

SUMMARY NOTE

ROUND TABLE ON THE DOUBLE BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION

In view of the serious implications of the double burden of malnutrition in countries of the region, on 16 March 2014 the Thirty-second FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific held a round table on the subject. The objectives of the round table were to share country experiences and perspectives on different causes of malnutrition facing countries in the region and experiences in addressing the same, as well as agree on practical steps for nutrition sensitive agricultural policies and actions on the ground to address the double burden of malnutrition.

The meeting was opened by Hiroyuki Konuma, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific. He welcomed the participants and introduced the objectives of the round table. He invited participants to share their views and contribute to the development of recommendations for future action. This was followed by a presentation on “Overview of the Nutrition Situation in Asia and the Pacific” by Nomindelger Bayasgalanbat, Nutrition Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Shashi Sareen, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, moderated the round table which was an interactive session with six questions. Each question was taken up one by one starting with an introduction to the topic. Comments by three panellists on each topic were followed by questions and views from the floor. The panellists and delegates participated actively and there were lively discussions.

The questions and discussions were structured around two themes: (a) the issues and challenges of malnutrition faced by countries both in terms of undernutrition and overnutrition and (b) how these could be addressed through integrated and complementary actions and interventions.

The meeting stressed that, for agriculture development to be most effective in providing solutions to hunger and malnutrition, there is a need for wider implementation of effective, sustainable and long-term, nutrition-sensitive, food-based approaches that improve diets and raise levels of nutrition. It was recognized that making agriculture more nutrition-sensitive should be promoted as a sustainable solution to the double burden of malnutrition.

The meeting agreed that, in order to tackle problems related to the double burden of malnutrition, nutrition objectives should be explicitly integrated in agriculture, rural development and food security. The technical, institutional and human capacity to address the double burden of malnutrition in the agriculture sector should be considered and supported.

The meeting highlighted the need to pursue a multi-sectoral and integrated approach to implementing nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food security policies and strategies, engaging multi-stakeholders and promoting their concerted actions, and responding effectively to the challenges.

The need for collaborative efforts at subregional and regional levels was stressed as an important factor for information and knowledge sharing and fostering initiatives. To maximize partnership opportunities to support nutrition integration as part of agricultural development, the meeting discussed and exchanged views on exemplary cooperation and

partnership initiatives. The importance of collaborative work on nutrition with concerned UN agencies such as UNICEF, WHO and WFP was emphasized as per the successful on-going example of country nutrition profile preparation through the UN joint team work under the leadership of FAO and UNICEF at the regional level.

The meeting recognized the potential roles and contributions of public and private partnerships in food security and nutritional initiatives and goals. The role of food industries to improving public health through better nutritional initiatives and behavioral communication modification provides much opportunity to be further explored.

As a follow-up, the round table recommended the following core and harmonized key recommendations for addressing the double burden of malnutrition.

Policy

- Recognizing that food safety has important implications on the nutritional status of the population, develop a regional strategy on nutrition in collaboration with concerned UN agencies and partners with an indication of clear linkages with food safety and public health, which should complement existing strategies and action plans and be holistic enough to bring together all the various sectors and partners.
- Develop standards on food safety and nutrition labelling, and encourage countries to adopt labelling on packages for consumers to make healthier choices.
- Explicitly integrate nutrition in agriculture and trade policies and agriculture related interventions, including allocation of a national budget for the same.
- Support development of reliable nutrition data and statistics for the Pacific Island countries.
- Support adequate technical, institutional, financial and human capacities for agriculture stakeholders in addressing the double burden of malnutrition.
- Support agriculture policies on research, production, trade (import/export) that are based on the dietary requirements of the population.

Nutrition and food systems

- Strengthen research on the impact of food trade on the nutritional status and dietary patterns of populations.
- Promote local traditional and indigenous foods/locally available food resources.
- Support crop and agricultural diversification as a sustainable solution in combating the double burden of malnutrition.
- Encourage community, home and school gardening.
- Support the conservation of biodiversity for sustainable diets, and use of plant genetic resource materials.
- Support technologies to minimize post-harvest loss and reduce food waste, including improving food storage and distribution facilities to ensure the retention of the nutritional value of foods.
- Promote food-based interventions taking into account traditional and cultural practices.

Coordination

- Encourage sharing of experiences and good practices on accelerating the reduction of malnourishment.

- Facilitate the establishment and/or enhancement of coordination mechanisms among sectors (agriculture, health, education, nutrition, livestock, fisheries, forestry, natural resources, trade, finance and other related actors) in the region involved in agriculture, food security and nutrition at all levels for joint planning, policy-making, synergizing actions and sharing resources for concerted implementation efforts.
- Provide an enabling environment to support private sector interventions in strengthening nutrition throughout the value chain.
- Recognize the role of smallholder farmers, women's organizations, youth groups and other CSOs in improving nutrition, including promotion of regional consultations with CSOs by FAO and partners in scaling up nutrition as well as involvement of CSOs in the Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and the Pacific.

Education and awareness

- Support nutrition education, behaviour change and awareness raising about nutrition.
- Launch national campaigns on nutrition to encourage healthier diets and raise awareness about the importance of agriculture and the food sector for improved nutrition.
- Develop food based dietary guidelines.
- Promote proactive nutrition education campaigns to encourage healthier diets, including for school children.
- Support labelling on packaged foods to bring about consumer awareness for healthier choices by consumers.

Overweight and obesity was recognised as an important problem and most of the recommendations above also apply to over nutrition. The meeting recognized that over nutrition can be driven by factors such as affluence, sedentary life styles, culture, urbanization and changing diet patterns and that there is a need to focus on changing diet patterns, lifestyles and education.

The general conclusion of the discussion was that malnutrition is a very important subject and requires determined national and international action. FAO should play a leadership role in line with its comparative advantage and in close coordination with other UN agencies and partners, both to facilitate policies and programmatic actions at the country level, and ensure international cooperation and coordination at the regional level in Asia and the Pacific.

The round table ended with concluding remarks by Mr Konuma thanking the country delegates and civil society representatives for their participation and valuable contributions.