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Information Note

Joint FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)

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Executive Summary

The Joint FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), a positive pro-active global policy response to tackle unacceptably high and persistent levels of malnutrition, offers a great opportunity at global level to discuss the nutrition situation and major challenges and to assess progress made in addressing nutrition at global, regional, sub-regional and country levels since the first ICN held in 1992. The high level conference will be held in FAO headquarters, Rome, 19-21 November 2014. This document summarizes the key information on the preparation process of the ICN2 as well as provides understanding on the objectives and intended outcomes of the conference.

Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

The input of the regional conference is required for the success of the high level event on 19-21 November 2014. For the preparatory process to succeed, the involvement of government is crucial in finalizing the country nutrition papers and case studies, ensuring the active participation of countries in the ICN2 process and for providing inputs from the regional perspective into the outcome document. The participation of governments in the resource mobilization effort is welcome.

I. Background

1. The first International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) held in 1992, jointly sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), unanimously adopted a World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition. Delegates from 159 countries and the European Community pledged to eliminate or reduce substantially starvation and famine; widespread chronic hunger; undernutrition, especially among children, women and the aged; micronutrient deficiencies, especially iron, iodine and vitamin A deficiencies; diet related communicable and non-communicable diseases; impediments to optimal breast-feeding; and inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene and unsafe drinking water. One of the outstanding results of the ICN was the preparation of National Plans of Action for Nutrition (NPA's) which represent the countries' priorities and strategies for alleviating hunger and malnutrition.
2. In the two decades following the ICN, notwithstanding great improvements in a number of individual countries, progress in reducing hunger and malnutrition has been unacceptably slow. The combined effects of prolonged underinvestment in nutrition and in food and agriculture, together with the recent price instability and the economic downturn and exacerbated by the steady increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters have led to increased hunger and poverty in developing countries, jeopardizing the progress achieved so far in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
3. FAO estimates that a total of 842 million people were undernourished in 2011-2012 compared with 1.02 billion in 1990-1992. The number of hungry people is higher than before the food and economic crises of 2008-09 and higher than the level that existed when world leaders agreed to reduce the number of hungry by half at the World Food Summit in 1996. WHO estimates that 7 million children die before their fifth birthday every year, and that a third of these deaths are associated with undernutrition. One in three developing country children under the age of five (160 million children) are stunted due to chronic undernutrition and 99 million children are underweight. Micronutrient malnutrition or "hidden hunger" affects around 2 billion people (over 30% of the world population) with serious public health consequences.
4. Around 500 million adults are obese, increasingly in low and middle income countries, with consequences ranging from increased risk of premature death to serious chronic health conditions including an increase in the prevalence in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) all of which reduce the overall quality of life. The change in diets made possible over the last twenty years or so by rising incomes and increased availability of energy dense convenience foods together with reductions in physical activity levels are believed to be associated with such a transition.

5. This co-existence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition exemplified by obesity and non-communicable and chronic disease is termed the double or multiple burden of malnutrition. Malnutrition, in all its forms, is an intolerable burden not only on national health systems but on the entire cultural, social and economic fabric of nations, and is the greatest impediment to development and to the fulfilment of human potential. While the cost of treating and dealing with the effects of malnutrition, whether in fiscal, economic or human terms is high, the cost of prevention is much less. Investing in nutrition, therefore, not only is a moral imperative, but also makes economic sense as it improves productivity and economic growth, reduces health care costs and promotes education, intellectual capacity and social development.

6. Several political developments have taken place to address global food and nutrition security. Initiatives and instruments aimed at improving food and nutrition security include the Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) developed by the United Nations High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF) and the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) with its High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN).

7. The Scaling-up Nutrition (SUN) Movement launched in 2010 with the support of multiple partners including governments from countries with high burden of malnutrition, UN Agencies, donors, NGOs, academia and the private sector, together with advocacy initiatives such as the 1,000 days campaign, are calling for high level international attention to the need to scale up nutrition programmes.

8. UN collaboration such as REACH (Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger) and the UNSCN (United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition) are committed to strengthen governance for nutrition and to revitalize the role of nutrition at the international level.

II. Rationale

9. Better political and policy coherence, alignment, coordination and cooperation between food, agriculture, health and other sector policies is needed to improve global nutrition.

10. For this purpose FAO and WHO, in collaboration with several UN and non UN partners are to convene a Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). The ICN2 will review progress made since 1992, reflect on the existing and the new challenges and opportunities presented by the changes in the global economy, in the food system, and by advances in science and technologies and analyse policy options for improving nutrition. Since nutrition is an outcome of multiple causative factors, comprehensive multisector solutions are needed. The ICN2 will address issues related to both under as well as over nutrition and will explore how agriculture, health, education, social and other sectors can work together to address this multiple burden of malnutrition.

11. Successful examples of integrated policies addressing nutrition are available and can inspire further progress. The achievements of the 1,000 day campaign and the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement in this regard will be influential.

12. Holding the ICN2 has the added value of harnessing the political will that has recently been generated for improving nutrition and to use this for mobilizing the resources necessary to support effective and consistent actions in the medium to longer term.

13. While the Conference will address the particular nutrition needs of women and of children in the first 1,000 days of life, it will also address the nutritional needs of all – individuals, families, households and communities, because nutrition is everyone's right.

14. The Conference will help to mainstream nutrition into the work of development partners by ensuring nutrition objectives, concerns and considerations are incorporated into their policies and programmes. The Conference will help to integrate nutrition into multi-sector frameworks and encourage greater corporate and institutional engagement of UN and other agencies in nutrition-sensitive development.

III. Objectives

15. The ICN2 will be a high-level political event and the first global intergovernmental conference devoted to addressing the world's nutrition problems in the 21st century. The Conference will bring food, agriculture, health and other sectors together to mobilize the political will and resources for improving nutrition. The specific objectives of the Conference will be to:

- 1) Review progress made since the 1992 ICN in the collective effort to address nutrition problems, identify major constraints encountered in the implementation of National Plans of Action for Nutrition.
- 2) Review the achievements at country level for scaling up nutrition through direct nutrition interventions and nutrition-enhancing development policies and programmes.
- 3) Identify policy measures in health, agriculture, trade, consumers' policies and social support to improve global nutrition and develop consensus around a global multi-sectoral nutrition framework.
- 4) Strengthen political and policy coherence and coordination for improving global nutrition and raise the political will necessary to mobilize the resources needed to achieve nutrition related MDGs through a balanced multi-sector approach.

IV. Process

16. The ICN2 will be a three-day high-level Inter-Governmental Conference, including plenary meetings of high-level government officials and thematic roundtables. In addition to FAO and WHO as the main sponsoring agencies, stakeholders involved in the SUN movement and in the SCN will be involved in preparations for the Conference.

17. A series of regional, sub-regional and expert meetings and consultations were held and country case studies have been prepared as part of the preparatory process for the ICN2. Online discussions on specific topics on FAO FSN Forum (www.fao.org/fsnforum) have been organised. As part of the process, a Preparatory Technical Meeting was held 13-15 November 2013.

18. During these consultations, consideration has been given to seeing how each sector and actor can determine how it can best address nutritional problems, taking into account the specific needs and conditions in each country.

19. Action-oriented themes from 1992 include incorporating nutritional objectives, considerations and components into development policies and programmes, improving household food security, protecting consumers through improved food quality and safety, preventing and managing infectious diseases, caring for socio-economically deprived and nutritionally vulnerable (with a special focus on promoting good maternal nutrition and infant and young child complementary feeding), preventing and controlling specific micronutrient deficiencies, promoting appropriate diets and healthy lifestyles for preventing and managing all forms of malnutrition, and assessing, analysing and monitoring nutrition situations.

20. Additional themes since 1992 may include soaring and volatile food prices and their impact on food consumption and nutrition, impact of emergencies on nutrition, climate change both in development and emergency contexts, demographic changes and urbanization, globalization and the impact of changing food systems on the dietary transition, role of women as producers and managers of limited households resources, capacity building at all levels to enable scaling up nutrition actions, nutrition-enhancing food-based approaches for improving dietary diversity and nutrition, biofuels and their impact on food and nutrition security, and information systems for food and nutrition security including evidence of the impact of both health-based and food-based nutrition policies and interventions as well as of programme delivery on nutrition.

Regional meetings

21. The ICN2 is preceded by a series of regional meetings. Country strategy papers detailing the food and agriculture, health and nutrition situation, dietary trends, the policy environment including a

review of what policies have been effective in improving nutrition, what are the lessons learned, what has worked and why and other issues of relevance to food and nutrition security will provide a basis for discussions.

Online discussion on specific topics on FAO Food Security and Nutrition Forum (FSN) forum

22. Three online discussions (www.fao.org/fnsforum) were organized on: (1) social protection to protect, promote nutrition; (2) nutrition-enhancing agriculture, food systems and (3) contribution of private sector, civil society to improve nutrition. Further web based consultations are planned in the run up to the November meeting. The report of the consultations will help inform the debate at the ICN2.

Country Nutrition Papers, Case Studies

23. Country nutrition papers and case studies prepared by selected countries critically discuss best practices and lessons learned for improving nutrition for possible replication in other countries.

Preparatory Technical Meeting

24. A Preparatory Technical (PTM) Meeting was held at FAO Headquarters, from 13-15 November 2013 with the purpose of exchange knowledge, information and ideas on how best to address global nutrition challenges. The PTM provided an informed basis for reaching broad consensus on policy and political actions required for the event in 2014. The Conclusions of the PTM will be considered in the preparation of the event and the way forward.

Three-Day Conference

25. Based on the reports of the regional conferences, expert meetings, online discussions and country case studies prepared for the ICN2, actions to be considered by governments in their efforts to improve nutrition will be identified.

V. Arrangements for the preparation of the Conference

26. An ICN2 Steering Committee (ICN2 SC) has provided the overall political and policy direction for the preparatory process and the holding of the ICN2 itself. The Steering Committee includes representatives from FAO and WHO as well as from our partners from the SUN movement including senior representatives from the HLTF, IFAD, IFPRI, UNESCO, UNICEF, WB, WFP, and WTO.

27. A Joint Working Group (JWG) is to be established of Members of both FAO and WHO to prepare the outcome document and framework for action.

28. An ICN2 Secretariat provides policy guidance and technical direction on the day to day activities for preparing for and holding the Conference and has been asked to prepare a zero draft of the outcome document.

VI. Participants

29. Participants may include Heads of State, Government leaders and high-level representatives from Ministries of Agriculture and Health and other relevant Ministries. High level representatives of the United Nations Agencies and Regional Intergovernmental Organizations, as well as experts, programme planners and policy-makers, researchers from NGOs, CSOs, academic institutions and the private sector involved in food and nutrition are also expected to attend the event.

VII. Timing

30. The ICN2 will be held from 19 to 21 November 2014 at FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy.

VIII. Budget

31. Significant preparatory work for the Conference falls routinely within the regular work programmes of FAO and WHO, and responds to the increased attention being given to nutrition as a priority activity. While some funding has been identified for the Conference, the regular budget of the organizations available for the Conference is limited, and extra-budgetary support will be required. Extra-budgetary funding will be sought to supplement this work. Complemented extra-budgetary resources will also be encouraged to support the participation of delegates from developing countries. A provisional budget with costs for preparatory activities and for the three-day event is available.