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MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE UN DECADE OF ACTION ON NUTRITION

Executive Summary

As recommended in 2014 by the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), the United Nations (UN) General Assembly proclaimed in 2016 the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025, which provides a time-bound cohesive framework to implement the ICN2 commitments. FAO and WHO were mandated to co-lead the implementation of the Decade through a dedicated Work Programme. The Decade reaches its mid-term in 2020. This document provides an update on the preparatory process of the Mid-term Review of the Decade.

I. BACKGROUND

1. In April 2016, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly proclaimed 2016–2025 the United Nations (UN) Decade of Action on Nutrition (“Decade”) through Resolution 70/259.¹ In this resolution, the UN General Assembly mandated FAO and WHO to co-lead the implementation of the Decade.
2. The Decade is a commitment by UN Member States to undertake ten years of sustained and coherent implementation of policies, programmes and increased investments to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms, everywhere, leaving no one behind.² Its aim is to accelerate implementation of the commitments made at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) in 2014, achieve the global nutrition and diet-related non-communicable disease targets by 2025, and contribute to the realization of the SDGs by 2030.
3. The Decade’s Work Programme embraces six cross-cutting and connected action areas, based on the 60 recommendations of the ICN2 Framework for Action,³ namely:
 - a) Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets;
 - b) Aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions;
 - c) Social protection and nutrition education;
 - d) Trade and investment for improved nutrition;
 - e) Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages;
 - f) Strengthened governance and accountability for nutrition.

II. MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE DECADE

4. ECOSOC resolution 1989/84⁴ on international decades provides that the implementation of a decade’s programme of work should be appraised at the mid-point and at the end of the decade.
5. In keeping with resolution 1989/84, the status of implementation of commitments of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition should be reviewed at the mid-term and at the end of the Decade, in an open and participatory process.
6. The Decade reaches its mid-term in 2020 and the joint FAO/WHO Decade Secretariat is therefore preparing for its Mid-term Review (MTR).
7. The objectives of the MTR of the Decade⁵ are to assess and evaluate the achievements in individual policy areas of the ICN2 Framework for Action, as reflected in the action areas of the Decade’s Work Programme, over the period 2016–2020, with a view to: (i) highlighting specific advances, initiatives and partnerships in nutrition during the first half of the Decade; (ii) identifying

¹ UN. *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 1 April 2016. 70/259. United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025)*. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/259>.

² A dedicated website on the Decade is available in all six UN languages: www.un.org/nutrition.

³ *United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025, Work Programme*. www.un.org/nutrition/sites/www.un.org.nutrition/files/general/pdf/work_programme_nutrition_decade.pdf.

⁴ UN Economic and Social Council. 1989/84. *Guidelines for international decades in economic and social fields*. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/75597/files/E_RES_1989_84-EN.pdf.

⁵ *Mid-term Review of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025, Concept Note*. www.un.org/nutrition/sites/www.un.org.nutrition/files/general/pdf/conceptnote_mtr_nutrition_decade.pdf.

the constraints encountered and the actions needed to overcome them during the second half of the Decade; (iii) and identifying focus areas for priority action for the second half of the Decade.

III. PROGRESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION IN ACTION AREA “SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS FOR HEALTHY DIETS”⁶

8. During the first few years of the Decade, many high-level reports and resolutions have showed the critical role of sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition.⁷ The reports have highlighted the importance of agroecology and biodiversity, sustainability issues in national food-based dietary guidelines, measures to reduce food loss and waste, and actions for enhancing food supply resilience in crisis-prone areas. Governments have accelerated measures to reduce or eliminate industrially produced trans fats and the food industry has implemented voluntary or mandatory reformulation of processed food products to reduce their salt content.

9. Food systems should enhance food security and nutrition for all, be economically sustainable, be inclusive and have a positive impact on climate and the environment.⁸ To drive progress towards that vision in the second half of the Decade, the joint FAO/WHO Decade Secretariat encourages countries to:

- *Recognize that agriculture⁹ and food systems delivering safe, diversified and healthy diets that include sustainability considerations are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* The UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 will address sustaining biodiversity, use of ecosystems services, the challenges of climate change, and underline the critical importance of action and investment towards more sustainable food systems for achieving the SDGs by 2030.¹⁰
- *Include nutrition objectives in food, agriculture (including fisheries and aquaculture) and other sector policies. No sector should impede promoting healthy diets and improving nutrition.* Countries need to focus more on actions to promote the diversification of crops; increase the production of fruits and vegetables, legumes and pulses; raise the production of oils that contribute to healthy diets; emphasize the important role of fish in food-based dietary guidelines; create healthy food environments and implement food price policies to support healthy diets.¹¹

⁶ United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025, *Mid-term Review Foresight paper*.

www.un.org/nutrition/sites/www.un.org.nutrition/files/general/pdf/nutrition_decade_mtr_background_paper_en.pdf.

⁷ See, for example, FAO and WHO. 2019. *Sustainable healthy diets – Guiding principles*. Rome.

www.fao.org/3/ca6640en/CA6640EN.pdf; *Declaration G20 Meeting of Agriculture Ministers. 27–28 July 2018, Buenos Aires, Argentina*. www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-07-28-g20_agriculture_declaration_final.pdf; UN. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019. 74/149. *The right to food*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/149>; UN. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2018. 73/253. *Agriculture development, food security and nutrition*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/253>; UN. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2019. 74/242. *Agriculture development, food security and nutrition*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/242>; UN. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2018. 73/132. *Global health and foreign policy: a healthier world through better nutrition*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/132>.

⁸ A statement by FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu. Informal Seminar on the UN Food Systems Summit. Rome, 10 February 2020. www.fao.org/director-general/speeches/detail/en/c/1260815/.

⁹ The term ‘agriculture’ comprises crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries.

¹⁰ FAO Informal Briefing with Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Food Systems Summit. Rome, 10 February 2020. www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5213/icode/.

¹¹ CFS Forty-sixth Session, Rome, Italy, 14–18 October 2019. *Progress Report on Follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), including implementation of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition*. www.fao.org/3/na753en/na753en.pdf.

- *Ensure that everybody worldwide has access to affordable safe, diverse and nutritious foods that contribute to healthy diets.* Countries need to identify trade-offs among the environment, health and economics and further opportunities to enable healthy diets through the food system.¹²
- *Strengthen local food value chains through cold chain technology, improve post-harvest handling and connect smallholders to new supply chains.* This can lead to lower resource use (including energy, labour, land and capital)¹³ and safe foods for human consumption, as well as reduced losses and waste in the quantity and quality of especially perishable foods such as fish.

IV. PROGRESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION IN ACTION AREA “TRADE AND INVESTMENT FOR IMPROVED NUTRITION”⁶

10. While trade can enhance food security and nutrition, trade policy, nutrition action coherence, governance and cross-sectoral cooperation are also essential.^{14,15} Some global value chains and agri-food industries currently produce environmentally unsustainable food products high in unhealthy fats, sugars or salt. With food supply globalization, populations are more exposed to different food hazards. Increased foreign direct investment has been linked to higher consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.^{16,17} Prioritizing health over short-term economic gain leads to greater long-term economic gains.^{18,19}

11. Fish and fish products are important sources of vitamins and minerals and can have a large impact on preventing micronutrient deficiencies. When low-income countries, for instance, divert some of their fisheries exports to domestic consumption, fish-based food strategies have the potential to contribute substantially to global food security and improve nutrition.²⁰

12. For the remaining years of the Decade, the joint FAO/WHO Decade Secretariat proposes the following priority focus areas:

- *Use trade policy, including instruments such as tariffs and quotas, to improve the food supply.* The World Trade Organization provides space for import restrictions to protect population health, through changes within the bound tariff rates and through health exceptions. Public

¹² FAO. 2018. *Strengthening sector policies for better food security and nutrition results: food systems for healthy diets.* Rome. www.fao.org/3/CA2797EN/ca2797en.pdf.

¹³ FAO and WHO. 2018. *Strengthening nutrition action: a resource guide for countries based on the policy recommendations of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2).* Rome. www.fao.org/3/ca1505en/CA1505EN.pdf.

¹⁴ UN. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2018. 73/132. *Global health and foreign policy: a healthier world through better nutrition.* <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/132>.

¹⁵ International Forum on Food Safety and Trade. *The Future of Food Safety – Transforming knowledge into action for people, economies and the environment.* Geneva, Switzerland, 23-24 April 2019. www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e/faowhowtoapril19_e.htm.

¹⁶ Baker P, et al. Trade and investment liberalization, food systems change and highly processed food consumption: a natural experiment contrasting the soft-drink markets of Peru and Bolivia. *Globalization and Health*, 2016, 12: 24. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4890476/pdf/12992_2016_Article_161.pdf.

¹⁷ Shram A, et al. The role of trade and investment liberalization in the sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages market: a natural experiment contrasting Vietnam and the Philippines. *Globalization and Health*, 2015, 11: 41. <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-015-0127-7>.

¹⁸ Cylus J, et al. 2018. *Making the economic case for investing in health systems: what is the evidence that health systems advance economic and fiscal objectives?* WHO. Copenhagen. www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/380728/pb-tallinn-01-eng.pdf.

¹⁹ Anekwe TD & Rahkovsky I. Economic costs and benefits of healthy eating. *Current Obesity Reports*, 2013, 2: 225–234. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13679-013-0064-9>.

²⁰ Hicks CC. Harnessing global fisheries to tackle micronutrient deficiencies. *Nature*, 2019, 574: 95–98.

health professionals could assist economic and legal professionals and trade economists in advocating trade and investment policy.

- *Strengthen regional partnerships among countries, leverage existing regional economic groups, and improve data collection and tools.* Global institutions could continue to gather data and support methods for better understanding trade policy impacts on nutrition.
- *Invest responsibly in agriculture and food systems.* More investment by *international institutions, governments, and the private sector* is needed to enhance food security and nutrition and boost economic development. Trade policies need to complement investments in domestic agriculture and social safety nets.¹⁵