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**Identifying gaps in the main conclusions of the   
Second International Conference on Nutrition**

*An in-depth analysis of comments on the technical issues   
related to malnutrition and the outcome of the political documents*

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# Acronym list

AR4D – Agricultural Research for Nutrition

CS – Civil Society

FFA – Framework for Action

IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFPRI – International Food Policy Research Institute

IGO – International Organizations

JWG – Joint Working Group

NDCs – Non-Communicable Diseases

NEAFS – Nutrition-Enhanced Agriculture and Food Systems

PPP – Public-Private Partnerships

PS – Private Sector

RDN – Rome Declaration on Nutrition

SP – Social Protection

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

WFP – World Food Programme

WTO – World Trade Organization

# Introduction

The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and in cooperation with IFAD, IFPRI, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, WTO, WFP and the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF), took place at FAO Headquarters in Rome from 19-21 November 2014. ICN2 resulted in the adoption of two main documents: the *Rome Declaration on Nutrition* (RDN)[[1]](#footnote-1) and the *Framework for Action* (FFA)[[2]](#footnote-2). On one hand, signatory countries[[3]](#footnote-3) to the RDN have committed, among other things, to eliminate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition. On the other hand, the FFA recommends a list of policies, strategies and actions to help guide signatory governments[[4]](#footnote-4) in the proper implementation of the commitments made in the Rome Declaration.

As part of the preparations leading up to the Conference, a Preparatory Technical Meeting[[5]](#footnote-5) was held at FAO Headquarters from 13-15 November 2013. Building on the results of this meeting, FAO and WHO Secretariats prepared drafts of the two outcome documents. These drafts were then discussed and developed by a Joint Working Group (JWG) of regional representatives of FAO and WHO Members for their final adoption during ICN2 in November 2014.

In order to give all stakeholders an open and unbiased opportunity to contribute to the preparations of such an important event, a number of electronic discussions were available on the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (Global FSN).[[6]](#footnote-6) It should be mentioned that the First International Conference on Nutrition was held 22 years earlier, in 1992. Therefore, the need for an open discussion on the modern challenges of nutrition, including the double of malnutrition, was fundamental prior to the Second Conference. These discussions allowed for an inclusive process where Governments, Intergovernmental and Non-governmental Organizations, the Civil Society, the Private Sector, Research Institutes and Universities, and anyone concerned by these issues to comment upon a number of relevant themes and share experiences, opinions, ideas in order to feed into the preparation of ICN2.

In total, there were six main online discussions[[7]](#footnote-7) presented on the Global FSN website. Firstly, three of these discussions were launched between June and September 2013 – prior to the Preparatory Technical Meeting – and addressed technical issues related to malnutrition, and ways to improve the nutritional statues of people. Secondly, the three following discussions, which were held between March and August 2014, aimed at providing comments on the draft versions of the RDN and the FFA.

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This Issue Note is the result of a detailed examination of all 268 comments (more than 680 pages) coming from the six online discussions. Malnutrition is a very complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, which requires coordinated action on different fronts. This has arisen very clearly from this analysis. Therefore, the aim of this Report is to capture the key messages emerging from the different stakeholders who have participated to these online debates and to synthesize them in a coordinated way, illustrating some of the areas where there is a need for additional investigation and efforts in order to eradicate malnutrition.

## Methodology

A specific methodology – agreed collectively - was adopted to tackle this work. The group was first divided between the two core sets of discussions to be analysed: approximately ten students worked on the technical discussions related to malnutrition and other aspects of nutrition. The remaining of the class executed an in-depth analysis of the comments made on the drafts of the RDN and the FFA. Following this main division of the work, each group organized how the comments were divided among individuals. Using an excel matrix[[8]](#footnote-8), each person analysed the comments they were assigned. As a starting point, comments were screened according to the following parameters:

* Country
* Developed or developing country
* Name or organization
* Type of institution (GVT, IGO, Research, etc.)

Key messages and other relevant references provided in the comments were also noted in the matrix. Finally, each comment was classified according to its relevance (high/medium/low) to the topic of nutrition and of the background documents provided. This value judgment on the comments, though it maintained some elements of subjectivity, was kept as unbiased as possible with considerations on the credibility of the original source, the references quoted (e.g. quality papers, hard science or just soft references, news, media, etc.) and the coherence of the general argumentation. Moreover, this classification did not prevent the possibility to review comments marked as low in the final preparation of this Report.

After compiling the full excel matrix with all analysed comments, four summaries were produced: three for the technical discussion (one per topic) [[9]](#footnote-9) and a single joint summary for the three political discussions.[[10]](#footnote-10) We proceeded in this way in order to separate technical issues very sharply as the themes did not overlap. However, given the completely different nature of the political discussions, which focused on possible modifications to bring to the two documents to be discussed at the ICN2, an overall summary was thought to capture better the depth of the discussion. These summaries allowed every student to be informed of the parts s/he was not assigned to read and screen, highlighting proposals, criticisms, potential gaps, suggestions proposed during the online consultations and giving evidence to successful experiences.

This final document is a further synthesis based on the four summaries and the excel matrix.

## Outline of the Report

In the first section of this Report, we produced some basic statistics on the different comments analysed. These provide some insight on the interaction between the different stakeholders and their main interests. The second part presents the technical and political summaries to illustrate the breadth of arguments discussed and the issues raised. On one hand, the technical summary includes a number of relevant case studies, where specific programmes or policies have shown to have a significant impact on one or more dimensions of malnutrition. On the other hand, the political summary contains a review of the comments made on the drafts of the RDN and the FFA, highlighting the linkages with the three technical issues of the previous debates. The main scope of this summary was (i) to identify in what way the discussions on the political documents actually had an impact on the final outcomes of the ICN2 and (ii) to understand if the technical discussions were useful to inform policy-makers. In the third section, based on the above background analysis and the overall six discussions, this Issue Note illustrates ways in which the multidimensionality of malnutrition has emerged, and the many different pathways possible to address it. In the fourth part of this Report, we identified possible shortcomings present in the RDN and the FFA by comparing the comments made by stakeholders in the preparatory discussions and the final outcome documents. Finally, we propose some recommendations for future consideration, in light of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025.

# Statistical analysis

We screened and analysed each comment in order to better understand the overall trends of the discussions conducted. This exercise has proven to be quite useful as it revealed the main interests of the involved stakeholders, their interests and the technical or political focus of their comments.

*Figure 1: Distribution of type of discussion by institution*

In terms of frequencies of comments, each stakeholder participated more or less uniformly to the political and the technical aspects of the debates, which means that, overall the actors involved expressed an equal interest and involvement in both typology of discussions. However, it should be mentioned that the actual contribution of the Private Sector to the discussions is, by far, lower compared to the rest of the stakeholders. This is likely due to the instrument used to facilitate these consultations, the FSN Forum, which is a platform that Private Sector is only recently starting to use more frequently.

Notably, and quite reasonably, those falling under the “other” category have been much more involved in the technical aspects, rather than the political drafts of the documents. This already highlights one interesting point: institutions need to find better ways to involve everyone in the process of policy-making. In fact, it is not enough to give the possibility to participate, but people also need to be enabled to do so by overcoming their natural deference to official political documents. This observation can also be linked to the following graph that shows the distribution of comments received by thematic area, distinguishing between developed and developing countries.[[11]](#footnote-11)

*Figure 2: Type of Thematic area by countries' economic level of development*

More than half of the commentaries made by actors belonging to developed countries referred to the political discussions, whereas stakeholders located in the developing world, showed an equal interest in all the themes of the discussion. What is probably even more interesting is the fact that stakeholders in developed countries had the least interest in connecting social protection schemes to malnutrition issues. One should not jump to conclusions, but it certainly brings to mind the trend of developed countries to abandon social protection policies and safety nets, while their problem of malnutrition also shifts from under to over nutrition. We are not suggesting a direct link or correlation (though it could be object of further studies), but the two phenomena are both present in developed countries. It also strikes the eye that stakeholders in developing countries are more prone to tackle malnutrition via policies, giving less importance to the technical aspects. In our view, this is definitely a short-sighted approach. Policies are definitely important but they should be grounded on specific technical actions in order to be effective.

# Technical Summary

FAO’s nutrition department proposed three technical discussions to investigate the multidimensionality of malnutrition, its causes, possible solutions and best practices. The aim was to stimulate participants in proposing innovative and efficient policies to tackle malnutrition and influence policy-making in order to develop background elements for ICN2.

Stakeholders were called upon to comment on the three following discussions:

1. Social protection to protect and promote nutrition (3-28 June 2013)
2. Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems (1-29 July 2013)
3. The contribution of the Private Sector and Civil Society to improve nutrition (5-26 September 2013)

It should be mentioned that these discussions can either be viewed as independent discussions on specific and narrow topics in relation to malnutrition, with debates on particular aspects of the single domains, but also as being part of a wider overarching discourse on policies aimed at informing the ICN2 works. Indeed, the three opening letters from the facilitators of the discussions all contained requests related to policies, with a clear reference to the upcoming work of ICN2. In particular, we can read:

1. What are the main **issues for policy-makers** to consider in the design, **formulation and implementation of nutrition-enhancing social protection measures**?
2. What are the **key institutional and governance challenges** to the delivery of cross-sectoral and comprehensive **social protection policies that protect and promote nutrition of the most vulnerable**?
3. In your experience, what are **key best-practices and lessons-learned** in fostering cross-sectoral linkages **to enhance malnutrition and poverty reduction through social protection**?

(from the Social Protection online discussion)

1. **Policy issues**: What **policies** can make agriculture and food systems more nutrition-enhancing? What are the **knowledge gaps in policies** associated with nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems?
2. **Programme issues**: What do nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems **look like**? What have been the **success stories and lessons learned from programmes** at country level? How can we **monitor the impact** of such programmes on food consumption and nutrition?
3. **Partnerships**: How can we **work across sectors** and build strong linkages between food and agriculture, social protection, employment, health, education and other key sectors? How can we create **sustainable partnerships**? How can we build **effective governance** for nutrition?

(from the Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems online discussion)

1. **Policy issues**: What role can the private sector and civil society play in d**esigning and implementing policies** that make agriculture and food systems more nutrition-enhancing? What are the **knowledge gaps**?
2. **Programme issues**: What have been the **success stories and lessons learned** by the private sector and civil society in implementing **nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems programmes** at country level? How can the **impact** of such programmes on food consumption and nutrition be **monitored**?
3. **Governance**: What are the **changes needed** to make sure that the private sector and civil society are involved in **building effective and sustainable governance mechanisms** related to agriculture, food systems and nutrition?

(from the Role of Private Sector and Civil Society online discussion)

As it can be clearly observed, the questions posed by the facilitators were often very similar (sometimes identical) and strongly policy-oriented. This is coherent with the initial idea to use these results to inform and prepare the ground for the discussions on the ICN2 political documents. However, contributions did not always tackle directly the proposed questions. Often the main topic itself was matter of contentious debates, which in the end dominated the whole discussion. As we will discuss in the *Missed Opportunities Section*, some of these questions have not been developed in full potential, thus possibly defying their value in support to the ICN2 debates. In the next point, we will look at the main issues raised in these three technical discussions.

## Main issues

Starting from the three main technical topics mentioned above and the questions posed by the facilitators, participants to the technical debates raised a wide variety of aspects on malnutrition, as well as contrasting views by different actors. The perception of malnutrition and the means to address are influenced by the economic, political and cultural context in which they are conceived. However, there is an almost unanimous recognition that malnutrition is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires coordinated action in a very context-specific fashion.

The list here below represents the most frequently raised aspects and concerns in these three debates.[[12]](#footnote-12) Clearly, this is not an attempt to list all the possible ways to address malnutrition, but rather a snapshot of what emerged from these three exercises.

* Agricultural and food systems’ enhancement, including valorizing traditional/historical practices (including the conservation of seed diversity), soil preservation and sustainability practices to safeguard natural resources;
* Promoting diversification in supply;
* Modifying consumption habits, the need for diversifying diets worldwide, including the reduction of highly processed foods;
* The need for education in nutrition and information campaigns;
* Developing Agricultural Research for Nutrition (AR4D), linking local knowledge to advanced scientific knowledge;
* Improvement of infrastructure, storage structures, etc.;
* Protection of human rights across the whole food chain;
* The multiple roles of Civil Society in tackling malnutrition in the various societal layers;
* Promoting local food sovereignty and smallholders’ role, improving their access to irrigation, resources, markets, etc., developing an enabling environment that improves nutrition;
* The importance of indigenous people’s knowledge of traditional food systems;
* The need for transparency, monitoring and accountability in the nutrition domain;
* Promoting participatory processes and programmes;
* The pivotal role of women in the improvement of the society’s nutrition and working for their full empowerment;
* Developing adequate social protection schemes and safety nets with appropriate targeting of vulnerable and marginalized groups;
* The need for multi-stakeholder partnerships that include Governments, Intergovernmental Organizations, local and development agencies, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), etc.;
* Fostering the inter-linkages between health and nutrition, with a recognition of the triple-burden of malnutrition, the increasing diabetes and Non-Communicable Diseases (NDCs);
* Lobbying for better nutritional policies;
* Promoting the production of more nutritious foods via incentives or subsidies; and
* Challenging the corporate interests and marketing approaches, possibly through regulations.

Many contributors provided specific examples to illustrate their point and suggested specific policies or ways to design them. The following point illustrates some examples of policy design for nutrition on the basis of comments received.

## Policy design for nutrition

The majority of the contributions explicitly affirm the need to develop collaborative, coherent and forward thinking polices aimed towards the creation of an enabling environment to improve nutrition. Many notable organizations, including the US Council for International Business, the International Diabetes Federation and the NCD Alliance, called for policies to be:

* **Effective:** meaning that the risk of unintended consequences must be low;
* **Coordinated:** the goals of the different stakeholders can often collide resulting in many destabilizing outcomes; this is why there is a clear need for coordination amongst them. Coordination can potentially achieve more widespread nutritional outcomes than single uncoordinated policies;
* **Evidence-based:** in order to promote sound nutritional policies and programmes, they need to be formulated using research and scientific analysis;
* **Context-based:** in order to account for the economic, political and cultural diversity in which they are designed and implemented;
* **Multidimensional:** in order to take into account the multidimensional nature of food and nutrition security and to tackle the root causes of hunger;
* **Targeted:** according to the needs of different social groups;
* **Accountable:** clear objectives and monitoring should be fully integrated in policy design;
* **Focused on empowerment:** women are often key to the household nutritional status, so they should be assisted in this critical social role.
* **Focused on social protection**: the development of safety nets is central to fight food insecurity
* **Focused on nutritional education strategies**: to facilitate the availability, affordability and acceptability of healthy lifestyle behaviors.
* **Focused on the reduction of highly-processed foods**: to prevent diet-related diseases

In order to assess the efficiency of policies, some contributions suggest, as important reference tools, the Global Strategic Framework (GSF)[[13]](#footnote-13), developed by the Committee on Food Security (CFS)[[14]](#footnote-14) and the “Key recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture” developed by FAO/UNSCN.[[15]](#footnote-15) A cooperative, multi-stakeholder approach is needed in policy-making to address global and local challenges, which are often too hard to be solved single-handedly by one actor. A comprehensive approach as such can also attract more donors.

## Policy and programme proposal

Here is a list of some of the most recurrent and important policy and/or programme proposals put forward in the three technical consultations, divided by the themes discussed above:

**Health, nutrition and basic rights**

* Promoting a human right to food approach in all relevant policies;
* Promoting access to clean water and reduce the incidence of water borne diseases;
* Fostering collaboration between the health sector and agriculture, and involving nutritionist specialists at policy levels;
* Eliminating health care fees for pregnant women - this would increase the access to health facilities and as a consequence, reduce child mortality.
* Protecting human's rights, at all stages of the food chain.

**Agriculture and Food Systems**

* Reducing post-harvest losses;
* Promoting the use of nutrition-enhanced fertilizers;
* Focusing on soil health to enhance crop production and nutrition, preservation of traditional and improved seeds, with a generational hand-over of traditions, their usage and historical practices;
* Sustainable agricultural production (preservation of natural resources);
* Nutrition interventions: food (bio) fortiﬁcation to reduce malnutrition and micronutrient deﬁciencies;
* Fostering resilient agriculture;
* Creating of enabling environment for local smallholders;
* Safeguarding natural resources, strengthening local market mechanisms;
* Decentralizing local food systems.

**Education**

* Encouraging the link between local knowledge and advanced scientiﬁc knowledge and promoting Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D);
* Developing educational programmes on nutrition at all levels including trainings, capacity building and empowerment of smallholders especially women farmers.

**Social protection**

* Promoting cash-based transfer programmes to help vulnerable groups escape malnutrition;
* Encouraging a wider use of school-feeding programs and national food gardens;
* Promoting legislation to support nutrition-sensitive social protection;
* Improving access to credit;
* Creating basic infrastructures such as water supplies and rural roads, which can e.g. facilitate access to markets;
* Establishing a free social security insurance for the most vulnerable.

**Economic policies**

* Exploring innovative financing schemes to provide long-term, sustainable funding for direct nutrition interventions;
* Reforming taxation / incentives for the production of nutritional food, thus lowering the price, improving access and reducing marketing of unhealthy foods;
* Addressing global trade rules;
* Increasing cross-sectoral coordination among multiple stakeholders;
* Enabling partnerships between local and development agencies.

**Transparency and monitoring**

* Addressing corruption practices and the misuse or allocation of resources;
* Determining the appropriate indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

## Relevant Case Studies

A number of examples of programmes and best practices were cited during the online discussions. Though some of these were just mentioned, we investigated deeper to provide an overview of how specific and well-designed programmes can have concrete nutritional benefits. All information from these case studies was taken directly from the referenced websites, in footnotes below.

1. **Integrated home gardening and farming systems for nutrition – South of Bangladesh[[16]](#footnote-16)**

Ektee Bari Ektee Khamar i.e. One House One Farm (OHOF) is a poverty alleviation project through family farming of the Government of Bangladesh.

**Partners**

*Sponsored by:* Rural Development and Cooperative Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives

*Executing Agency:* Rural Development and Cooperative Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives with District Administration in particular Deputy Commissioner and his officials. Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) as the main support agency along with other departments like Co-operatives, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Comilla, PDBF, SFDF and Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogra.

**Objective**

The goal of the project is poverty alleviation through e-financial inclusion (i.e. fund mobilization) followed by family farming livelihood and income generation of the under privileged and smallholders of the country.

**Background**

For the first time, the Government of Bangladesh is giving money to poor people and village organizations directly as a grant for their primary capital to use as a revolving fund. Secondly, the poor are taking decisions themselves, i.e. development is participatory and designed as a bottom up approach rather than top down. Thirdly, the total process of project management and fund management have been done electronically using ICT. The electronically digital monitoring reduced both delay and corruption, to ensure transparency and accountability. A huge investment was made in agriculture through household farming. Most interestingly, the mobilized fund lies with the account of the village cooperative.

**Phased-Approach**

* Assistance for capital formation of the poor farm families
* Sharpening their skill by training & motivation
* Allow them to sit together at courtyard meeting
* Enable them to take decision independently
* Enabling them to develop need based small family farms
* Ensure marketing facilities for their product

**Benefits**

In rural areas, 75% of households reportedly have a home garden. A range of 25 fruit crops, 29 vegetables, and 12 spices can be cultivated, even in small home gardens of less than 50 square-metres. Income from the home gardens is usually controlled by women and is more likely to be used for better diets, education, health care and other elements directly benefitting women and children. Estimates from the national Food Security and Nutritional Surveillance Project 2011-12, show that: 56% of households have only home gardens, 62% have backyard poultry and 42% of households with homestead gardens also have backyard poultry. The same source also estimates that homestead gardening with backyard poultry decreased from 41% in February-May of 2010-11 to 35% in February-May of 2011-12. The current situation shows that integrated home gardening needs enhanced resilience to land degradation, water scarcity, bio-security (especially avian flu) and climate change, particularly in high risk areas such as in the Southern region in Bangladesh.

Around a tenth of gardens in selected villages of the Southern districts were destroyed completely by soil salinity and seeds could not sprout. Amidst this situation, about half of the households implemented coping practices using organic compost, and a little over a third planted crops in pits leached with water. Mulching with rice straw, coconut coir and other locally available organic materials were used to increase water retention of the soil and develop compost. Greater resilience was found in salinity among vegetable crops, which include Indian spinach (puishak), sweet gourd, okra and kangkong (kolmishak) which are good sources of micronutrients. It is essential that strategies and input resources have specific nutrition considerations integrated into agriculture extension while promoting integrated home gardening, particularly in flood affected areas. Households with larger plots of land are also seen to be moving from rice cultivation to shrimp cultivation, which is more remunerative and this has affected the day labour opportunities for poor households. Households with better knowledge and means to adopt salinity coping practices were mostly the better off ones.

1. **Food fortification[[17]](#footnote-17)**

The Food Fortification Programme is designed to eliminate micronutrient deficiencies through the addition of micronutrients to processed foods. Food fortification is one of the food-based approaches for the prevention of micronutrient malnutrition. It can be a very cost-effective method to ensure adequate intake of micronutrients. In fact, food fortification has been recognized as one of the important strategy to increase the micronutrient content of available foods, especially post farm gate level.

**Intervention in Zambia[[18]](#footnote-18)**

Food vitamin and mineral deficiencies, also known as micronutrient malnutrition, represented a severe public health problem in Zambia For this reason, different types of food have been fortified with various nutrients as needed. For example, salt is fortified with iodine and sugar is fortified with vitamin A. Now, 77% of the population is consuming adequately iodized salt. Iodine deficiency disorders are currently under control due to the Universal Salt Iodations Programme. Plans are also under way to fortify maize meal with a multi-mix of vitamins and minerals. In promoting this intervention, one of the preliminary activities is to assess the level of utilization of fortified foods by households and determine if samples of fortified foods meet the government standards.

1. **One cow per poor family program (Girinka program) – Rwanda[[19]](#footnote-19)**

The word Girinka, which can be translated to ‘may you have a cow’, describes a centuries-old cultural practice in Rwanda whereby a cow was given by one person to another, either as a sign of respect and gratitude or as a marriage dowry.

This program was developed in Rwanda and consisted in targeting poor households and providing them a cow for free, on condition they give the first female calf to their neighbour, who will then do the same with their first calf and so on. Since its introduction in 2006, more than 198,000 households have received cows. Girinka has contributed to an increase in agricultural production in Rwanda - especially milk products which have helped reduce malnutrition and increase incomes. The program aims to provide 350,000 cows to poor families by 2017.7

**Partners**

Funded by the Government of Rwanda, it actively involves Line Ministries, Local NGOs, International Organizations (Heifer International Pro-gram, Send a Cow, World Vision …)

**Objective**

The program’s central aim is to reduce child malnutrition rates and increase household incomes of poor farmers.

**Benefits**

Girinka has led to a number of significant changes in the lives of the poorest Rwandans. The impact of the program can be seen through the following results:

* *Agricultural production*: between 2000 and 2011, milk production increased seven fold allowing the Government of Rwanda to start a School feeding programme based on milk (One Cup of Milk per Child). Between 2009 and 2011, national milk production increased by 11.3%, rising to 372.6 million litres from 334.7 million litres. Over the same period, meat production increased by 9.9%, according to the Government of Rwanda
* *Food security, income and diversification*: according to a Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey (CFSVA) in 2012, Rwanda experienced 7% decrease in food insecure households since 2006 at which time the figure was 28% according to the 2006 CFSVA. Moreover, most communities’ recipients of the cow produced enough milk to sell a part of it at the market, providing additional income generation. The manure produced by cows increased crop productivity, allowing smallholders to also plant crops offering sustenance and employment as well as a stable income and to diversify and increase crop production, leading to greater food security.
* *Livestock ownership*: animal production and the integration of livestock into smallholder farming is a key contributor to food security. Animal products are a good source of proteins and lipids and, in times of crisis, livestock functions as a shock absorber, contributing to the resilience of poor households. Results of a 2012 nutrition survey showed that in comparison to 2005/2006, higher proportions of households are now able to afford cattle at 47% nationally (up from 34%).
* *Health outcomes*: while Girinka cannot be credited with single-handedly improving health outcomes across Rwanda, the program has certainly played a part in reducing the level of malnutrition across the population, as well as among children under five. According to the 2010 Demographic Health Survey, the percentage of stunted children fell from 51% in 2005, to 44% in 2010, the percentage of wasted children fell from five percent to three percent and the percentage of underweight children fell from 18% to 11%.
* *Social reconciliation and unity*: Girinka has played a significant role in post-genocide reconstruction in Rwanda. During the colonial period, the cow was used to divide Rwandans along ethnic lines and cattle became a symbol of elitism and a commodity reserved only for a portion of the country’s people. According to a report by UNICEF, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi saw 90% of the country’s cattle killed. It is against this historical background, whereby cows were considered as only for the elite in society, that Girinka was introduced.

Girinka has changed what it means to own cattle in Rwanda. While the symbolism of prosperity is still attached to the cow, by giving cattle to the poorest in society, the program has helped to end the divisive perception surrounding owning cattle. The ‘pass on’ component of Girinka, whereby a recipient gifts the first born calf to a neighbour, has helped to rebuild social relationships destroyed during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. This is because the giving of a cow to someone or ‘GutangaInka’, translated as ‘sealing a bond of friendship’ remains a cultural practice owned, understood and valued by Rwandans.

This is a very significant example as it impacts nutrition both directly (provision of livestock and dairy products), but also indirectly by creating a safety net, providing diversification, income and social bonds. The program has been crucial in addressing the fundamental needs of those parts of the country that are critically food insecure. This is also an excellent example of an innovative policy, with a multi-stakeholder cooperation.

## Missed Opportunities

Across the three technical online discussions, some of the contributors raised concerns on a number of missed opportunities: aspects of malnutrition that have been overlooked by the facilitators of the discussions or that have not been developed in adequate depth by the discussion. We have analysed them in the context of each of the three specific topics, but have also identified gaps from our own perspective, trying to identify missed opportunities of these electronic debates.

The *Social Protection* discussion highlighted the classical themes related to aid, targeting, conditional transfers and programmes, the need to ensure that the right to food is adequately recognized as a basic human right worldwide, market regulations, innovation, etc. What was really missing was a breakdown of the four food security dimensions and an analysis of how different social protection schemes could intervene in the different dimensions and at the core fulcrums of the food systems chain. If such an analysis could be conducted in a context-specific way, it could provide a framework for action for countries to reach self-subsistence, develop coping mechanisms and food sovereignty in the long run. Some contributors did raise the need to analyse structural causes of malnutrition, but failed to provide any usable synergies for policies.

The *Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems* online discussion focused on many of the classical debates around malnutrition. Given that the facilitators defined “nutrition-enhancing” as any action that can improve nutrition, including indirect actions (ranging from increasing women’s income to improved health care services), the most interesting aspect of this debate would have been an in-depth, result-based analysis of different agricultural practices (e.g. traditional practices, agro-ecology, innovative, more intensive methods) and different food-based approaches for nutrition enhancement. Despite the fact that some contributions highlighted the importance of agricultural diversiﬁcation and of dietary diversity for better nutritional outcomes, there is very little mention of this crucial aspect in the comments. Moreover, the discussion did not tackle the importance of innovation for enhancement, sustainability, how to enhance nutrition in the various hotspots of the food systems chain and how civil society can play a role in helping smallholders deploy nutrition-enhancing strategies. At the same time, only few comments suggest ideas on how to enhance food systems in a way to make them more responsive to nutrition: more inputs would have been welcomed given the centrality of this topic. To conclude, a provision of a higher number of successful stories / case studies would have provided ideas to better inform policy-making and serve as inspirational source for all the participants to the online discussion.

The consultation on *The Contribution of the Private Sector and Civil Society to improve nutrition* has underlined the critical issues related to the vagueness of terms associated with “private sector”: what does this term exactly refer to? Does it encompass everything from big corporations to the smallholders? The discussion failed to provide an answer. This extremely important point plagued the whole discussion, which was unable to delineate an array of concrete actions for the Private Sector in addressing malnutrition, while the roles of the Civil Society were analysed to much greater depth.

Finally, as an overarching consideration, all three discussions have remained very narrow in their scope and development. In our view, they have also failed to address some of the global challenges (urbanization, climate change, sustainability), and how the specific topics analysed could contribute in improving nutrition in face of these challenges.

In general, we have seen that these electronic consultations are a great tool to raise technical concerns, issues and providing useful references and experiences. However, given the proper nature of these open platforms where anyone can contribute, they often lack coherence and structure. In our opinion, this is one of the main gaps: though facilitators have sometimes tried to summarize the various inputs or provide an altogether new analysis/document (an example is in the Social Protection discussion), this was done in a relatively superficial way and defied, in someway, the whole exercise. According to the facilitators, given that these discussions were initiated to “feed into and inform [the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)]”, it would have made a lot of sense to do a comprehensive summary of the outcomes and link them to the actual ICN2 discussions, to illustrate to the participants the effect of their contributions.

# Political summary

At the beginning of 2014, building on the results of the preparatory processes, the FAO and WHO Secretariats began drafting the zero draft of the RDN. The technical discourse helped to indicate new areas of focus and action for member countries, especially in increasing the acknowledgement of agriculture and food systems, education, information and communication, the roles of the Private Sector and the Civil Society, women’s empowerment, social protection and safety nets, and transparency and monitoring policies. When the actual phase of negotiation among the FAO/WHO members began, the FSN Forum platform opened online discussions to member states and the general public for review and remarks. In February 2014, the first Zero Draft of the Rome Declaration was presented by the ICN2 Secretariat and the FSN Forum published on its online platform the first of the three political discussions. In May, after another round of negotiations, a revised draft was presented and the second online discussion was launched. When the discussions on the RDN were exhausted, a draft of the FFA was presented by the Secretariats and the FSN forum opened the last and final discussion on this draft.

Hence, stakeholders were called upon to comment on the following three discussions:

1. “*Invitation to an open discussion on the political outcome document of the ICN2*”
2. “*Invitation to comment on the revised draft of the political outcome document of the ICN2*”
3. *“Invitation to an open discussion on the ICN2 Framework for Action zero draft to implement the Rome Declaration on Nutrition”*

It should be noted that the final documents that were presented for approval during ICN2, and which were adopted by unanimous consensus, differed substantially from the initial drafts submitted for online discussion. However, these modifications were not all due to the electronic consultations. In fact, in addition to the online debates, regional representatives participated in seven meetings of the JWG to negotiate the RDN, a two-day meeting to negotiate the FFA draft and two meetings of an Open-ended Working Group (Geneva 22-23 Sept., Rome 10-12 Oct.) to finalize both documents. However, a large number of comments analysed in our exercise were based on the initial drafts and find no correspondence in the final documents. Moreover, contributions did not always tackle directly the proposed questions, addressing most of the times more critical and complicated political issues.

This is the reason why the class decided not to follow the questions proposed in the online discussions when analysing the comments, but to structure the study in order to highlight the political differences between the four main participant actors: Civil Society and NGOs, Research Institutes and Universities, Private Sector and Governments and International non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, we organized their contributions following the three thematic areas considered in the technical discussions and further concerns.

## Zero and Revised drafts of the Rome Declaration for Nutrition

In our view, it suffices to say that the RDN recognizes many important points such as the multidimensionality (causes and threats) associated with malnutrition, entitlements of all people in ending all forms of malnutrition and the reshaping of an equitable food system. Thus, the following section only summarizesthe commentary by the four main stakeholder groups in response to the *Invitation to an* *open discussion on the political outcome document of the ICN2* and the *Invitation to comment on the revised draft of the political outcome document of the ICN2.*

The Civil Society suggests defining vulnerable groups such as women and indigenous people, as this would allow greater ownership in decision-making for gender and culturally sensitive food production.[[20]](#footnote-20) The enabling environment needs to be stronger in order to trace the food supply chain so that nutrition-related decisions made by consumers are based on transparency. In addition, land reform is a crucial aspect to access resources, especially in the form of agro-ecological production which is based off of less external (industrial) inputs and accounts for social, environmental and health externalities.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Research institutes and universities suggest to place emphasis on the multidimensionality of malnutrition and causal links.[[22]](#footnote-22) Social food systems that engage local populations (including women) in leveraging traditional and indigenous crops would support the adoption of sustainable and nutritious diets, including establishing markets for smallholder and family farmers. Parties are also encouraged to recall the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security*.[[23]](#footnote-23) Practical policy recommendations would be to extend nutrition education in a specific institutional setting as well as communication that encourages consumption/behavioural change.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The Private Sector encourages focus on the social roles of women to claim economic independence in order to combat malnutrition, where environmental and health externalities should be configured in the production of food.[[25]](#footnote-25) There is a urgency for food industries to make their products healthier and this can be done by promoting investments in applied research and cooperation with universities and research centres.

Governments and international NGOs point out the lack of mention on nutrition in emergencies, how HIV and infectious diseases affect nutritional absorption and gender-mainstreaming. They recommend to reference the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) as a rights-based document. The right to adequate food and nutrition should be used as a core obligation of the state to “respect, protect and fulfil” the protection of the most vulnerable groups. Moreover, a grievance mechanism is strongly suggested to look at human rights’ violations that cause malnutrition - such as women’s rights, children’s rights, and people's access to natural resources.  There also needs to be a clearer articulation on how to integrate nutrition into agricultural programming. This can be done through advocacy for fund mobilization to scale up programmes. Moreover, nutrition focal points should be assigned to take leadership to ensure multi-stakeholder participation in programming at national level. Finally, the Private Sector has the responsibility to provide accurate nutrition information and this should be provided through participatory methods.[[26]](#footnote-26)

## Zero version of the Framework for Action

To begin, it is necessary to state that this document is based on voluntary suggestions, which serves to guide the implementation of national commitments under the RDN. The FFA only builds on existing commitments, goals and targets of the Declaration, representing a set of policy strategies and options which governments, acting with other stakeholders, may include in national nutrition, health, agricultural, development and investment plans,[[27]](#footnote-27) considering all international agreements to achieve commitments at country level. Moreover, the analysis is linked to the three thematic areas analysed in the technical summary of this paper.

The Civil Society’s sentiment is that the FFA is realized at an opportune moment along with the post-2015 development agenda (SDGs), providing all member states opportunities to set people-centred and nutrition-centred programmes in cost-effective ways for mid-term and long-term national agendas. Actions for “vulnerable” groups of people and “priority” food groups include credit and cash transfers for pro-poor growth, price reductions, and continued civil society participation and accountability.

More specifically, for thematic area 1, *Concern Worldwide* raises specific nutrition-related issues that concern women in pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, lactation, early life of the child as well as non-communicable diseases. Among the various stakeholders involved, the Private Sector is encouraged by this organization to play a key role both in terms of responsibilities and influence in consumption patterns in the 1000-day framework. Regarding to thematic area 2, *FIAN International* suggests that national ministries support small-scale farmers with access to credits and subsidies to reach greater potential of sustainable, biodiverse and labour-intensive agriculture. Another priority is to elaborate the concept and definitions of agroecology so that regulations are better administered. Lastly, on thematic area 3, a scenario is presented by *International Baby Food Action Network* on the primary commercial and profit-driven motives of the Private Sector, in particular large transnational corporations, when involved in policy-making. Therefore, the network suggests multi-stakeholder evaluation, monitoring and accountability between Private Sector and Civil Society with the support. Importance should be directed towards the structural qualities of the nation’s health, and the realisation that epidemic diseases are symptoms of sick societies.

For Research Institutions and Universities, national level actions are seen to be prioritized on evidence-based data, which enables the understanding of what healthy diets consist of for nutrition practitioners and policy planners. Academia also suggests to remove the WHO recommendations on sugars[[28]](#footnote-28) since the document is still under draft revision in international deliberation. In addition, independent accountability bodies are encouraged to be set up to assure liability, for example an International Panel on Nutrition.

Under thematic area 1, *Community Eye Health Research* *Center* mentions that gender-sensitive intervention should focus on developing nutrition-sensitivity education programmes for the early intake of nutrient dense foods. Availability of locally grown nutrient dense foods at an affordable price is always possible and proper steps to be taken towards making such foods available. These price considerations increase the accessibility of healthy foods to the vulnerable population and thus enables them to make healthy dietary choices. For thematic area 2, *World Cancer Research Fund International* suggests using WHO's comprehensive *Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition* and the *WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non communicable Diseases 2013-2020[[29]](#footnote-29)* as a secondary reference to complement the FFA. In this document, specific references are made to the significance of food systems that add to solutions, which is not typically found in existing political and technical documents. This can also be done by creating and improving tools for gathering better and more frequent data, particularly on undernutrition rates, micronutrients, diet quality (including metrics relevant to obesity and non-communicable diseases) and local availability and affordability of diverse nutritious foods. This data is essential to monitor the problem of malnutrition in all its forms, as the basis for solutions, and to monitor and evaluate impact. Regarding thematic area 3; national level priority actions need to consider a cross-governmental and inter-sectoral governance mechanism, including the engagement of local and intermediate levels of government, with a mandate of providing leadership. As referenced by *World Cancer Research Fund International*, a multi-stakeholder platform with safeguards will provide solutions to potential conflicts of interest that includes civil society and engagement with local communities. This reference is closely related to to the sentiment of an International Panel on Nutrition.

Private Sector comments refer to the lack of clarity on the concept of “global nutrition governance” and the fact that similar platforms, mechanisms, processes, and activities are already in place, running the risk of redundant and duplicative processes. In addition, the Private Sector sees that there is a negative association with trade and investments, thus stresses a multi-stakeholder approach.

The *US Council for International Business* suggests specifically for thematic area 1 the importance of nutrition education such as food labels and nutrition programs are needed for consumer education. Women’s roles should be supported by policies aiming at empowerment in economic and social circumstances in becoming farmers, traders and business owners.   
As for thematic area 2, micronutrient fertilization, in particular zinc, selenium and iodine, is suggested by *International Fertilizer Industry Association* to be integrated along the value chain for affordable and sustainable solution to eradicate deficiencies globally. For the consideration of thematic area 3, the contribution of the Private Sector and Civil Society, the *US Council for international Business* suggests that the Private Sector’s role in strategies, actions and common goals should be considered in implementation processes so that their contributions are not denigrated in the food industry.

For the last actor, the *INGOs and Governments,* a broad range of programming suggestions come from FAO and WFP in the field as it is highly related to context. It is understood to be self-evident that INGOs and Governments work multilaterally or bilaterally with governments, thus there is no mention of one particular Government in specificity. In addition, all INGOs insist on better data collection and knowledge management systems in order to assure better targeting.   
Specifically, for thematic area 1, WFP headquarters encourages more social protection measures in access to land, while FAO headquarters suggests to target programs addressing gender inequalities.   
For theme 2, *FAO in Afghanistan* provides a picture of how food systems in subsistence agriculture make the backbone of the economy in many communities that are in rural terrains, thus, there is a need to better organize and classify in relevant information to increase efficiency in the supply chain. In addition, capacity building for strengthening nutrition education in food systems is regarded by these organizations as a top priority. All actions taken in programming should be balanced with political commitment. In regards to 3: The contribution of the Private Sector and Civil Society to improve nutrition, there is no specific mention by these international institutions as a multistaker approach assumes the participation of all actors in defining policy measures.

## Conclusion

Overall, the FSN online platform provided a participatory process that shared information with stakeholders pre-ICN2, encouraging discussion on concerns of opposition prior to the finalization of the RDN and FFA. It is only semi-participatory in the sense that member states’ comments and individual comments were unaccounted for in the final consensus process. In addition, many points highlighted in the draft documents were considered moot and deleted. The negligence of definitions and non-clarification in the roles that actors should carry out in country-level actions was considered to be a main area of concern by all stakeholders. However, it is to be reminded that the RDN is a political document and therefore, cannot include precise context-specific elements. For example, by not defining clearly who the “vulnerable groups” are, or what “highly nutritious diets” consists of, as well as what “global nutrition governance” implies – many risks are created to negatively impact the evidence base for informing good public policies. More importantly, it also runs the risk of marginalizing certain population groups when targeting investments in the different sectors.

In the following, we try to highlight the interests of all actors’ comments by underlining potential rationales and areas of potential conflict in “why” investments for certain portions of the population are of greater focus and “why” certain sectors are promoted or neglected. In our view, an International Panel on Nutrition could serve as an ideal international governance mechanism that is to assure a fully inclusive space for the participation, accountability, transparency, monitoring and evaluation to re-inforce programming and policy implementation.

The two main actors with the greatest potential conflicts are the Civil Society and Private Sector. With regard to Civil society, mostly all organizations allude to the concept of equal distribution in incentives (i.e. credits) and increased investments in the capabilities of the “vulnerable populations.” Credits and investments in their view, most likely serve as empowerment tools as well as safety nets. The effort is made to stress the role that smallholders, indigenous peoples, women, and youth play in the capital formation of a country’s agriculture sector, provided that nutrition-sensitive and gender-sensitive programmes are targeted to educate and inform these actors for effectual decision-making. This is especially important when in deliberation with other actors such as Governments and the Private Sector. However, some Civil Society organizations also recognize the roles of the Private Sector, such as the importance of unpacking what healthy diets consist of in conjunction with the promotion of consumption-behaviour changes. Most actors agree that there can be consistent cooperation if national and international mechanisms are coherent and aligned.

From the Private Sector, it is noticeable that the idea of trade and investments is still considered pejorative to most civil society actors. However, this suggestion is made to be avoided as it cannot be claimed that trade and private investments are negative determinants for the promotion of nutrition-sensitive agriculture, healthy food systems and healthy societies. Their perspectives to illuminate the idea of pro-poor growth, where absolute growth through trade revenues can be used in synergies to stabilize poor countries *while* focusing on individual human development.

As for the research institutions, inclusion of data analysis is founded on interests of academic validity and funding for researching adequate solutions on what – for example – agroecological practices consist of and why the potential socio-economic-ecological benefits would outweigh the initial investments. In addition, the INGOs and Governments, being the public interest entities that they are willing to increase the collection of data-driven evidence, transfer of knowledge, and increasing inclusive dialogue spaces for better policy-decisions.

# Food for thought

## Malnutrition is multidimensional

FAO defines malnutrition in a multidimensional manner, stating that it is *“an abnormal physiological condition caused by inadequate, unbalanced or excessive consumption of macronutrients and/or micronutrients. Malnutrition includes undernutrition and overnutrition as well as micronutrient deficiencies.”[[30]](#footnote-30)* Contributors from the FSN platform are in agreeance with this definition, noting that the immediate causes of malnutrition are multidimensional and should not be analysed solely from the consumption/diet perspective.

Food systems – understood as 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. Therefore, contributors agree that improving nutritional aspects along the whole value chain is a key strategy to enhance nutrition sensitive food systems. This could be achieved by setting explicit nutrition objectives, improving equity and targeting, gender sensitivity and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the enhancement of social protection and safety nets is considered by a wide majority of the contributors as another key tool to reduce poverty and build food security with specific focus on reduction and elimination of stunting and acute malnutrition.

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. Contributors highlight the need for an accountable cross-governmental and inter-sectoral governance mechanism with safeguards that would provide solutions to potential conflicts of interests that also includes civil society and engagement with local communities.

All stakeholders are reminded to respect human rights, focusing primarily on “The right to adequate food and nutrition,” which should be used as a core obligation of the states to “respect, protect and fulfil” the protection of the most vulnerable groups. Moreover, a grievance mechanism is strongly suggested to look at human rights violations that cause malnutrition – such as women’s rights, children’s rights, and people's access to natural resources. Contributors recognise that women’s nutritional status plays a pivotal role in the nutrition of children within the critical 1000-day window. Directly improving their nutrition while in adolescence, pregnancy and during the breastfeeding period is crucially related to infant’s well-being and avoids stunting and wasting. Gender-sensitive interventions should therefore focus on developing nutrition sensitivity for the reinforcement of intake in nutrient dense foods.

Thus, IGOs recall the commitments of *The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.* Contributors suggest to take into consideration already existing platforms and schemes such as WHO’s comprehensive *Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition* and the *WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013-2020* as a secondary references to complement FFA.

Contributors agree that nutrition related decisions should be made by consumers based on transparency and that there is a need for a synergy between nutrition and communication programmes. Food industries are urged to act on their responsibility to provide accurate nutrition information. Furthermore, civil society contributors urge food industries to make their products healthier promoting investments in applied research undertaking steps to increase availability of locally grown nutrient dense foods at an affordable price.

In order to promote the prioritization of nutrition-sensitive policies by the agriculture sector, a series of constraints were highlighted including essentially the absence of adequate information and monitoring systems for nutrition in the agriculture sector. This could be addressed by creating and improving systems and tools for gathering better and more frequent data, particularly on undernutrition rates, micronutrients, diet quality (including metrics relevant to obesity and NCDs) and local availability and affordability of diverse nutritious foods.

Indeed, from the above analyses, the extremely complex and context-specific nature of malnutrition is clearly elucidated. A wide spectrum of interrelated causes can be found, addressing malnutrition from a food systems approach, ranging from the inadequate availability of, and access to safe, diverse, nutritious food, lack of access to clean water, poor sanitation and inadequate health care, inappropriate child feeding practices, lack of adequate social protection programmes and safety nets or the lack of nutrition education, inappropriate enabling environment and adequate policies, etc.

The RDN and FFA set the ambitious goal to capture all or most of these aspects, building on the technical suggestions and the comments to the draft versions of the documents. Here below we provide our analysis of the outcome of this process.

## Effectiveness of non-binding agreements

Both the RDN and the FFA are non-binding agreements. The existing literature on the effectiveness of binding versus non-binding agreements and treaties offers contradictory theoretical as well as empirical results. Notably, a large-scale research project from Raustiala & Victor (1998) on the effectiveness of international environmental commitments argues that non-binding agreements have proven more effective in changing the behaviour of relevant actors.[[31]](#footnote-31) *In general, compliance with nonbinding commitments seems to be low, but* ***the influence of these commitments on the behavior*** *of relevant actors appears to be high. States do not comply completely with nonbinding agreements, but do change their behavior significantly. Compliance and effectiveness seem to be “inversely related”*.[[32]](#footnote-32) However, empirically, the rather “simple” question whether non-binding agreements have proved to be more effective in solving international problems than binding treaties remains open.

Given the targets and actions proposed in the RDN and FFA, the final assessment of this UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (see Recs. 58 and 59, FFA), as well as the proposed biannual monitoring and reporting at FAO and WHO governing body meetings and regional conferences (see Rec 60, FFA) will hopefully prove Raustiala and Victor’s positive prediction true.

## What has been left out?

The RDN and FFA are clearly strong political statements, where not much is left out, given also the non-binding nature of the documents. Indeed, it is hard to pin-point any clamorous omission or shortfall. Rather than illustrating all the points where the RDN and FFA match the proposals submitted by participants, we decided to focus only on what we have identified as omissions or elements for improvement. Some of these shortfalls are directly related to comments and proposals provided during the electronic consultations which in the end didn’t make it in the final documents. Others derive from our collective understanding of the complex nature of malnutrition and how we feel it could be further addressed.

As a first exercise, given the breadth of topics, we tried to cross-check all the issues and proposals raised by participants of the online discussions with the two final documents emerging from ICN2.

The below list highlights the most important proposals and concepts that were not adequately retained:

* In the zero draft FFA discussion, a number of participants, notably 1,000 Days Partnership, El Poder del Consumidor, World Public Health Nutrition Association, referred to the importance of participatory processes for nutrition enhancement. Indeed, also the technical consultations often mentioned participatory approaches in a wide variety of areas, from research to breeding practices. However, participation has been mentioned only in the *Water, sanitation and hygiene* Recommendations (Recs. 50 and 51);
* Civil society is explicitly mentioned only once in the RDN (in the recognition that cooperation among various stakeholders and in the commitment to achieve universal access to safe drinking water) and again only once in the FFA (Rec. 51). This is quite in contrast with the importance given to this specific actor (one full discussion on the role of PS and CS) and with the overwhelming number of comments that indicated the role of CS in a wide variety of areas for nutrition enhancement;
* In its comment on the first draft of the RDN, Civil Society stated that the accountability of the Private Sector is not mentioned at all, nor the importance of addressing possible conflict of interests regarding industry involvement and partnerships. We understand that, politically speaking, there is reason to avoid the language of “public-private partnerships” in documents such as the RDN, however mentions of this should have been included in the FFA.
* Civil society called for a clear commitment from countries to promote land reforms stating that the lack of land reforms is the basic hurdle behind access to resources and therefore to food. No mention of land tenure and rights is present in neither RDN nor the FFA, though clearly this is a central issue in the agricultural systems.
* Devarao Shivaram Trust and other contributors to the technical debates indicated the need to promote synergies between the local knowledge systems and research institutions. In particular, the Barilla Center of Food and Nutrition, commenting on the draft of the RDN, highlighted how the food industry can promote investments in applied research and cooperation with universities and research centres to make products healthier and provide meaningful nutrition information. Though research is mentioned *en passant* both in RDN and FFA, it is certainly not central to the debate yet and no recognition of the need to connect different typologies of knowledge systems;
* The Civil society strongly highlighted that there is no reference to the 1,000 days window in the draft of the FFA. Although this is mentioned in the RDN, we believe that this reference should also be made in the recommended actions of the FFA. This time frame could consist in an operational guideline for governments to tackle generational malnutrition;
* FIAN International highlighted the fact that equity should be at the center of the actions to creating enabling environments to improve nutrition in all sectors. The concept of equity and its importance for enhancing nutrition is not clearly stated in the RDN and FFA;
* In commenting the first draft of the RDN, Akershus University College and Population Education Resource Centre both make mention of the link between corruption and malnutrition. Indeed corruption has been flagged as a very important driver of malnutrition, also highlighted in the discussion on the importance of social protection and the role of PS and CS. Though the final RDN and FFA underline the importance of accountability, there is no recognition of the importance to fight corruption as a way to tackle malnutrition;
* The technical discussions have often referred to the indigenous people, their specific challenges and their importance for traditional food practices and knowledge hand-over, there is no recognition of this in the RDN. However, in the FFA indigenous people are mentioned in the CFS definition of smallholders,[[33]](#footnote-33) no recognition of their specific role in improving local nutrition.
* El Poder del Consumidor highlighted a number of critical elements missing from the FFA draft, notably:
  + *Accountability mechanisms overall and conflict of interest management;*
  + *Genetically modified organisms* (GMOs);
  + *Sovereignty;*
  + *Protection of biodiversity;*
  + *Protection of native seeds and centres of origin.*

It is sad to report that, with the sole exception accountability, mentioned in Recs. 5 and 58 (FFA) and just one single mention of conflict of interest in Rec. 3 (FFA), all the other points above have been completely ignored. In our view, it would have been fundamental to acknowledge the importance of promoting food sovereignty, protecting biodiversity, native seeds and soil. With regards to GMOs, at least the FFA should have mentioned the need for further scientific investigation, research and assessments on the impacts of GMOs on human health and the role the can play in enhancing nutrition, while helping address other global challenges as climate change.

## Improving the process

We have seen how the RDN and FFA have omitted some very important elements emerged during the 6 online discussions. This is quite striking, as the whole exercise had been devised to allow a semi-participatory approach to policy making. These omissions underline how strong political and economic interests are at stake when devising these agreements, even if not binding.

However, they also pose a question on the process. More specifically, it is not clear how the salient elements of the first three technical consultations were synthesized in a usable way to inform the three political discussions. There is a time span of around 6 months between the 2 sets of consultations. As we understand, this time has been used by the Secretariats of FAO and WHO to draft the zero versions of the RDN and FFA. However, when releasing these for debates, it would have made a lot of sense to produce a synthesis of the main outcomes emerged from these three debates. It is not enough to provide the full proceedings, which amount to 164 comments (and around 190 pages) as background elements and expect GVTs, IGOs and all other stakeholders to actually read them. A coherent and structured summary should have been made available.

Moreover, from our scrutiny it appeared that the CFS and its stakeholders had not been adequately involved in the process since the beginning. FIAN expressed concerns on the lack of participatory, transparent and coherent governance of international nutrition initiatives, alluding at the possibility that was done intentionally from GVTs *in order to exclude public interest civil society organizations from any effective participation in the elaboration process of the outcome documents of ICN 2, and the eventual governance of the follow up, in total opposition to the CFS reform process*.[[34]](#footnote-34)

# Further recommendations

As we have seen, the online debates have captured a huge number of aspects related to nutrition, actions and programmes that can tackle various dimensions of food insecurity, addressing structural or temporary causes. Many of them have been mentioned in the RDN and/or FFA, but some have been omitted. Some of the omissions are incredibly striking and we hope they shall be taken into consideration in future debates and political commitments. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the story. What we are proposing here, is a number of considerations we think should be taken into account for further tackling the complex issue of malnutrition in policy making. It should be clear that the below do not derive from the examination of the online debates or the ICN2 documents, they are our original attempt to propose alternative views on the subject matter.

* **Malnourished does not have to mean passive.** There is the need to adopt a more “human development” approach when talking about vulnerable and malnourished groups. Though we understand the need to address their nutritional and health issues immediately, policy makers should not forget the important lessons coming from the writings of Amartya Sen. Passive recipients are less prone to exit their condition. Empowerment emerges when people are dignified and enabled to exercise their agency.
* **Research in nutrition-related psychology domains.** As recent studies in behavioural economics have shown,[[35]](#footnote-35) behaviour is a very complex phenomenon with non-obvious dynamics. We encourage research studies that investigate how behavioural mechanisms relate to nutrition in order to better understand relationships between consumption patterns and marketing strategies;
* **Establishing multiple definitions of “health diets”.** There is growing recognition of the importance of healthy diets, also mentioned in the RDN and FFA, but there is still a lively debate in the literature on the definition of this concept. We believe that a unique definition is probably not possible or useful, but a range of concepts, or multiple definitions should be agreed upon internationally.
* **Understanding the shift between different types of malnutrition.** The triple-burden of nutrition is well known. What is less understood are the patterns of transitions between the different forms of malnutrition. In our statistical analysis we have hinted at a possible correlation between abandoning social protection schemes (with often as a result of economic growth, privatization, etc.) and the increase in obesity. While this is a very simplistic, non-scientific correlation, we encourage studies that understand the root causes for shifts in types of malnutrition.
* **Regulation can also be good.** Not surprisingly, the term “regulation” appears very little in the FFA (Recs. 15, 40, 53). Though regulations slightly defy the concept of non-binding agreements, it could be good to explore more regulatory actions in different domains, in order to enhance accountability and liability. Too much is at stake when discussing the health of generations.
* **Challenging the old concept of “modern” food systems.** It is recognized that current food systems, especially intensive corporate systems have often failed to deliver what is needed, bringing about a number of negative externalities, including malnutrition and unhealthy consumption patterns. These need to be seriously challenged, through research, innovative strategies, ICT, etc. in order to come up with one or more new paradigms. Research and innovative practices should be applied at all levels of food systems, from planting crops all the way to monitoring and accountability of GVTs, PS, etc. New paradigms should integrate high technology with ancient practices to promote a truly holistic and contemporary model.

1. The final document can be consulted here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The final document can be consulted here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A total of 164 Members of FAO and WHO, including 162 Member States, one WHO Associate Member (Puerto Rico) and the European Union, as well as three observers (The Holy See, Sovereign Order of Malta and Palestine) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This term also refers to the European Union and other concerned international organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For more information, see the following link: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-at607e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition can be consulted here: <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/home> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The six discussions can be accessed here: <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The matrix can be accessed here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B505XdMhP-14TEZHSWlYQ1BPY1E> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The 3 technical summaries can be accessed here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B505XdMhP-14eUZJVU5RS09qeW8>, <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B505XdMhP-14WlM0MVJ6Vjd1MDA>, <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B505XdMhP-14a0lvS3ZZZTJtWnM> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ylMFhS-KSqMd3IAwrxhPeBTmPVtuZAEiHrS7sC36e_g> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The classification adopted can be found here: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2015/01/weodata/groups.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Further elaboration on these aspects can be found in the previously linked documents. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For further information on the GSF, follow this link: <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/activities/gsf/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Information on the CFS can be found here: <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The full list of key recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture can be found here: <http://unscn.org/files/Agriculture-Nutrition-CoP/Agriculture-Nutrition_Key_recommendations.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For further information on this initiative, see the following website: [*http://www.ebek-rdcd.gov.bd/*](http://www.ebek-rdcd.gov.bd/) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. More information on Food Fortification can be found here: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w2840e/w2840e03.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Information on the intervention in Zambia can be found in the following report: <http://www.nfnc.org.zm/sites/default/files/downloads/NFNC_Nutrition_Report_2008.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Information on this initiative can be found here: <http://www.minagri.gov.rw/index.php?id=28>,<http://rwandapedia.rw/explore/girinka> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Invitation to an open discussion on the political outcome document of the ICN2.* Discussion no. 97. From February 21 to March 21, 2014. Contributions 2 by WOCAN and 59 by Concern Worldwide. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibid.* Contribution 53 by Dorota Sienkiewicz, European Public Health Alliance. *Invitation to comment on the revised draft of the political outcome document of the ICN2*. Discussion No. 103. From May 14 to May 28, 2014. Contribution 53 by Jamil Junejo, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Op. cit. Invitation to an open discussion on the political outcome document of the ICN2.* Contribution 48 by Development Fund Norway. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. Contribution 18 by Elchin Atababayev, Institute of Agricultural Economy, Azerbaijan. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. Contribution 64 by Carol Lewin, University of Washington.; Op. cit.  *Invitation to comment on the revised draft of the political outcome document of the ICN2*. Contribution 19 by Abubacker Siddick Syed Mohamed, M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation, India. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Op. cit. Invitation to an open discussion on the political outcome document of the ICN2.* Contribution 41 by Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition. Italy. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. Contribution 69 by Yvette Futsch, FAO. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Conference Outcome Document: Framework for Action. Second International Conference on Nutrition. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. "WHO | WHO Opens Public Consultation On Draft Sugars Guideline". Who.int. N.p., 2016. Web. 13 June 2016. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2014/consultation-sugar-guideline/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Geneva: WHO Document Production Services, 2013. Print. Global Action Plan For The Prevention And Control Of Noncommunicable Diseases 2013-2020.

    <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94384/1/9789241506236_eng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. FAO’s definition of malnutrition can be accessed here: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/glossary/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Raustiala, Kal, and David G. Victor. (1998) Conclusions. In The Implementation and Effectiveness of International Environmental Commitments: Theory and Practice, edited by David G. Victor, Kal Raustiala and Eugene B. Skolnikoff, pp. 659-708. Laxenburg Austria; Cambridge Mass.: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis; MIT Press [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid. Our emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Smallholder farmers include agriculture and food workers, artisanal fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and the landless (Committee on World Food Security, Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/107_ICN2-FFA/PROCEEDINGS_EN_ICN2_FFA.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Khaneman, D. Thinking fast and slow, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)