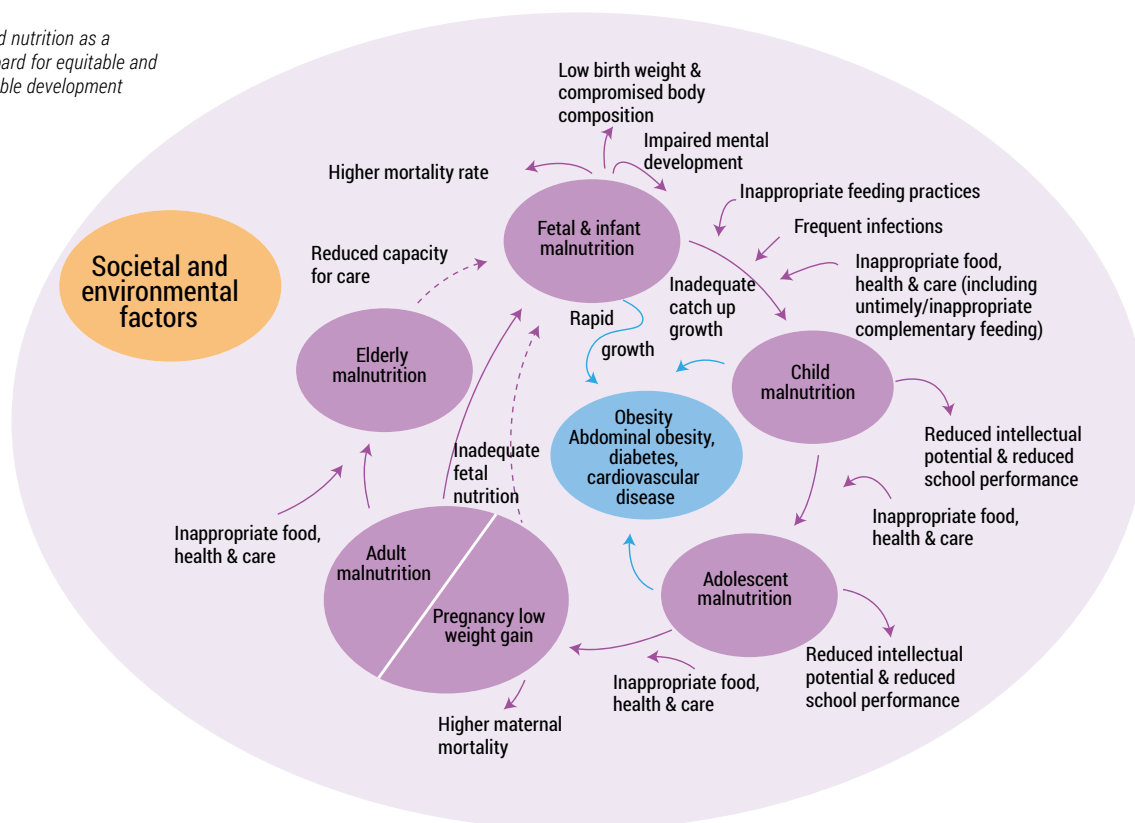
¹³ Lancet (2008) *Maternal and child undernutrition: global and regional exposures and health consequences*. London.

¹⁴ Bhutta et al (2013) *Evidence-based interventions for the improvement of maternal and child nutrition. What can be done and at what cost?*. Lancet. 2013.

¹⁵ A life course approach is being used to study the physical and social hazards during gestation, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and midlife that affect chronic disease risk and health outcomes in later life. It aims to identify the underlying biological, behavioural and psychosocial processes that operate across the life span. (Kuh and Ben-Shlomo, 1997). It used to be very prominently referred to until the 1000 days approach was launched. In fact the two should be seen as complimentary.

Figure 2.
Nutrition throughout the life-course¹⁶

*Improved nutrition as a
springboard for equitable and
sustainable development*



World Health Assembly Targets

The WHA has adopted two sets of targets, one focused on undernutrition in young children and women of reproductive age, the other on NCDs, of which a sub-set is directed to nutrition, overweight and related NCDs. Both sets combine insights from studies related to the first 1000 days to prevent or cure child undernutrition, the link between undernutrition in childhood and the onset of overweight/obesity and NCDs later in life, and advice about practices that can be implemented throughout the life course.

The WHA targets to improve maternal, infant and young child nutrition and the nine voluntary global NCD targets are both to be met by 2025.

The WHA target for breastfeeding is a precondition to achieve the other targets as it is the first action after birth that can be taken to provide a human being with a healthy diet and a good start in life. Appropriate breastfeeding practices, including appropriate complementary feeding practices after six months of exclusive breastfeeding, not only prevent malnutrition among young children, but are also associated with less susceptibility to

¹⁶ Reproduced from WHO childhood overweight policy brief, based on figure from Darnton-Hill I, Nishida C, James WPT. *A life course approach to diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases*. Public Health Nutr 2004;7:101-21.

overweight and NCDs later in life. The policy documents that accompany the WHA targets also indicate how the several forms of malnutrition found in children interact (e.g., how iron deficiency is associated with stunting, child underweight and low birth weight¹⁷). In the same policy document, the breadth of the WHA targets are noted, reaching out beyond the six nutrition targets, for example stating how certain micronutrient interventions are needed to tackle low birth weight. As such, despite the fact that the WHA targets do not specify all individual forms of malnutrition, their scope is comprehensive with regard to young child nutrition.

WHA targets

1. 40% Reduction in the number of children under 5 years of age who are stunted
2. 50% Reduction in anaemia in women of reproductive age
3. 30% Reduction of low birth weight
4. No increase in childhood overweight
5. Increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months up to at least 50%
6. Reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5%

The NCD targets mainly focus on four types of NCDs: cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. This paper focuses on aspects of these NCDs most commonly linked with diet and nutrition; it does not discuss the drugs that may be needed to cure the consequences. It will include those behavioural risk factors – unhealthy diet, and physical inactivity – that are mostly linked to nutrition. Farounzafar et al. concluded in 2015 that unhealthy diets are the number one leading cause for the disease burden worldwide.¹⁸

The NCD targets recognize that the lifestyles and conditions in which people live and work influence their health and quality of life.¹⁹ The NCD action plan recognises the need to reduce modifiable risk factors for NCDs and underlying social determinants through the creation of health-promoting environments. Policy options are the promotion of healthy diets (target 2 and 4) and physical activity (target 3). The NCD targets include both outcome indicators (target 1, 6, and 7) as well as the process indicators indicative of the actions needed to realise these outcomes (target 2, 3, 4 and 5). These are placed in the context of strengthening health systems and working toward universal health coverage, including both preventive and curative measures (target 8).

The NCD targets are geared towards preventing malnutrition related to an unbalanced diet and insufficient exercise in the general population, whereas the WHA targets are formulated mainly to reduce malnutrition among young children and their mothers. The two sets of WHA targets can therefore be seen as complementary and leading to better nutritional status and wellbeing of the population as a combined set. Both sets of targets perfectly match the SDGs, with specific emphasis on SDG2 (food security and nutrition), and SDG3 (health).

¹⁷ WHO (2014) *Global nutrition targets 2025: policy brief series* (WHO/NMH/NHD/14.2). Geneva: World Health Organization.

¹⁸ Lancet (2015) *Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks in 188 countries, 1990–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013*. Forouzanfar, Mohammad H et al. Volume 386, Issue 10010, 2287 - 2323.

¹⁹ Ibid 12

NCD targets

1. 25% relative reduction in the overall mortality from **cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes**, or chronic respiratory diseases
2. At least 10% relative reduction in the harmful use of alcohol, as appropriate, within the national context
3. **10% relative reduction in prevalence of insufficient physical activity**
4. **30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium**
5. 30% relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15+ years
6. **25% relative reduction in the prevalence of raised blood pressure or contain the prevalence of raised blood pressure**, according to national circumstances
7. **Halt the rise in diabetes and obesity**
8. At least 50% of eligible people receive drug therapy and counselling (**including glycaemic control**) to prevent heart attacks and strokes
9. 80% availability of the affordable basic technologies and essential medicines, including generics, required to prevent heart attacks and strokes
10. 80% availability of the affordable basic technologies and essential medicines, including generics, required to treat major NCDs in both public and private facilities

Outcomes of the second International Conference on Nutrition

The vision of ICN2 is to eliminate all forms of malnutrition with an emphasis on both food and health systems being better geared towards this end. Unique to the ICN2 outcome is that countries committed to eradicate *all* forms of malnutrition. This was done via adoption of ten commitments as part of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition,²⁰ which in addition to health called upon agriculture, trade, education and social protection as essential. The Rome Declaration on Nutrition is therefore more all encompassing than the WHA and NCD targets, which focus primarily on health systems. An important addition is the food environment - the context in which people choose, buy and consume their food - as an important factor that influences nutrition outcomes. One commitment specifies the strengthening of human and institutional capacities in order to improve nutrition.²¹ This is especially important at national level and includes a call for support to frontline nutrition workers. The ICN2 Framework for Action (FFA) provides the “how” to operationalize the “what” of the Rome Declaration. Comprising sixty recommendations for action, the FFA addresses all forms of malnutrition as well as attempts to prevent the onset of malnutrition in all its forms by fostering healthy diets in a sustainable food system.

²⁰ Conference Outcome document: Rome Declaration on Nutrition, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>.

²¹ Ibid 20

The FFA can be divided into the following six focus areas for nutrition actions:

1. Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets;
2. Aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions;
3. Social protection and nutrition education;
4. Trade and investment for improved nutrition;
5. Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages; and
6. Strengthened nutrition governance and accountability.

The FFA also recognises that food systems should be assessed for their environmental impact, thus making a crucial link between the nutrition agenda and the sustainability agenda of the SDGs.²² Healthy diets are increasingly linked with sustainable food production and biodiversity. Sustainable food production and consumption can help protect the planet from degradation and mitigate the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. The SDGs provide the comprehensive context in which this should be realised, taking into account environmental and social determinants as well as putting a heavy emphasis on gender equality. Nutrition is at the centre of all SDGs.

Planet: If average diets among adults in the UK conformed to WHO recommendations, the associated GHG emissions would be reduced by 17% (Green et al 2015).

Agenda 2030: Transformation, Sustainability and Nutrition

In 2014, UNSCN documented clearly²³ how nutrition is embedded in the SDG targets. The table in Annex 1 provides an illustration of these linkages. The UN Decade of Action, which is a follow up to the ICN2 and a powerful tool for achieving the WHA and NCD targets, serves as a major driving force for achieving the SDGs.

It is critical to recognize that the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are truly different from earlier development agendas: the SDGs are global targets and require global action; they are universally aiming to “leave no one behind”, thus putting particular emphasis on equity and equality aspects of the development agenda. Most specifically, SDG10 aims to reduce inequalities within and among countries.²⁴ Central to achieving equity and central to the 2030 Agenda is the position of women: gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.²⁵ SDG5²⁶ is truly visionary and paves the way for the full realisation of women’s rights, which is also essential to eliminate malnutrition. The SDGs cannot be looked at individually; they are all integrated and interlinked. Equally important to realise is that the 2030 Agenda calls for transformational, systemic change.

²² Conference Outcome document: Framework for Action, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>

²³ UNSCN (2014) *Nutrition and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals*. Geneva: UNSCN.

²⁴ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

²⁵ Ibid 23

²⁶ Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Ibid 23

Health and legal sectors in support of sound breast feeding practices

To better support breastfeeding, stronger legal measures are needed to i) fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, ii) enact family leave and workplace policies and iii) provide skilled lactation and birth attendance services (UNICEF 2016, *From the first hour of life. Key findings of the 2016 edition*).

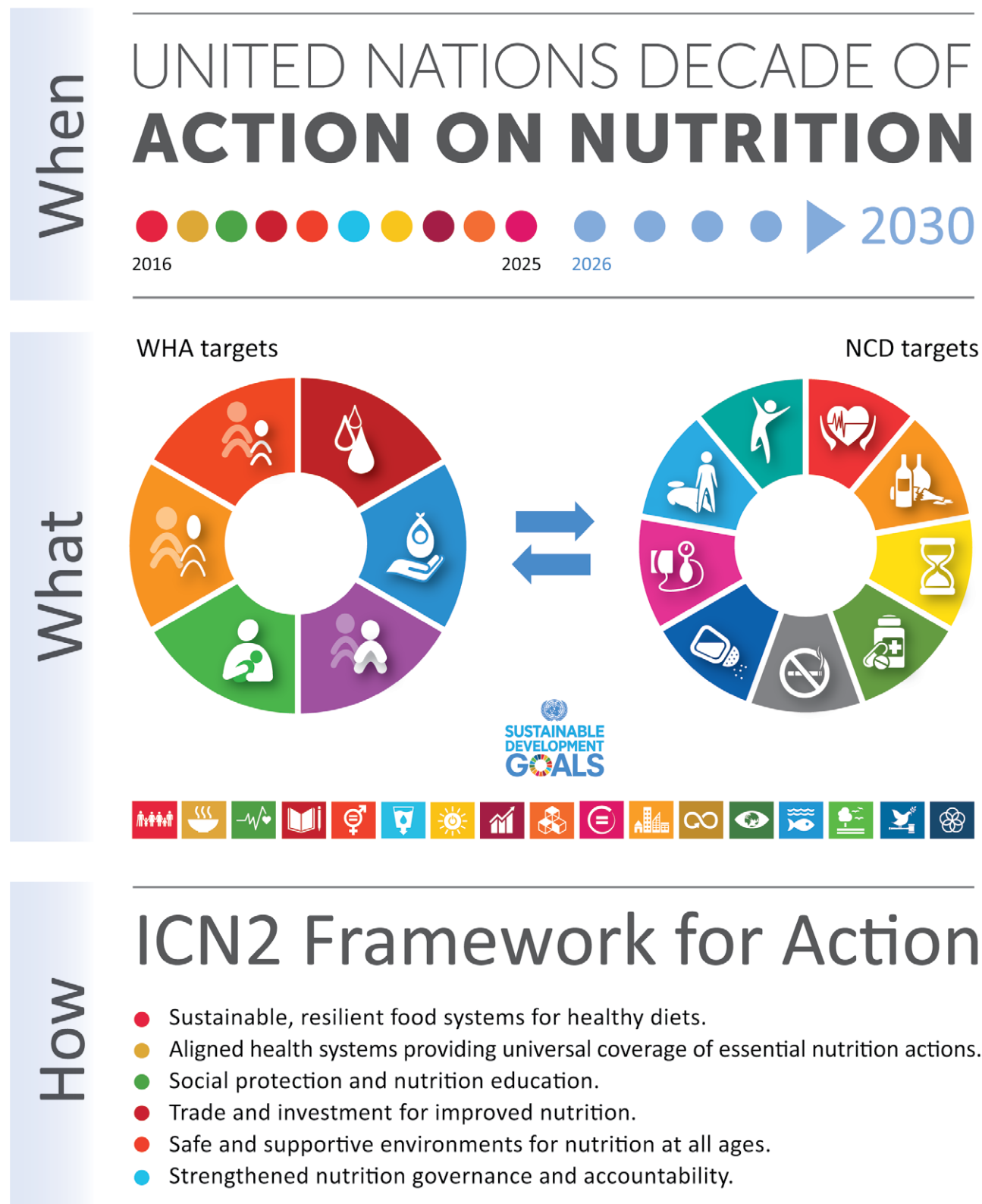
As stated earlier, current food systems are not delivering the healthy and nutritious diets needed for people to lead active and healthy lives. Nutrition and the SDGs are natural partners regarding their integrated, global and universal character. Without proper nutrition, people cannot function, grow and thrive optimally. Investing in and promoting good nutrition is therefore imperative for a well-functioning body and society. Healthy diets are increasingly linked with sustainable food production and biodiversity. Diets and malnutrition are also the number one risk factor for the global burden of disease.²⁷ Healthy and sustainable diets are the foundation for a healthy planet. The “healthy diet” approach provides a key entry point to address the six areas of attention in the ICN2 recommendations. For example, promotion of healthy and sustainable diets could help stimulate demand for sustainably produced food in sustainable food systems. Promotion of healthy diets should be routinely incorporated into preventive nutrition interventions in health systems. Trade and investments should look harder at the outcomes their policies have on diets. The food environment should be conducive to people choosing and consuming healthy diets –including the protection and promotion of good breastfeeding practices. Consumer education and social protection can and should be designed to protect and promote healthy diets; good examples exist of this in several countries. Good governance practices should promote sound policies that support these actions, including monitoring and evaluation activities to create feedback loops between policy and practice, as well as, as part of good governance, holding duty bearers to account. The integrated nature of the SDGs provides ample opportunities for additional entry points involving even more sectors to work for better nutrition to achieve the transformational change that is needed to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms and to achieve the entire 2030 Agenda. The work programme of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition,²⁸ with its six focus areas, is the operational plan to accelerate this achievement.

²⁷ Ibid 19

²⁸ Work programme of the UN Decade on Nutrition, forthcoming.

Figure 3.

By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition and leave no one behind²⁹



²⁹ Prepared by UNSCN.

UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025

The year 2016 was the start of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. The Decade is a commitment by Member States and other stakeholders to undertake 10 years of sustained and coherent implementation of policies and programmes in different sectors to improve nutrition, following the recommendations and commitments of the ICN2 Framework for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN Decade of Action on Nutrition increases pressure to translate internationally agreed upon global targets to specific country commitments leading to national action and impact.

The Decade provides a broad window of opportunity to lay the foundations for just and sustainable food systems that deliver diversified, balanced and healthy diets for all people at all times and at all stages of life. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen integration of and access to nutrition services in health systems, through a continuum of care approach.³⁰ The Decade also highlights the need for increased alignment of nutrition actors –including those who do not have an explicit nutrition mandate but who nevertheless impact on nutrition.³¹

The UN Decade of Action on Nutrition mainstreams nutrition across multiple domains of sustainable development and thus energises and moves the entire 2030 Agenda forward.

Declared by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Decade creates increased visibility of nutrition action at the highest level ; it ensures coordination, strengthens multi-sectoral collaboration, creates synergies and measures progress towards sustainable food systems and food and nutrition security for all. Important to note is that by declaring a UN Decade of Action, UN member states are taking a leadership stance regarding nutrition. Governments have the prime responsibility for well-being in their countries. The UN system has a strong role to play in supporting countries in this task.

The UNGA calls upon FAO and WHO to convene the implementation of the Decade and to develop a Work Programme together with IFAD, UNICEF and WFP, making use of UNSCN as a coordination mechanism. It also recognizes that the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) provides a useful multi-stakeholder platform where countries can discuss progress, exchange lessons and experiences and agree on coherent and consistent food security and nutrition policies. The Decade will consult other international and regional organizations and platforms.

There are strong links between the Decade of Action Resolution and the 2030 Agenda in its various dimensions (economic, social and environmental), recalling the importance to end hunger and improve nutrition as well as the interlinked targets.

³⁰ FAO and WHO (2014a). *Rome Declaration on Nutrition*. Second International Conference on Nutrition. Rome.

³¹ UNSCN (2017) *Global Governance for Nutrition and the role of UNSCN*.

Building momentum

The Decade invites all actors including parliamentarians, civil society, academia and the private sector to support implementation of the Decade's Work Programme. It is an umbrella for all actors, working together across all sectors, to align their nutrition related actions to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms, according to the intergovernmentally agreed targets and frameworks.

This is an unprecedented moment to combat malnutrition in all its forms. Never before has there been such an all-encompassing agreement regarding the need to eliminate, not just reduce, all forms of malnutrition. Never before have so many actors felt motivated to be involved now that they understand the gains to be made across sectors, should sustainable and healthy diets become the status quo. To achieve this goal, governments will have to provide an enabling (policy) environment that incentivizes more actors to contribute in the fight for the elimination of all forms of malnutrition. A specific challenge in this joint effort is and will be the assurance of coherence between actors towards the common goal of the elimination of all forms of malnutrition. This will require improved "Governance for Nutrition": defined as the process by which impact on nutrition by non-nutrition policies – e.g. policies in education, employment, health, environment and trade – is leveraged or mitigated. Since actors in these policy areas influence nutrition even though that is not their primary intent, global nutrition governance actors must learn to exert influence in these other areas. Following the human rights based approach, governments have the prime responsibility in creating an enabling environment for nutrition. The central role of the UN system and its specialised agencies is to support governments in this endeavour. Listed below is an overview of UN System structures that are related to nutrition and advocacy for nutrition, nutrition governance or ensuring coherence. Some are working towards policy convergence and coordination, whereas others are advocacy mechanisms. The full list of technical UN agencies, funds and programmes that are in support of the elimination of all forms of malnutrition is provided in the UNSCN paper *Global Governance for Nutrition*.³² UN technical agencies, funds, and programmes, play an important role, not just because of their technical capacities, but also because of their formal reporting lines to governments and intergovernmental bodies, which are an essential element of good governance. Monitoring is also essential to ensure lessons are captured and lead to improvement of policies and programmes where and if needed.

UN system including intergovernmental structures

- **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all. The Committee reports to the UNGA through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and to FAO Conference. Using a multi-stakeholder, inclusive approach, CFS develops and endorses policy recommendations and guidance on a wide range of food security and nutrition topics. These are developed using scientific, evidence-based reports produced by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) and/or through work supported by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP) and representatives of the CFS Advisory Group. CFS holds an annual plenary session every October at FAO Headquarters in Rome.³³ Since the plenary meeting in 2015, CFS has had a formal nutrition work stream.

³² Ibid 3

³³ www.fao.org/cfs

- **World Health Assembly (WHA)** is the decision-making body of WHO. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and has a specific health agenda prepared by their Executive Board.³⁴ The WHA determines the policies of WHO, including nutrition policies and guidelines.
- **United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** advances the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.³⁵ The **High Level Political Forum**, which meets annually under the auspices of ECOSOC, reviews and discusses global progress of the 2030 Agenda.
- **UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN)** keeps under review the overall directions, coherence, scale and impact of the UN systems response to the nutritional problems in the world. It is a point of convergence in harmonizing the policies and activities of the UN system and it provides initiative in the development of concepts, policies and strategies and programmes in the UN systems in response to nutrition needs of countries.³⁶ UNSCN was established in 1977 by an ECOSOC resolution and is accountable to ECOSOC.
- **UN Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (UNIATF)** coordinates the activities of relevant UN organizations and other inter-governmental organizations to support governments to meet high-level commitments to respond to NCD epidemics worldwide.³⁷ UNIATF was established in 2013 by an ECOSOC resolution and reports to ECOSOC. UNSCN, one of the members of UNIATF, will lead its nutrition work starting in 2017.
- **Zero Hunger Challenge and High-level Task Force** is an initiative by the UN Secretary General (UNSG) and has five objectives: zero stunting in children less than 2 years, all food systems sustainable, 100% access to adequate food year round for all people, zero food losses and waste, and 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income.³⁸ These five pillars are also part of the ICN2 commitments and have been integrated in the SDGs.
- **Every Woman Every Child** is also a UNSG initiative. It aims to end preventable deaths among children, women and adolescents.³⁹ For women, many of these deaths are related to malnutrition and child birth. Among young children, malnutrition represents about half of all child deaths. Healthy adolescents who have adopted a healthy lifestyle become healthy adults who can in turn raise healthy children. The initiative is a good example of how to take the life cycle approach by starting with women, children and adolescents. In addition, it is essential to realise that without the realisation of women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights⁴⁰ it is impossible to prevent and eliminate nutritional problems.

34 World Health Assembly (WHA), see <http://www.who.int/governance/en/>.

35 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). See: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/>.

36 UNSCN Strategic Plan 2016-2020.

37 UN Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (UNIATF), see: <http://www.who.int/ncds/un-task-force/en/>.

38 Zero Hunger Challenge, see: <https://www.un.org/zerohunger/>.

39 Every Woman Every Child, see: <https://www.everywomaneverychild.org/>.

40 World Health Assembly (WHA), see <http://www.who.int/governance/en/>.

- **Renewed Efforts Against Childhood Hunger and Malnutrition (REACH)** was established in 2008 and works at country level to strengthen national nutrition governance and management, acting as a country level facilitation mechanism to support the scale-up of national nutrition efforts.⁴¹ REACH was set up by FAO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and later joined by IFAD.

The UNGA resolution that proclaims the Decade calls on all relevant actors, including international and regional organisations, civil society, private sector and academia, to support its implementation. Examples of these actors are listed below. It is important to note that this list is a mere illustration of the range, diversity and potential of actors in nutrition⁴² at global level and does not aim to give the complete picture.⁴³ A comprehensive listing of regional and national actors, networks and initiatives is beyond the scope of this global narrative. However, it is essential to note that regional, national and local actions and policies that are context specific are essential to realize all nutrition targets. Initiatives and actors established without a formal structure or mandate can be very influential and have high impact.

Research and Academia

- **Global Nutrition Report (GNR)** and its Independent Expert Group originated from a request by Nutrition for Growth stakeholders.⁴⁴ GNR gathers an independent group of experts who are committed to developing a Global Nutrition Report to track commitments to and progress in nutrition actions, thus improving accountability of governments and all other stakeholders.⁴⁵ The first GNR was published in 2014.
- **International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS)** aims to promote advancement of nutrition science, research and development through international cooperation at the global panel level. IUNS addresses contemporary global nutrition issues, such as the global challenge of obesity, and the nature and determinants of child development and their implications for programmatic interventions with young children. IUNS also addresses food and nutrition problems in developing countries, and food safety training for nutritionists.⁴⁶
- **World Public Health Nutritionists Association (WPHNA)** convenes people with a common interest in promoting and improving public health nutrition and serves as a professional voice for public health nutrition internationally. WPHNA's mission is to promote public health nutrition, to prevent disease and to promote well-being. It also aims to build professional capacity and to represents the interests of allied professions.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Renewed Efforts Against Childhood Hunger and Malnutrition (REACH), see: <http://www.reachpartnership.org/>.

⁴² The list mentions cross-sectoral and cross country/regions activities and those initiatives that are jointly implemented by a multitude of actors.

⁴³ A more comprehensive overview of actors is listed in the UNSCN paper "Global Governance for Nutrition and the role of UNSCN", including a succinct analysis of their role and accountability structures. See footnote 3.

⁴⁴ See description on p. 19 under multi-stakeholder initiatives.

⁴⁵ Global Nutrition Report, see <http://www.globalnutritionreport.org/>.

⁴⁶ International Union of Nutritional Sciences, see <http://www.iuns.org>.

⁴⁷ World Public Health Nutritionists Association, see <http://wphna.org/about-us/>.

Civil Society actors

- **Global Right to Food and Nutrition Network** is a group of civil society organisations (CSOs), including NGOs, faith-based organisations, and social movements that work to provide a space for dialogue to hold States accountable for their obligations to realise the right to adequate food and nutrition.⁴⁸
- **ICN2 CSO Liaison and Follow Up Group** is a large, inclusive group of CSOs that provided joint input into the ICN2 conference and that is now providing joint follow up to post-Conference processes.⁴⁹ This Group is currently engaging with FAO and WHO regarding development of a Work Programme for the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.
- **International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN)** consists of a broad array of international NGOs, advocacy organizations and foundations united around the shared goal to save and improve lives through better nutrition. Building upon the 2013 Nutrition for Growth Summit in London, at which \$4 billion was committed to high-impact nutrition programmes, a global coalition of advocates has come together to keep the pressure on governments and donors to scale up funding for nutrition.⁵⁰ The ICAN mainly focuses on advocacy for the WHA targets to improve maternal, infant and young child malnutrition.
- **Noncommunicable Diseases Alliance (NCD Alliance)** unites 2,000 CSOs in more than 170 countries, dedicated to improving NCD prevention and control worldwide.⁵¹

Parliamentarians

- **The International Union of Parliamentarians (IUP)** is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy. IPU has an Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) that provides a global parliamentary focal point for legislative work in the field of HIV/AIDS and maternal, newborn and child health.⁵² During their 132nd Assembly, IPU adopted the Hanoi Declaration that called for investment in the health, nutrition, education and skills of citizens as the most important resource.

Multi-stakeholder Initiatives

- **Nutrition for Growth Compact** is a multi-stakeholder initiative gathering private sector, donors and governments around the shared goal of reducing undernutrition. Under this Compact, several actors have made individual commitments to reduce stunting and severe acute malnutrition.⁵³ Efforts are underway to bring these commitments more in line with globally agreed targets.

48 FIAN International (2013) *Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition – A Call for Joint Action*.

49 ICN2 Civil Society Organizations Liaison Group, see <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/icn2/nsa/civil-society/en/>.

50 International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN), see <http://thousanddays.org/the-international-coalition-for-advocacy-on-nutrition/>.

51 Noncommunicable Diseases Alliance, see <https://ncdalliance.org/>.

52 The International Union of Parliamentarians (IUP), see <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>.

53 Nutrition for Growth Compact, see <http://nutritionforgrowth.org/>.

- **The SUN Movement** is a multi stakeholder, multi sectoral movement to fight malnutrition. To date, 57 countries have joined SUN, which includes five networks (Country, Business, Civil Society, Development Partners, and the UN System), operating primarily to coordinate and support country-level action.⁵⁴ The SUN Lead Group is an influential strategic advisory group, appointed by the UNSG and including representatives from the five networks. The SUN Movement Strategy (2016-2020) has four objectives to improve the enabling environment to scale up nutrition interventions at country level: Expand and sustain an enabling political environment; prioritize and institutionalise effective actions that contribute to good nutrition; implement effective actions aligned with national common results frameworks; and effectively use, and significantly increase, financial resources for nutrition.
- **Sustainable Food System Programme** is a global group of UN agencies, CSOs, and businesses convened around the need to build sustainable food systems that reduce food losses and waste, mobilise consumers for sustainable and healthy diets, and foster sustainable production and value chains.⁵⁵

This list shows that there are numerous actors across the globe who are motivated and have the capacity (financial and human resources) to combat malnutrition in all its forms. The Decade aims to centralize the globally agreed targets and commitments and align actors around these targets in the context of the 2030 Agenda. All governments worldwide should be lead actors in eliminating malnutrition in their countries. They can do this through specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound (SMART) commitments that are specific to country context and that are in line with the ICN2 recommendations, the WHA and NCD targets, and the 2030 Agenda. The actors mentioned above and many others are invited to support governments in this task, including holding governments accountable (CSOs, academia and parliamentarians) and providing support (legislative or financial) to policy and programme action. The UN system supports countries in their endeavour to eliminate malnutrition.

Partnerships: There is no single actor who can address all the underlying causes of malnutrition; the Decade calls on actors to align themselves with the intergovernmental agreed nutrition targets and contribute from their respective mandates and comparative strengths.



⁵⁴ SUN Movement, see <http://scalingupnutrition.org/>.

⁵⁵ Sustainable Food System Programme, see <http://web.unep.org/10yfp/programmes/sustainable-food-systems-programme>.

Conclusion

The world now has a complete and comprehensive set of nutrition targets and a sustainability agenda that provides social, economic and environmental context in which these nutrition targets should be met. These targets supplement the human rights agenda; specifically the Right to Adequate Food, indicating the responsibilities of governments and the avenue they should take to respect, protect and fulfil the Right to Adequate Food. In addition, high-level political attention for nutrition is increasing, with many governments committed to developing concrete policies and actions. This momentum must be maintained. Many institutes, organisations and individuals have been mobilised for nutrition in several important and influential initiatives, programmes and networks. More are welcome.

The stars are aligned. Let us make the Decade a success.

UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF **ACTION ON NUTRITION**



2016-2025

Annex. Nutrition in the SDGs

Contributions of nutrition to SDG	Sustainable Development Goals	Contributions of SDG to nutrition
<p>Good nutrition results in higher labour productivity, mental capacity, and longer healthy lives. Each added cm of adult height is associated with an almost 5% increase in wage rates.</p> <p>Good maternal nutrition reduces risks of low birth weight and improves care of children. A well-nourished work-force supports productive agriculture and more demand for food, increased food security and reduced hunger.</p> <p>Nutrient-disease interactions are synergistic. Good nutrition significantly reduces the risks of sickness and mortality in the context of a host of diseases, as well as maternal health and foetal growth.</p> <p>Improving linear growth for under 2s by 1 Standard Deviation adds half a grade to school attainment. Resolving iron, iodine and other nutrient deficiencies supports mental capacity.</p> <p>Improving the nutrition of girls, adolescents and women increases their ability to perform well at school and in the workforce.</p> <p>Improved nutrition is associated with enhanced knowledge and behaviours linked to personal and food hygiene and sanitation, raising demand for clean water and quality sanitation.</p> <p>Improved nutrition in all its forms generates demand for food, goods and services, including electrification in the context of demand for refrigeration and food processing.</p> <p>Nutrition stimulates economic growth, improving the mental and physical productivity of the labour force. Removing undernutrition would prevent GNP losses of 8-11% per year.</p>	1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere. ⁴²	Doubling per capita income cuts child stunting by 15 percentage points. This happens as households escape poverty and governments invest more to tackle malnutrition due to reduced GNP losses.
	2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.	Nutrition would benefit hugely from zero hunger and full food security. Sustainable agriculture supports appropriate diets, income and resource use.
	3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	Enhancing health, starting with adolescent girls and focusing on the first 1,000 days (including breastfeeding promotion), supports child nutrition and growth while reducing NCD burdens later in life.
	4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning.	Access to information, education, schooling and informal knowledge enhances health and food choices, income growth, and nutrition.
	5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.	Gender equality (in education, status, earnings) accounts for 25% of child nutrition gains. Girls' education delays marriage and first birth.
	6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.	Reduction in open defecation and improved access to water cuts bacterial contamination in the food supply and supports hand-washing, which impacts nutrition outcomes.
	7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.	Access to energy reduces time burdens on women seeking wood and charcoal. Reduced indoor pollution directly reduces sickness-mediated nutritional compromise.
	8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all.	Earning opportunities are key to enable households to rise out of poverty and to enhance the adequacy and quality of their diets. Higher GNP allows governments to invest in pro-nutrition policies and programming.

⁴² The SDG titles used here are abbreviated for space. Full SDG titles as currently proposed are in OWG (2014).

Contributions of nutrition to SDG	Sustainable Development Goals	Contributions of SDG to nutrition
<p>Enhanced nutrition through the lifespan supports learning and later innovation potential. Industrialization and markets only thrive with productivity and growing demand across food systems.</p> <p>Resolving stunting has more impact for the poor, thereby reducing current nutrition inequalities that perpetuate future nutrition and income inequalities.</p> <p>Lower mortality and morbidity due to enhanced nutrition reduces population pressure on natural resources as fertility falls.</p> <p>Falling poverty and improved nutrition raises demand for higher quality and more diverse diets.</p> <p>Research on nutrient quality as crop traits promoting plant vitality supports climate resilient agriculture research.</p> <p>Reduced population pressure on environmental resources comes through better nutrition supporting reduced mortality and lower fertility rates.</p> <p>More informed consumer demand for high quality, diverse, safe diets drives attention to sustainability of production and impacts of product choices on entire food systems.</p> <p>Moves to strengthen nutrition accountability and governance globally bring attention to the importance of inclusive stakeholder dialogues and cross-sector models for effective policy.</p> <p>Global prioritization of nutrition has never been higher. Multi-stakeholder platforms such as Scaling Up Nutrition and Zero Hunger Initiative offer platforms on which to build renewed interest and investment in nutrition.</p>	9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive industrialisation and foster innovation.	Innovations in productive technology, value chains and marketing enhance food safety and diet quality. Innovation in communication and marketing among the poor supports nutrition.
	10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.	Reduced inequalities in nutrition allows for more balanced productivity and growth across the population. Less inequality across nations promotes balanced dialogue and engagement.
	11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.	Urban demand for safe quality diets supports growth in rural production and services, enhancing nutrition. Less water waste and pollution supports nutrition in urban and rural areas.
	12. Ensure sustainable production.	Product diversity and more productivity supports diet diversity, food quality (including of complementary foods) and safety, all needed for good nutrition.
	13. Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.	Research to enhance crop and animal resistance to agro-ecological shifts linked to climate change will protect food supplies and diet diversity. Enhanced resiliency of food production and marketing systems can reduce food price volatility that hurts the poor.
	14. Conserve and use the oceans, seas and marine resources sustainably.	Production diversity based on sustainable practices leads to lower consumer prices (diversified demand) and hence to diet quality.
	15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.	
	16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, & build effective, accountable institutions.	Discrimination of all kinds, inequity, economic penury and injustice are drivers of conflict, destruction and malnutrition. Peace and justice are preconditions for building accountable institutions needed to achieve good nutrition for all.
	17. Strengthen and revitalise global partnerships for sustainable development.	A further strengthening of global partnerships and inter-governmental commitments to sustainability and equality offer a foundation for building peace and effective, open and accountable institutions, and improved multisector and multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration.

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<https://www.everywomaneverychild.org/>

<http://www.reachpartnership.org/>

List of abbreviations

CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FFA	Framework for Action (of the ICN2)
GNR	Global Nutrition Report
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition
ICAN	International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition
ICN2	Second International Conference on Nutrition
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IUNS	International Union of Nutritional Sciences
IUP	The International Union of Parliamentarians
MNCH	Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
NCDs	Non Communicable Diseases
NGOs	Non-government organizations
REACH	Renewed Efforts Against Childhood Hunger and Malnutrition
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIATF	United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCN	United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization
WPHNA	World Public Health Nutritionists Association

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UNSCN vision

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



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UNSCN

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

