



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Executive Summary

Study to Identify and Analyse National Experiences that foster the Nutritional Wellbeing in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for Latin America and the Caribbean
- Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP)

Introduction

A technical cooperation project implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is being developed within the framework of the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) Plan of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to: **"Facilitate spaces for dialogue and generate regional and national capacities to fight malnutrition in all its forms through Food and Nutritional Education (FNE), in support of CELAC 2025 FNS Plan."** This project is also aimed at supporting the commitments undertaken by the countries of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), to approach malnutrition by means of sustainable food systems in support of healthy meals and interventions to provide nutritional education and information.

The objective of this technical cooperation project is to develop two lines of action of the CELAC 2025 FNS Plan. One of them is the achievement of nutritional well-being through promotion, and the other is the use of nutritional food and legal and institutional frameworks to develop healthy environments and habits, and fight malnutrition in all its forms. This resulted in this study, which was carried out by the **Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP)**.

The study was divided in three phases: 1) a regional inventory of nutritional well-being interventions; 2) an in-depth analysis of nutritional well-being interventions; and 3) the validation of a policy proposal to strengthen and create programmes to develop nutritional well-being interventions in 33 countries of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

The current report contains a consolidation of products from the three phases of the study, conducted from February through November 2016.

Objective

Submit the results of the Study to Identify and Analyse National Experiences to Support Nutritional Well-being: 1) a regional inventory of nutritional well-being interventions; 2) a report on the in-depth analysis made of the nutritional well-being interventions, and 3) recommendations on the policies to strengthen and create programmes to promote nutritional well-being in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Methodology

Regional Inventory

The methodology involved the compilation of information on nutritional well-being programs obtained from primary and secondary sources in the 33 participating countries, from February through April 2016.

The first step was to identify the types of programs and information sources for each of the six nutritional well-being interventions (see the conceptual model). Then the criteria for inclusion were established and tools were developed to record the information. A Google search was immediately performed, using the types of programs and information sources as key words. A search was also conducted in platforms and specialized sites (such as FAOLEX).

Upon completing the search, the findings were analyzed and recorded according to the selected information and the inclusion criteria. Lastly, reports were made to the corresponding FAO nutrition focal points of contact in the 33 countries, for a validation of the information found for each country.

In-Depth Analysis

To select the interventions, 10 countries were involved who had enough interventions and were representative of the three sub-regions. From those 10 countries, 21 interventions were selected that had national or regional coverage already assessed or scheduled for assessment as well as key informants, and the nutrition information available was validated by the corresponding FAO nutrition focal points of contact in each country.

To collect the information, two tools were designed and validated, one for the analysis of the programs, and another to analyze the legislation. Ten national consultants, one per country, were employed to compile the information by means of in-depth interviews with the key informants. The INCAP team coordinator held a virtual induction session with the consultants to explain the objective and methodology of the study, and analyze and comment on the tools. They were followed up with e-mails, telephone calls, or text messages throughout the process.

Each consultant submitted the information collected during the interviews with the key informants, and an analysis and interpretation of the data from the findings of the in-depth analysis followed.

The in-depth analysis included aspects relative to: a) project, program and policy components; b) training for the development of nutritional well-being promotion programs; c) program management and budget model; d) a process monitoring mechanism and the impact assessment of the programs identified; e) the participation of central government stakeholders and other actors such as local governments, parents, and private enterprises, among other aspects relevant to this area; and f) determination of the regulations applicable to the interventions.

Political Recommendations

The political recommendations to strengthen and create interventions and support nutritional well-being interventions resulted from an analysis of the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats (SWOT), as well as from the lessons learned provided by the key informants of the interventions included in the in-depth analysis.

The second step was a proposal with political recommendations validated during a regional e-workshop with government counterparts from CELAC countries, directors, or parties responsible for the analyzed interventions, a subject-matter expert, and a Nutrition official from FAO, Rome.

The e-workshop facilitator was one of INCAP's main researchers, who provided the methodology, moderated the session, and followed up on the comments made on the document fifteen days after the e-workshop, for the purpose of completing the validation exercise and deliver the final version.

Findings

Regional Inventory

Two hundred and four interventions were identified in the three sub-regions covered by the study: South America, Mesoamerica, and the Caribbean. Of these, half were identified in South American countries, 35% in Mesoamerica, and 15% in the Caribbean.

With regard to the type of interventions, those reported the most were about diet diversification (28%) and to the promotion and use of nutritional foods (25%). There was a similar number of interventions about nutrition labeling regulations (19%), Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) (13%), and the regulation of Ultra-Processed Products-UPP publicity (12%); the least identified were about the appreciation of the traditional culinary culture (3%).

Most interventions seek to prevent or reduce malnutrition due to deficiencies, or promote healthy lifestyles among vulnerable groups. The few interventions found to enhance food culture are included as part of programs that also address other themes. The majority of the food guidelines available address the promotion of healthy lifestyles for individuals beyond 2 years of age. In the three sub-regions there are regional guidelines to regulate nutrition labeling and interventions to control UPP publicity, and in South America they are mostly for children and adolescents. A greater priority needs to be assigned to this issue in the other two sub-regions.

In-Depth Analysis

Information was collected on 17 interventions, in the categories described below:

- Use and promotion of healthy foods (5 interventions)
- Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) (3 interventions)
- Diet Diversification (4 interventions)
- Appreciation of the culinary culture (2 interventions)
- Understandable labeling (3 interventions)

All the interventions studied are covered by some **legislation, regulation, government agreement, or decree**, with the exception of a Policy to Safeguard the Colombian Culinary Culture, and a regulation on understandable labeling in Jamaica, for which none were reported.

The interventions are made in response to a wide diversity of international commitments, such as the World Food Summits and 1 , the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the LAC Hunger Free Initiative, CIN2, and the Sustainable Development Goals, among others.

The interventions are conducted by **multisector** in conjunction with various institutions, such as seven government sector entities, three educational institutions, and two from civil society, the United Nations System, the food industry, and the mass media. These interventions are conducted jointly with other institutions and cover widely diverse themes ranging in number from three to twelve.

For all such interventions it is important not only to orient the staff, but also to provide them with continuous training. The **training** courses must cover not only technical health, food, and nutrition aspects, but also administrative components. Training is conducted by the institutions responsible for the programs, a Ministry, or an educational

institution. Their modalities include live lectures, workshops, and virtual means such as on-line courses and videoconferencing.

All interventions have a **budget** allocation, with the exception of FBDGs in Chile and Uruguay. Funding is mostly provided by public national or department agencies (10 programmes), in some instances by taxes, and in one case, by a private enterprise.

The interventions report the use of various **sustainability strategies**. The ones most commonly mentioned are the decrees and laws that establish government budget allocations and the beneficiaries' authority to create behavioral changes and conduct impact assessments. Other national strategies mentioned include epidemiological monitoring, international commitments, and inter-institutional partnerships.

Most interventions have been assessed. Seven programs report the assessment both of the process as well as of the impact, three programmes mention both qualitative as well as quantitative assessments, and one mentions an outside assessment.

Some of the reports made are on the assessment of processes relative to coverage, food delivery, and implementation of the Annual Operating Plan (AOP). Among the **impact findings** were improvements in the beneficiaries' nutritional health and their academic performance, a reduction in micronutrient deficiency, and improvements in feeding indicators and diet diversity.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis:

The most important elements of the SWOT analysis of the interventions are: a legislation to support and secure funding; the need for timely budget funding; a well-trained, stable staff; partnership and inter-institutional coordination; the importance of surveillance and monitoring for the measurement of the information and impact of the dissemination of information on activities and findings; and the need for an Information, an education and communication (IEC) strategy for advocacy, positioning, and consumer empowerment.

Some examples of the factors that led to the success of the interventions reported by the key informants and consultants include: political support and the allocation of funds; program planning and management based on validated evidence and methodology; comprehensive actions with stakeholder participation; targeted actions for the identification of beneficiaries and their coverage at a national level; sufficient and timely budget allocations; enough well-trained and committed staff; the importance of monitoring and assessment to measure the results; a working partnership with the public and private sectors; international cooperation and community participation; and the empowerment of beneficiaries.

Policy Recommendations

Eight political guidelines with their respective key actions are being proposed on the basis of the in-depth analysis, in order to strengthen or create programs to develop nutritional well-being effectively:

1. Political actions: Secure **political support** for Nutritional Well-being interventions; enter into governmental agreements to guarantee the allocation of resources for the implementation of GN interventions; incorporate GN interventions into existing policies; use GN interventions to comply with the commitments and food, nutrition, agriculture, social protection and education-related international treaties.
2. Budget: Obtain a timely and sufficient annual **budget allocation** to allow a planned programme coverage.
3. Staff: Establish mechanisms that will enable having a **qualified staff** to design, implement, monitor, and assess the interventions; support the work being performed with multiple disciplines and by the various sector; support the stability of a well-coordinated and qualified team at all chain levels that will keep its commitment to the programme and achieve its goals; and **ensure the continuous training** of the staff responsible for the interventions.
4. Partnerships: Support the **coordination between sectors**, promote partnerships with government and non-government organizations at all levels, promote coordination with the private sector, establish mechanisms to support the participation of civil society, and develop the collaboration of international cooperation.
5. Monitoring and Assessment: Establish a baseline that may allow the measurement of the impact of an intervention, implement **monitoring systems** from the beginning of the programme, define a periodic and timely assessment, define impact and process indicators and their corresponding measurement tools, and promote the use of assessment findings for decision-making, including programme improvement.
6. Positioning and advocacy: Support **comprehensive interventions** to achieve behavioral changes, complementing them with policy and environmental changes that will promote more responsibility and empowerment among the citizenry in selecting food practices that will improve, not only their health but also the environment; promote IEC strategies to create awareness, provide visibility to the interventions and empower consumers; support the dissemination of the findings through the mass media and the public; and make effective use of social networks to provide visibility and presence to the interventions.
7. Management: Use comprehensive approach methods, ensure that work strategies are validated and are based on scientific evidence, promote the participation of the involved stakeholders, favour models based on the empowerment of beneficiaries with participation by the community and a clear definition of the expected results.
8. Targeting and coverage: Define beneficiary **targeting** and selection strategies that will be clearly and easily understood by participants in the interventions, and support the full coverage of the target group.

Conclusion

The inventory compiles more than two hundred national and regional experiences through six types of interventions in support of healthy environments and practices to fight malnutrition in all its forms in 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean

This thorough analysis allowed a determination of each one of the six types of interventions analyzed, and products to generate policy recommendations according to the lessons learned shared by key intervention informants.

Policy recommendations will assist in establishing the basic guidelines to be followed in any intervention for the purpose of developing nutritional well-being among the Latin American and Caribbean people.

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