

# Post-2015 and SDGs



## Nourishing people, Nurturing the planet

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## Highlights

- Good nutrition is a pre-condition for a healthy and productive life; malnutrition in all of its forms imposes high economic, social and human development costs on individuals, households, communities and countries.
- Improving nutrition requires multi-sectoral policies and strategies supported by effective coordination and accountability mechanisms, and the capacity to transfer nutrition targets into actions and impacts.
- The food and agriculture sector has the primary role of feeding people by increasing the availability, affordability, and consumption of diverse, safe, nutritious foods and aligned with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability.
- The contribution of agriculture and food systems to nutrition can be enhanced by setting explicit nutrition objectives, improving equity and targeting, gender sensitivity and environmental sustainability.

## Nutrition

### Overview

Malnutrition in all of its forms – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – imposes unacceptably high economic and social costs on countries. It is one of the greatest impediments to human and national development. Malnutrition adversely affects physical growth as well as cognitive development of the unborn and young children, undermining the capacities and capabilities of individuals and communities.

FAO's most recent estimates indicate that at least 10.9 percent of the world population, or 795 million, go to bed hungry or suffer undernourishment in terms of energy intake; just over one in nine people are not getting enough food to maintain an active life. These figures represent only a fraction of the global burden of malnutrition. An estimated 26 percent of children under the age of five are stunted (too short for their age) due to chronic undernutrition. Two billion people suffer from one or more micronutrient deficiencies or "hidden hunger". At the same time, 1.4 billion people are overweight, of whom 500 million are obese.

The economic and social costs of malnutrition to the global economy are very high. Loss of productivity and direct health care spending can account for as much as five percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), equivalent to USD 3.5 trillion a year.

## Key challenges

The immediate causes of malnutrition are complex and multidimensional. They include inadequate availability of, and access to safe, diverse, nutritious food; lack of access to clean water, poor sanitation and inadequate health care; and inappropriate child feeding practices. The root causes of malnutrition are even more complex and encompass the broader economic, social, political, cultural and physical environment.

Trends in economies and societies are altering the ways people produce, process, acquire and consume food. Food supply chains are changing in many ways. Changes in activity and dietary patterns, especially in developing countries, have contributed to the “nutrition transition” in which countries simultaneously face rising levels of obesity associated with excessive consumption, while continuing to deal with problems of undernutrition (both dietary energy undernourishment and micronutrient deficiencies).

It is not uncommon to have both undernutrition and obesity co-existing within the same country, household or individual, a situation referred to as the multiple burdens of malnutrition. This situation clearly points to a failure in getting the right foods to those who need it when they need it.

Food quality and safety issues represent another great challenge for healthy nutrition. For many developing countries, national food control systems are not adequate – infrastructure is weak, food laws and regulations are not up to date, and the institutional capacity to enforce rules is insufficient.

## What needs to be done?

These multidimensional causes require integrated actions across sectors to address the malnutrition challenge. Better political and policy coherence, alignment, coordination and cooperation among food, agriculture, health and other sectors are needed to improve global nutrition. Successful examples of integrated policies addressing nutrition are available and can inspire further progress.

Eradicating malnutrition and its associated social and economic costs must begin with agriculture and food systems. The role of agriculture in producing food, generating income and supporting livelihoods is fundamental, and its direct role in enhancing nutrition deserves greater policy attention. Sustainability is central

to the nutrition agenda, as we must ensure food security and good nutrition for all, today and tomorrow. To be effective in enhancing nutrition, food and agriculture programmes and policies must incorporate nutrition targets and indicators, strengthen coordination with other sectors, be sensitive to gender roles, especially those of women in household nutritional and child care.

To ensure food safety and quality, international standards needs to be promoted. Countries should build the means necessary to ensure an adequate supply of safe and good quality food. However, food quality and safety goals can only be realized if strategies, within adequate legal frameworks, are supported by sound investment plans.

*Food systems - the resources, environment, people, institutions and processes with which food is produced, processed, stored, distributed, prepared and consumed - determine the quantity as well as the quality of the food supply in terms of nutritional content, diversity and safety. Agriculture broadly understood (crop and livestock production, fisheries and forestry) and potable water are the basis of food systems*

Social protection programmes, associated with nutrition education and designed to promote diversification of livelihoods and diets, can facilitate access to basic services and play key roles in improving nutrition outcomes. The consumer must be empowered to demand healthy and nutritious foods.

In the past few years, there has been far more attention paid to the multiple burdens of malnutrition, with national and international initiatives rising to the challenge (e.g. with the emergence of the First 1 000 Days campaign and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement). The launch of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition can also refocus attention on opportunities to maximize the contribution of agriculture and food systems to improve nutrition. The second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) kept the spotlight on nutrition adopting the Rome [Declaration on Nutrition](#) and identifying priorities for international cooperation in the coming years. The post-2015 development agenda presents a real opportunity to make a difference in addressing malnutrition.