

Concept Note (20 September 2011)
JOINT FAO/WHO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION
TWENTY YEARS LATER (ICN+20)
FAO, Rome, Italy, 2013

Background

The 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), 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 (NPANs) which represent the countries' priorities and strategies for alleviating hunger and malnutrition.

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). FAO estimates that a total of 925 million people were undernourished in 2010 compared with 1.02 billion in 2009. 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 10 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 (178 million children) are stunted due to chronic undernutrition and 148 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.

At the same time 43 million children under five years of age are overweight, and obesity affects around 500 million adults, 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 that 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.

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.

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).

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 1000 days campaign, are calling for high level international attention to the need to scale up nutrition programmes.

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.

Rationale

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

For this purpose FAO and WHO, in collaboration with several UN and non UN partners are to convene an International Conference on Nutrition 20 years after the 1992 ICN (ICN+20). The ICN+20 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 ICN+20 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.

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.

Holding the ICN+20 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.

While the Conference will address the particular nutrition needs of women and of children in the first 1000 days of life, it will also address the nutritional needs of all – individuals, families, households and communities, because nutrition is everyone's right.

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.

Objectives

The ICN+20 will be a high-level political event and the first global intergovernmental conference devoted solely 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-sensitive 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.

Process

The ICN+20 will be a three-day high-level Inter-Governmental Conference, including plenary meetings of high-level government officials and thematic roundtables held as parallel events. 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.

A series of regional and expert meetings and consultations will be held and country case studies prepared as part of the preparatory process for the ICN+20. Consideration may be given to the action-oriented themes that were discussed at the 1992 ICN as well as themes that have emerged since that time, allowing each sector and actor to determine how it can best address nutritional problems, taking into account the specific needs and conditions in each country.

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.

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-sensitive food-based approaches for improving dietary diversity and nutrition, biodiversity and sustainable diets, 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

The ICN+20 will be 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 be presented and discussed. An outline for the preparation of the consolidated country strategy papers and of the synthesis paper at regional/sub-regional level will be prepared drawing on the information provided by each of the country strategy papers which will help inform the debate at the ICN+20. The regional meetings will contribute to the achievement of objective 1 of the ICN+20.

Expert meetings

Four expert meetings or ideas forum will be held to assemble state-of-the-art scientific knowledge drawing upon the experience of relevant networks. Each expert meeting will focus on specific thematic areas:

1. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture. How can agriculture better provide the food and livelihoods that lead to improved diets and raised levels of nutrition? This may be achieved through improved production systems which lead to increased availability, access to and consumption of foods of adequate quantity (calories) and quality (in terms of variety, diversity, nutrient content and safety). Best practices for addressing both under and over nutrition will be considered for developed and developing countries.
2. Agricultural and trade policies. Through what precise mechanisms and to what degree do such policies influence access to and consumption of food and therefore nutrition? The international context highlighting the dramatic changes that have taken place since 1992 (including the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture, trade liberalisation and national agricultural policy reforms, import surges, increasing globalization and urbanization, internationalization and increasing vertical integration - wholesalers/retailers/supermarkets – through value chains, food subsidies and taxes, tariff barriers to trade, subsidies for food exports, high food prices and price volatility, biofuel development, Codex and proliferation of private standards) will be considered as to their contribution to nutrition impact;
3. Social protection and poverty reduction. How the marginalized, most disadvantaged and nutritionally vulnerable sections of society can be protected by an inclusive development process? What are the challenges regarding the design and implementation of conditional and non-conditional transfers either of cash or of food and the effectiveness of social protection measures such as safety nets and employment policies for reducing social inequality and for safeguarding nutrition?
4. Nutrition education and consumer awareness. What kind of education programmes (literacy, mass media campaigns, formal and informal education, sector driven such as through health care providers or agricultural extension workers, social marketing) are most effective for raising consumers awareness and for guiding consumers to increase demand for and adopt healthy diets and lifestyles? What is the contribution that marketing strategies including food labelling can make to improve food choices for balanced diets?

Background papers will be invited for each expert meeting, stimulating debate around specific topics and issues of relevance. A synthesis paper will be prepared drawing on the information provided in the background papers which will help inform the debate at the ICN+20. Internet fora to support technical discussions around each specific topic will be hosted. The Expert meetings and their background papers aim to prepare a set of policy options to be discussed in ICN+20, thus addressing objective 3.

Stakeholder Consultation

A stakeholder consultation for CSOs, NGOs and the private sector will be organized bringing together a broad range of views and experiences and identifying areas for collaboration. The consultation will focus on issues including policy monitoring, advocacy, the effect of investment policies and on how CSO/NGO and the private sector contribute to improving diets and raising levels of nutrition (processing, preservation, cost, marketing, influencing consumer behaviour, reformulating and introducing new products. The report of the stakeholder consultation will help inform the debate at the ICN+20.

Country Case Studies

Country case studies will be prepared by early riser countries of the SUN Movement critically discussing best practices and lessons learned for improving nutrition for possible replication in other countries.

Three-Day Conference

Based on the reports of the regional conferences, expert meetings, stakeholder consultation and country case studies prepared for the ICN+20, actions to be considered by governments in their efforts to improve nutrition will be identified.

Arrangements for the preparation of the Conference

An ICN+20 Steering Committee (ICN+20 SC) will provide overall political and policy direction for the preparatory process and the holding of the ICN+20 itself. The Steering Committee would include additional 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.

An ICN+20 Secretariat will be established to provide policy guidance and technical direction on the day to day activities for preparing for and holding the Conference. The Secretariat will be supported by a Technical Taskforce (ICN+20 TT) which will provide technical assistance for the preparations of the background papers and related materials as well as for the holding of the regional and expert meetings and stakeholder consultation.

Participants

Participants may include delegates at ministerial level of Member States (Ministers of Health, Agriculture, Trade, Social affairs), high level representatives of the United Nations and of Regional Intergovernmental Organizations, as well as experts and programme planners from NGOs, CSOs, academic institutions and the private sector involved in food and nutrition.

Timing

The ICN+20 will be held at FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy at a date to be agreed upon in 2013.

Establishment of Steering Committee	Sept 2011
Establishment of Secretariat	Sept 2011
Establishment of Technical Taskforce	Sept 2011
Country papers received	April 2011-mid 2012
Regional meetings held (6)	3 in 2011, 3 in 2012
Experts papers commissioned	May/June 2011
Expert meetings held (4)	2012
Expert synthesis papers prepared	mid 2012-mid 2013
Consolidated country strategy papers prepared	mid 2012-mid 2013
Stakeholder consultation held (CSO/NGO and private sector)	2012
Country case studies (SUN Early Riser countries)	2012/13

Budget

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 and support the preparatory meetings and expert consultations. 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.