



Improving Food Systems for Nutrition and Health



1. What are the key challenges for food systems and nutrition?

Food systems are crucial for addressing problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, and diet-related health problems. Many countries, communities and even households face situations where under-nutrition exists side by side with a fast growing problem of overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases. The problems and their causes are complex and evolving fast. New challenges arising from demographic changes, climate change, and globalization further add to the complexity.

The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) in 2014 raised awareness about the underlying issues and generated agreement through the ICN2 Framework for Action on a set of recommended policy and programmatic action. Central to this is the need for creating strong partnerships and promoting coordinated action among all food systems actors. The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) will facilitate reaching this goal.

With the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 2 (*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*) countries further emphasized the need for a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach to ending malnutrition and placed a strong emphasis on refocusing food and agriculture systems on health and nutrition outcomes.

Governments have a key role in creating an enabling policy, legal and institutional environment that provides incentives for food system actors to sharpen their focus on helping consumers, and in particular vulnerable groups, with affordable access to nutritious food and

knowledge about healthy diets. The private sector, civil society and academia have a key role to play in supporting governments to create healthy food systems.

2. How does FAO help countries to meet these challenges?

FAO takes a comprehensive food systems approach to address issues of malnutrition and diet-related health problems, working in partnership with UN agencies and other relevant partners. The focus of FAO is to help governments and their development partners: i) develop a policy and institutional environment that brings all food systems stakeholders together to engage in evidence-based dialogue; and, ii) agree on a common framework for action to make food systems better focused on producing positive nutrition and health benefits for consumers and in particular for the most vulnerable, including pregnant and lactating women, children during their first 1 000 days of life and adolescent girls.

In an effort to strengthen its support to countries and partnership with other agencies, FAO has established a renewed “Nutrition and Food Systems Division” and is seeking support to further develop and strengthen its support to countries in the following ways:

- i. **Support the generation and dissemination of evidence about food systems and food system innovations that have proven positive impact on nutrition and health**, including the development of metrics and systems for monitoring progress and impact of implementation of food systems innovations on nutrition and health. This involves inter alia development of capacities to collect and analyze currently lacking information about food consumption as part of national surveillance, monitoring and evaluation systems.

- ii. Support decision-makers in government and development partners to develop policies, legal framework and programmes to make food systems more nutrition and health-focused and implement related food-systems innovations at scale.** This includes the provision of evidence-based policy advice, training, strengthening coordination at national but also at decentralized levels between ministries of agriculture with other ministries (i.e. with health, social affairs, education, women's affairs, etc.) and also with private sector and civil society organizations.
- iii. Promote consumer behaviour change towards healthy diets :** This includes inter alia the development of national Food-based Dietary Guidelines to inform food and agriculture policies

Box 1: Mainstreaming nutrition and the Right to Food in Sierra Leone's agriculture programmes

FAO works with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security to:

- Integrate nutrition objectives in its Inclusive Agriculture Transformation Plan
- Train extension workers and Farmer Field School facilitators on nutrition
- Develop Food-Based Dietary Guidelines to guide national nutrition education and policies
- Integrate the Right to Food in district plans and in the Constitution
- Strengthen linkages between agriculture and health services at community level
- Integrate nutrition in the Faculty of Agriculture curricula

and nutrition education; the integration of nutrition education and behaviour change strategies in schools; the promotion of nutrient-rich foods and bio-fortified crops with high iron and zinc and vitamin A, work with organizations involved institutional feeding programmes, consumer organizations, etc.

- iv. Development of organizational and human resources capacities for implementation of nutrition-sensitive food systems changes.**

This involves work in partnership with other UN agencies (i.e. UNICEF, WFP, IFAD, WHO, etc.) and local partners to implement actions and up-scale

Box 2: Purchase from Africans for Africa

The Purchase from Africans for Africa Programme (PAA Africa) is a nutrition sensitive programme adapted from the Brazilian experience of PAA food purchases from family farmers for implementation in five African countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, the Niger and Senegal. It has combined productive inclusion for family farmers with food assistance to children and social protection for vulnerable populations. PAA Africa began in 2012 and, over the course of two years, supported over 5 000 family farmers, mostly organized in producer organizations, and benefited over 128 000 school children with locally procured school meals. This programme improves the food and nutrient intake of children at school while maintaining and/or increasing their attendance. Home grown school feeding programmes add yet another dimension by linking school meal programmes to family farming.

innovations that will contribute to making the food systems more nutrition and health sensitive. This includes work with agricultural extension services, social protection programmes, teacher training colleges, universities, schools, agencies involved in emergency and resilience building programmes, civil society and private sector agencies, etc.

- v. Improving stakeholder coordination and food systems governance to bring all relevant food systems stakeholders together in an inclusive and evidence-based dialogue around a common nutrition agenda.** Following the example of similar support at global level in the context of for example the Committee on World Food Security, this involves work with national and decentralized food security and nutrition coordination mechanism and platforms, as well as the facilitation of dialogue on specific issues i.e. among parliamentarians, civil society actors, private sector actors, etc. Much of this work takes place in partnership with other UN Agencies and initiatives like SUN and REACH.

- vi. Leveraging regional policies and platforms to**

Box 3: NEPAD CAADP Nutrition Capacity Development Initiative

FAO has worked with African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) since 2011 to integrate nutrition in National Agriculture Investment Plans. Between 2011 and 2013, through three sub-regional workshops, 50 multi-sectoral country teams, led by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) focal points, have designed roadmaps to integrate nutrition in agriculture, which are now guiding country investments.

strengthen and scale up country level efforts.

FAO leverages regional policy processes and partnerships with regional organizations to enhance the effectiveness and scaling-up of its country support, for example, by mainstreaming nutrition objectives and interventions in regional food security policies and strategies (e.g. ASEAN, CAADP Results Framework), and by leveraging regional forums to strengthen country capacities.

3. Why FAO, why partner with FAO, what is the organization's comparative advantage?

FAO has a clear comparative advantage in supporting countries and development partners to make food systems more nutrition and health focused because of: (i) its technical expertise; (ii) its role as a neutral broker with various food systems and nutrition stakeholders; (iii) its ability to capitalize on and share knowledge and experiences across countries and regions; (iv) its presence in countries, its partnership with regional organizations and its role and participation in various global fora; and (v) its role in advocacy and the promotion of inclusive dialogue and partnerships across a broad spectrum of stakeholders.