

NUTRITION NEWS - ISSUE 1, 2019

Optimizing human health and environmental sustainability

Nothing is more central to healthy diets and good nutrition than food systems. Researchers are contributing to our understanding of how food systems impact the environment.

[*The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems*](#), launched in January 2019, provides new insights on how diets that are rich in plant-based foods and fewer animal source foods are better for our health and use natural resources in a more sustainable way. It finds that *“foods sourced from animals, especially red meat [and animal source foods from grain fed livestock], have relatively high environmental footprints per serving compared to other food groups”*, with impacts on greenhouse gas emissions, land use and biodiversity loss.

[*The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change*](#) was also launched early this year and recommends a series of double and triple duty actions to reduce all forms of malnutrition while having a beneficial effect on climate actions. These include: i) shifting modes of transportation; ii) implementing sustainable dietary guidelines; and iii) restricting commercial influences in the interests of public health, equity, and planetary sustainability.

There is enough evidence across food supply chains, food environments and behavioural economics to act upon, and a wealth of knowledge of how nutrition enters or exits along value chains. There are also numerous examples at the country and city level of progress in effective policies and programmes. However, more is needed on the policy implications, especially in low-income countries. A suggested next step is for countries to design food systems policies, with health, economic, environmental outcomes all in one.

UNSCN knows that addressing the link between food production, a changing climate, and malnutrition is fundamental. With this in mind, it has worked to connect some of the conversations and global commitments about the link between climate change and malnutrition in its publication [*Sustainable Diets for Healthy People and a Healthy Planet*](#) (2017). It is also working to support its member UN Environment with related activities planned for the [4th session of the UN Environment Assembly](#), and in close collaboration with others through the [Sustainable Food Systems Programme of the 10-Year Framework for Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns](#).

Increasing commitments to the Nutrition Decade

One of the mechanisms to implement the commitments of the Nutrition Decade is the establishment of Action Networks. Following the first Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Ocean for Food Security and Nutrition, which was launched by the Government of Norway in 2017, the Governments of France and Australia hosted the inaugural meeting of the [Global Action Network on Nutrition Labeling](#) on 6 – 7 February 2019 in Paris.

Nutrition labelling is a policy implementation tool to promote healthy diets by giving consumers key information to guide their food choices. Its implementation has been recommended and promoted by various official WHO documents adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA), such as the Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition (endorsed together with the six Global Nutrition target 2025 in May 2012, the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) 2013-2020 (adopted together with nine voluntary NCD Global Targets 2025 in May 2013) and the Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity in May 2016.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) defines nutrition labelling as “*a description intended to inform the consumer of nutritional properties of a food*” and provides guidance on the procedures for implementing nutrition labels, such as how to implement nutrient declarations, which nutrients are to be declared, what reference values are to be used, or how to present nutrition labels (including criteria for legibility). But despite the availability of Codex guidelines on nutrition labelling and progress in implementing nutrition labelling policies, the impact and effectiveness on specific outcomes (i.e. consumers’ nutrition and health outcomes, food reformulation, etc.) vary between countries.

The Global Action Network on Nutrition Labelling was formed therefore to exchange country experiences and good practices, share successes and challenges they faced, and provide mutual support to accelerate implementation of effective nutrition labelling policies. At the 2–day launching meeting in Paris, 19 countries from different regions of the world presented their respective country situations and shared their experiences. They have then discussed a joint workplan of the Network and next steps. At the meeting, WHO also presented and shared its work on guiding principles for front-of-pack labelling systems as well as an on-going evidence review and policy guideline development on nutrition labelling that are being developed as part of the guideline development for promoting healthy diet.

Another notable achievement this month was the [Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition’s](#) commitment to the Nutrition Decade. Due to the wealth of knowledge and experience of its members, the Global Panel is able to provide strategic thinking and deep analysis on a variety of emerging issues and present that information through both policy briefs and foresight reports. These evidence-based products provide the necessary interlinkages to address emerging issues and provide substantive modelling and analysis to help policymakers better understand trends in agriculture and diets and to estimate costs/benefits of new agriculture and food policies. These products, as well as the Global Panel’s ability to convene high-level stakeholder meetings from different sectors in the food systems, are part of their commitment. Full commitment [here](#).

Understanding the Double Burden of Malnutrition

The [International Symposium on Understanding the Double Burden of Malnutrition for Effective Interventions](#) was organized in December 2018 (Vienna, Austria) by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), jointly with WHO and UNICEF, in response to the rising double burden of malnutrition (DBM) and in support of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. More than 460 representatives from 89 Member States and 21 organizations attended the symposium which covered the DBM, using a life stage approach that considered aspects of epidemiology, biology, assessment, interventions and policy implications. A dedicated session on the role of food systems in the DBM highlighted successful examples of regulatory interventions in Chile and Mexico positively impacting the DBM.



Participants from academia, international and non-governmental organizations and civil society shared experiences, learned about assessment tools, and identified concrete actions for the achievement of nutrition commitments within the context of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. Additional learning opportunities on new assessment techniques and applications were provided through interactive learning labs. Researchers shared their own project results through oral abstract presentations and posters. In addition, the symposium served as one of the venues to launch the 2018 Global Nutrition Report as well as a new [IAEA Doubly Labelled Database](#) containing human energy expenditure measurements. Over the course of the week, several key outcomes were identified by participants including, demystifying nutrition for the public and other non-nutrition sectors and engaging with youth to boost awareness.

The organizers invited innovative ideas on “*If you had a chance, how would you tackle the double burden of malnutrition using a science-based approach?*” via social media. The [winning video](#) was done by three students from the University of Monterey, Mexico and highlights the importance of working across sectors and disciplines to create stronger public policies for tackling the DBM. Visit the [nutrition section](#) of the IAEA’s Human Health Campus for video streams of the sessions, pictures and other symposium material.

Photo credit: @IAEA/Mariia Klymenko

Reinforcing the collective mindset for nutrition in Liberia

Malnutrition remains an issue of critical concern in Liberia, as nearly one-third of children under the age of 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting or low height-for-age) and almost half a million (69%) are anaemic (USAID, 2018). On 1 February 2019, Liberia held a [Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement and Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition \(REACH\) Stakeholders Meeting](#) in its capital city Monrovia, which brought together a diverse set of high-level actors from the government, United Nations, civil society and the Embassy of Ireland. Among the participants were the SUN Government Focal Point, Assistant Ministers and Directors from four different line ministries (Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, Education and Health), the UN Resident Coordinator, Country Representatives of UN agencies active in the UN Network (UNN), the UNN-REACH Facilitator, a representative from the UNN-REACH Secretariat and the Chairman of Liberia's Civil Society Alliance.



The event was timely. Not only did it build on the momentum from the recent official endorsement of the SUN Government Focal Point, it also coincided with the early stages of UNN-REACH activity initiated in December 2018. The event enabled the participants to collectively define the UNN-REACH work plan to support the transformational change required for nutrition scale up in Liberia. Participants left the event with a deeper understanding of the SUN Movement and the concrete actions that UNN-REACH will take, thanks to generous funding from Irish Aid, to build the capacity of nutrition coordination mechanisms and operationalize a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition.

There are already positive signs. The wide and high-level attendance at the event indicates growing political commitment to nutrition as well as increased stakeholder engagement in the nutrition space. Participants now have a common understanding of the current nutrition situation in the country upon which to ground future collective actions.

Photo credit: @WFP Liberia/John Monibah

Burkina Faso's Common Nutrition Narrative emblematic of new climate for increased harmonization of UN support

Burkina Faso has taken great strides to address malnutrition in the country, including concerted efforts to strengthen nutrition governance. Since 2015, the UN Network, through its intensive arm – REACH – has worked closely with the SUN Government Focal Point and other authorities to employ a participatory approach that has mobilized multiple sectors whose work supports nutrition outcomes. Today, roughly eight ministries (Agriculture, Education, Health, Local Governance, National and Women’s Solidarity, Research, Social Protection, Trade and WASH) are engaged to fight malnutrition in full force. Burkina Faso is in many ways a success story. Not only has it reached a number of nutrition governance milestones, it has reduced child stunting from 35% in 2010 (Demographic and Health Survey) to 21% in 2017 (National Nutrition Survey).

The [Common Narrative on Nutrition](#) in Burkina Faso joins this list of achievements and efforts to step up collective action on nutrition. The narrative is based on an analysis of the nutrition situation and the challenges faced by stakeholders in the country, drawing upon UNN-REACH analytics and insights. It outlines the measures being taken by FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO to improve nutrition and includes specific nutrition targets. While the document is a UN Network product, it takes into account the greater SUN Movement architecture. A set of recommendations are articulated for each of the six SUN networks active in-country, including the UN Network, as well as for the SUN Government Focal Point, key ministries and decentralized government authorities, showcasing the UN’s unique multilateral role.

Officially launched in late 2018 during an event that was covered by national television and newspapers, the narrative was revised in light of those wider stakeholder discussions. The common narrative is now being widely disseminated with the hope of triggering increased partnership and investment for nutrition action in the country.

Prime Minister of the Comoros endorses the decision to map nutrition stakeholders and actions following a study visit with Chad



What do Chad and the Comoros have in common? Both countries are working to conduct a sweeping nutrition mapping exercise that compiles data on intervention coverage across stakeholders, which is otherwise lacking. Government officials and UN colleagues in both countries recognize that it is difficult to have substantive discussions about scale-up without knowing the current levels of coverage. The mapping will enable local nutrition authorities to spearhead discussions and responses in order to scale-up multi-sectoral nutrition actions in-country.

The Prime Minister of the Comoros endorsed the decision to map nutrition stakeholders and actions following the recent visit of Chad's International REACH Facilitator and an Analyst from the UN Network Secretariat. The [mission](#) was requested by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and was an opportunity to share experiences from Chad's ongoing mapping exercise within the context of greater measures to enhance nutrition governance, supported by UNN-REACH. These include efforts to set-up and strengthen the capacity of nutrition coordination mechanisms in Chad – both at the national and regional levels – which will benefit and use the mapping data first-hand. The visit was timely, as the Comoros is in the process of establishing a new nutrition governance structure. An executive decree was submitted that same week to establish the National Nutrition Council (*Conseil National de la Nutrition et de l'Alimentation*) under the President's Office.

Four government ministries in the Comoros (Agriculture, Education, Health and Planning) have committed to engage in the mapping, while the UN Country Team is already working to mobilize funding, through its UN Network. The Civil Society Network has also expressed interest in actively engaging in the exercise and has included this activity in its 2019 workplan. While the mapping is due to commence in June 2019, after the election period, the UN Network Secretariat is assisting country actors with the preparation of Terms of Reference and a budget to ensure a prompt launch. It is also connecting the country civil society platform '*Plateforme Riziki*' with the SUN Civil Society Network's global secretariat, and has pledged to train the platform on the tool to help make it a strong actor in advancing the nutrition agenda in the Comoros.

Photo credit: @UN Resident Coordinator's Office/Cheikh Mohamed El Hafed Dehah

New Resources

Call for Inputs: Share your experiences in the use and application of the following Committee on World Food Security policy recommendations: (i) [Investing in Smallholder Agriculture for Food Security and Nutrition](#); (ii) [Connecting Smallholders to Markets](#); and (iii) [Sustainable Agricultural Development for Food Security and Nutrition: What Roles for Livestock?](#). This consultation is being held online through the [Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition](#) in English, French and Spanish until **22 April 2019**. All contributions received will be compiled in a document made available for delegates at the 46th session of the CFS and inform the plenary stocktaking event organized to monitor the use and application of these interconnected policy recommendations.

New feature providing cost-effectiveness information for nutrition interventions in eLENA

The cost of implementation and scale-up is a critical consideration when prioritizing interventions to be included in nutrition policies. Cost-effectiveness analysis supports priority setting by defining areas of action where the greatest health and nutrition gains can be achieved with available

resources.

To further support countries in the planning and development of evidence-informed nutrition policies, the WHO e-Library of Evidence for Nutrition Actions ([eLENA](#)) has been updated with a new feature providing links to more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and reports assessing the cost-effectiveness of a wide range of nutrition interventions conducted in a variety of contexts and settings. Click [here](#) for more information on the new cost-effectiveness feature.



UN Network Annual Report now available

The [UN Network Annual Report \(2018\)](#) provides a source of inspiration for UN Network colleagues and other SUN networks. It turns a spotlight on how the UN Network is fostering collective action at the country level to tackle malnutrition in all its forms. The report highlights various milestones and achievements from 2017 as well as the first semester of 2018, including those accomplished through its intensive, neutral facilitation service – REACH. Congratulations to all of you for your valuable contributions to these efforts! This report has been well-received by the other SUN networks and is helping to promote mutual accountability within the SUN community.

The Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) continues to supply the nutrition world with a range of quality stories about how colleagues are addressing malnutrition on the front line. Below are some recent publications that you might not want to miss.

- i. [Issue 59 of Field Exchange](#), a lighter edition with crisp research summaries, reflecting ENN's commitment to deliver more online content quickly and widely.
- ii. [Issue 11 of Nutrition Exchange](#), which includes an article on *Setting up SUN Networks in Fragile and Conflict Affected States*.
- iii. An illuminating report on [Mapping SUN Movement Networks in 17 fragile and conflict-affected states](#), with a success story on how the UN Network in DRC is increasingly aligning its efforts and working together.
- iv. Somalia case study on [Bringing humanitarian and development frameworks, financing and programmes closer together](#).

Sustainable Diets: Linking Nutrition and Food Systems

This [book](#) takes a transdisciplinary approach and considers multisectoral actions, integrating health, agriculture and environmental sector issues to comprehensively explore the topic of sustainable diets. The team of international authors informs readers with arguments, challenges, perspectives, policies, actions and solutions on global topics that must be properly understood in order to be effectively addressed.

Obituary - In memory of Dr. Elisabet Helsing

Elisabet Helsing – a heroine in the protection, promotion and support for breastfeeding – passed away on 26 January 2019. Throughout her illustrious career, Dr Helsing stimulated movements for breastfeeding across the globe, engaged in strengthening nutrition in international emergency operations, and helped move forward the development and implementation of nutrition policies in Europe as a regional advisor to WHO. She will be truly missed by the international nutrition community. To learn more about how Elisabet Helsing got a minister of agriculture to value the economics of human breastmilk and her other contributions to public health nutrition, read the full obituary [here](#).

Upcoming nutrition related events

- 25-27 February: [4th World Congress on Public Health and Nutrition](#), Berlin, Germany
- 27 Feb: Nutrition Sensitization Workshop and Launch of Lesotho's Nutrition Steering Committee, Maseru, Lesotho
- 27 Feb – 1 Mar: [4th International Congress Hidden Hunger](#), Stuttgart, Germany
- 6 March: [3rd meeting in the Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition](#), Bergen, Norway
- 4 - 6 Mar: [24th International Conference on Clinical Nutrition](#), Barcelona, Spain
- 7 - 9 Mar: [6th International Conference on Nutrition and Growth](#), Valencia, Spain
- 11 - 15 Mar: [4th session of the UN Environment Assembly](#), Nairobi, Kenya
- 11 - 22 Mar: [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW63\)](#), UN HQ, New York
- 12 Mar: Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping Validation Workshop, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- 20 - 21 Mar: [Global Food Security Symposium 2019](#), Washington, D.C.
- 20- 22 Mar: [2nd High-Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation \(BAPA +40\)](#), Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 21 - 22 Mar: [Future Food Tech Summit](#), San Francisco, USA
- 12 - 14 Apr: [2019 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund](#), Washington, D.C.
- 19 - 20 Apr: [4th Global Food Security, Food Safety & Sustainability Conference](#), Montreal, Canada
- 23 - 24 Apr: [FAO/WHO/WTO International Forum on Food Safety and Trade](#), Geneva, Switzerland