Addressing malnutrition requires a holistic and interconnected view of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that goes beyond Goal 2. The necessary transformation set out by the SDGs requires engagement with multiple stakeholders – as different sectors (e.g. health, education, agriculture, employment, water, sanitation and hygiene, gender equality and women’s empowerment) must align, harmonize and coordinate to achieve the SDGs.

The UN Nutrition Network (herein UN Network) serves as a platform for operationalizing integrated action and partnerships for nutrition.

The UN Network plays an integral role in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in all 60 countries and promotes progress towards the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025 by supporting country-driven action. It brings additional value to the UN System by leveraging its relationships with a diverse array of stakeholders from government – including Parliamentarians – to civil society, and business, donor and research communities.

In this context, the UN Network is uniquely positioned to facilitate a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach to nutrition, helping actors break away from fragmented approaches to malnutrition and disrupting the status quo. Action will be most effective when taken collectively to scale-up both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions from national to community levels.

Nutrition is virtually related to all of the SDGs. With that said, the following pages outline how nutrition is directly embedded into 12 of the 17 SDGs, thereby illustrating how it is both a maker and marker of sustainable development.
**Good nutrition contributes to good health and well-being.**

- On the other hand, there is a vicious cycle between illness and disease, and malnutrition (World Bank, 2013), with malnutrition presenting health risks and sick individuals having heightened nutritional needs to help them combat infection.

- Each year, undernutrition contributes to over 3 million deaths among children under 5 years old, which equates to approximately 45% of preventable child mortality (Black et al. 2013; Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group, 2013).

- Some vitamin and mineral deficiencies are associated with increased occurrences of infectious diseases, such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and other acute respiratory infections (WHO and UNICEF, 2013; Black et al. 2008).

- Furthermore, severe infectious disease in early childhood can lead to acute wasting and even cause irreversible stunted growth” (Black et al. 2013).

- Chronic nutritional deficits early in life, starting with pregnancy, can not only lead to stunting and irreversible cognitive impairments, but they also augment the risk of obesity and NCDs later in life (Adair et al. 2013; Black et al.)

- A healthy diet can help to prevent diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer, further illustrating the links between nutrition and NCDs (WHO, 2015).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** Maternal/infant/child nutrition and health counselling; Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI); iron/folic acid supplementation; oral rehydration treatment with zinc; management of severe acute malnutrition; deworming; nutrition counselling for people living with HIV/AIDS and TB; counselling on healthy diets to prevent overweight, obesity and NCDs; and universal health care.

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**Quality Education.**

- A child’s ability to learn and a child’s nutritional status are linked.

- Good nutrition can increase one’s IQ (Black et al. 2013); iodine deficiency alone is associated with up to a 15-point IQ reduction at the population level (WHO, 2013).

- The Cost of Hunger studies have shown that stunted children have lower education outcomes than their non-stunted counterparts and that 7-16% of repetitions in school worldwide are attributed to stunting (AU Commission, UN ECA and WFP, 2013).

- In contrast, access to education can support improved care practices such as exclusive breastfeeding, dietary patterns; and ultimately, nutrition outcomes (Ruel and Alderman, 2013).

**ACTION EXAMPLES:** School meals; deworming; nutrition and health education; and WASH interventions in schools, increasing attendance at schools, technical and vocational education.
Gender equality and women’s empowerment are inextricably linked to nutrition. Gender equality can drive as much as 25% of child nutrition gains.

It is important to take measures that help girls start school in a timely fashion and keep them in school. This not only helps them increase their earning potential in adulthood, but it also prevents early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (The World Bank, 2009), which can be detrimental to the nutrition of an adolescent girl and her baby.

Income-generating activities are often targeted to women, recognising that they tend to spend a larger portion of additional income and other resources on household nutrition, health and education, which can support nutrition gains (World Bank, 2007; Mucha, 2012; UNSCN, 2010).

Access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation are essential to safeguarding nutrient absorption, and thus contribute to improved nutritional outcomes (WHO, UNICEF and USAID, 2015).

Limited or lack of access to safe water increases the risk of waterborne disease, which impedes nutrient absorption and may thereby compromise one’s nutrition.

A growing body of evidence indicates links between poor sanitation practices (open defecation) and malnutrition (stunting) (Compendium of Actions for Nutrition, 2016; Global Nutrition Report, 2014; Spears, 2013; Woodruff et al. 2014).

In some settings, collecting water can be time-intensive with the burden disproportionately falling on women (Graham, Hirai, and Kim, 2016). This can detract from time that caregivers may dedicate to proven nutrition actions, such as exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and continued breastfeeding thereafter up to age 2.

Decisions around water use should be driven with a goal to achieve sustainable, equitable, and nutritious food systems.

While the links between economic growth and nutrition are well-documented, the literature shows that economic growth alone will not resolve malnutrition (Heltberg, 2009; Haddad et al. 2002). In many countries, high child undernutrition levels (e.g. stunting and wasting) are observed even among households in the highest wealth quintile.

In terms of decent work, actors may consider the cost of a minimum nutritious diet in addition to traditional macroeconomic considerations (inflation, labour supply and demand) when defining or adjusting national minimum wage.

Exposure to chemicals on the job or duties that require heavy lifting may not be suitable for pregnant and lactating women and may even compromise their health and nutritional status. They may also jeopardize the nutrition and health of the foetus and their infants.

Good food environments confer quality diets, which contribute to good nutrition. This can, in turn, increase the demand for sustainable food production.

Nutrition and sustainable diets are core elements of both sustainable consumption and production, underscoring the importance of employing a food systems approach.

The transformation of food systems, policies and practices, should guarantee sustainable and nutritious diets. Efforts to reduce post-harvest food losses and consumer food waste can also help promote increased food security and food safety, and further support nutrition gains.

ACTION EXAMPLES: Prevention of adolescent pregnancy; Family Planning; take-home school rations targeting adolescent girls; microcredit targeting women; and land tenure reform.

ACTION EXAMPLES: Infrastructure systems for water and sanitation; handwashing education/promotion; household water treatment; food hygiene promotion; and provision of water during special circumstances.

ACTION EXAMPLES: Minimum wage; ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention No. 155 (1981); microfinance/credit; entrepreneurship; and eradicating forced labour and slavery, human trafficking and child labour.

ACTION EXAMPLES: Food systems management, including reducing losses at all levels; promotion of small-scale farmer rights, organic agriculture; locally produced foods for consumption; regulations on the availability of ultra-processed foods; and support indigenous knowledge of local foods, including underutilised varieties.
The time is now. The UN Network is calling upon UN agencies to engage in nutrition at country level as part of efforts to bolster integrated action, leveraging nutrition as an enabler to achieve the SDGs.

To learn more about how the UN Nutrition Network is supporting country-level action visit https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/ or write to unnetworkforsun@wfp.org

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