

Background: “Nutrition Transition”

If a poor diet is one of the main causes of malnutrition, then the answer seems simple: change people’s diets, and they will become healthier. But what people eat is not entirely based on how they live – their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and preferences.

Diets are also determined by people’s food environment, meaning the foods that are available, affordable, convenient and desirable. This food environment is, in turn, affected by the food system. A food system includes all the conditions and activities that go into food being produced, distributed, prepared and eaten. It also includes the outcomes of these efforts – the impact on people’s health as well as bigger issues like a country’s socio-economic growth, equity and environment sustainability.

Around the world, food systems are undergoing rapid transformations. These changes are driven by a host of factors – from rising incomes and changing consumer demand, to agricultural industrialization and technological innovations, to population growth, urbanization and climate change.

The transformation of food systems is part of the “nutrition transition” from a diet based on grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits to one with higher consumption of meat, processed foods and sugar, salt and fat.

This transition has had benefits, such as greater food security, more diverse diets and the availability of more convenient foods for a large part of



the world. But, when combined with the more sedentary lifestyles associated with urbanization, it has led to rising incidence of obesity, even in countries burdened by undernutrition.

Member Countries: Committed to Nutrition

Food systems today are increasingly challenged to provide adequate, safe, diversified and nutrient-rich foods for a healthy diet. With this idea in mind, the following actions have been taken:

In November 2014, 164 member countries met at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) to propose an institutional framework to address the major nutrition challenges of the foreseeable future.

The conference adopted the “Rome Declaration on Nutrition” and its “Framework for Action”, which sets out a common vision for global action to end all forms of malnutrition. The ICN2 Framework for Action (FfA) provides a set of voluntary policy options and strategies for governments to guide the implementation of the commitments in the Rome Declaration on Nutrition.

In 2015, a year after ICN2, heads of state and government and high representatives adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a plan of action to shift the world to a sustainable and resilient development path. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reiterated and reinforced the commitments made at ICN2, namely committing member countries to end all forms of malnutrition and ensure sustainable food production systems by 2030.

To assist member countries in defining policies to meet their commitments under ICN2 and Agenda 2030, FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) organized a Global Symposium in Rome on 1-2 December 2016, titled "Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition".

The Symposium focused on the global situation of food system transformation, with examples from countries in all regions showing that the global community has the knowledge, experience and evidence to bring about transformational change in our existing food systems.

Regional Technical Symposia 2017

Following the success of the Global Symposium, Regional Symposia will focus on the nutrition challenges of each region, bringing together experts in the field of nutrition, health, agriculture, water and sanitation and other related fields, who will contribute to the agenda of improving health and nutrition through sustainable food systems.

Unlike the ICN2 and the Agenda 2030, the Regional Symposia are technical meetings designed to assist country stakeholders in defining the appropriate policies for reshaping food systems for healthier diets.

The Regional Nutrition Symposium for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) will take place over two days, on 11-12 December 2017, in Muscat, Oman. Like all other Regional Symposia, the event will aim to:

1. Take stock of the regional dimension/specificity of food security and nutrition challenges.
2. Share key features of food systems in countries in the region, and how these influence dietary patterns and nutrition outcomes.
3. Identify major regional policy processes, institutions, partnership initiatives and innovative programming for tackling nutrition issues through a food systems approach.
4. Identify experiences and practical entry points for intensive



policy and programmatic action with a view to feeding these into FAO Regional Conferences in 2018.

5. Facilitate the development of policy actions in line with the ICN2 Framework for Action and the Decade of Action work plan.

The NENA Regional Symposium will also explore ways countries can use FAO, WHO and other agencies to transform existing food systems so they are able to deliver desirable health and nutrition outcomes.

Expected Outcomes

The Symposium will result in a discussion of policy options tackling regional nutrition issues through a food-systems approach. A summary of the Symposium's proceedings, including key messages, presentations and other information materials, will be published and disseminated.

Target Audience & Participants

To build upon already existing regional efforts, the Regional Nutrition Symposium for the NENA region will use the FAO/RNE Regional Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Food Security and Nutrition (RMSW) platform. This is an annual platform for policy dialogue that provides the opportunity for member countries, donors, financial institutions, regional organizations, civil-society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, the UN System and academia and research institutions to discuss food security and nutrition challenges in the region and to propose solutions.

For this Symposium, special attention will be given to the participation of government representatives, specifically technical officers responsible for nutrition, academic and research institutions, civil societies and private-sector participants from multiple disciplines.

Renowned regional experts will give keynote presentations and participate in the technical sessions.

Key Partners: FAO & WHO

As with the ICN2 and the Global Symposium, the Regional Symposia will be joint FAO/WHO events, with the support of other key partners as well. For the NENA event, these partners include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Food Policy Research (IFPRI), World Food Programme (WFP) and the League of Arab States (LAS).

Developing the Symposium

The Symposium will be developed and delivered by a Regional Technical Task Team (TTT), comprised of three to four recognized regional experts in the field of nutrition and food systems, drawn from FAO, WHO, UNICEF and IFPRI. An advisory body comprised of NGOs and academic institutions will design and implement the Symposium.

The FAO Regional Near East office will primarily be responsible for organizing the event, and FAO Nutrition and Food Systems Division (ESN) will participate in an advisory capacity in the TTT and provide technical support as necessary.





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