

High Level Political Forum 2021 6-15 July 2021

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building and inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

Inputs by **UN Nutrition**

UN Nutrition is a UN inter-agency coordination and collaboration mechanism for nutrition at the global and country levels.

The burden of malnutrition in all its forms in the world remains inadmissibly high. While there has been progress it has been inconsistent and slow. At the current pace, hunger, undernutrition, overweight and obesity will continue to burden all countries and hinder social and economic development in the post 2030 world. An acceleration of progress is needed to accomplish the Agenda 2030 vision, leaving no one behind. UN Nutrition works to overcome fragmentation, increase harmonization on nutrition and provide coordinated and aligned support to governments for greater impact for children, women and people everywhere. Through UN Nutrition, UN agencies, programmes and funds leverage their collective strengths, build synergies, increase efficiencies and complementarities, and ultimately support governments and partners to deliver results on nutrition objectives and targets at all levels, from national to sub-national.

The HLPF will meet in 2021 under the auspices of ECOSOC, to review SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17.

The SDGs are profoundly transformative, cutting across technical sectors and providing a united vision for all nations. They encourage synergies between the individual actors and goals, which are by their nature, interconnected and indivisible. Good nutrition lies at the heart of these synergies and acts as a catalyst for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda as a whole¹².

UN Nutrition’s inputs will focus on the **nutrition-related** impacts of the COVID-19 and mitigating measures, while proposing recommendations for action to accelerate progress in meeting the SDGs, considering not only the SDGs under review but also their integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature.

¹ <https://www.unscn.org/en/topics/sustainable-development-goals>

² https://www.unnetworkforsun.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/UNN_SDGs%20Brief_WEB-final%20%286Dec2018%29.pdf

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of people's food and nutrition security.

Malnutrition in all its forms remains one of the main challenges the global community faces today. One in nine people are hungry or undernourished, while 149 million children under 5 years of age are affected by stunting globally. Meanwhile one in three people are either overweight or obese, increasing the risk of noncommunicable diseases.³ Importantly, **all** countries have populations that experience multiple forms of malnutrition. However, global and national numbers conceal large inequalities within countries, with the most vulnerable people being most affected. Country averages tend to hide this skewed distribution and make it harder to identify the most in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious impacts on diets and nutrition. The *UNSG Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition*, launched in June 2020, presents estimates that some 49 million extra people may fall into extreme poverty and that every percentage point drop in global Gross Domestic Product will mean an additional 0.7 million stunted children⁴.

Exacerbating the nutrition challenges, COVID-19 does not treat people equally. Poor people who already face the consequences of inequalities are most affected by the virus and its social and economic consequences. Undernourished people have weaker immune systems and may be at greater risk of severe illness. Poor metabolic health, including obesity and diabetes, is strongly linked to worse COVID-19 outcomes, including risk of hospitalisation and death. Furthermore, the poorer often lack access to quality health care if infected and the imposed restrictions have hindered the informal economy, upon which many are dependent, including migrants and seasonal workers, negatively impacting their livelihoods and income.

Keeping children in school, especially for girls, is associated with better nutrition not only for the girl child but also for their future children, positively affecting the next generations. School meals are an effective vehicle for getting children to school, keeping them there, and ultimately improving their nutritional status, overall health and learning. The negative impacts of COVID-19 in the education sector were also vast. By April 2020, 199 countries had closed their schools and 370 million children were suddenly deprived of what for many was their main meal of the day adding to the burden⁵.

The malnutrition burden can only be tackled by understanding and fully taking into account its underlying causes, including social, economic, political, environmental and cultural factors negatively affecting food, health, education and care systems. Integrated policies are therefore needed that combine efforts of multiple sectors and act on the interlinkages between biodiversity loss, environmental hazards, climate change, food systems, diets, nutrition, education and health, in line with SDG 17.

³ <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2020-global-nutrition-report/>

⁴ UNSG Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition

⁵ WFP, State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020. Available at https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000123923/download/?_ga=2.1284785.1819053757.1615795734-657519325.1615128173.

The COVID-19 pandemic has once again exposed the interactions of food, education, social protection and health systems, with weaknesses in them disproportionately impacting already vulnerable populations, bringing light to the urgent need of making all possible efforts to meet the SDGs.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that help building an effective and sustainable path to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, requires measures are taken to protect and promote good nutrition.

The following four key recommendations addressed to the global development community aim at improving nutrition in this context. An extensive list of UN resources and policy guidance in support of countries can be found [here](#).

Key recommendation one: Acknowledge the right to adequate food as a fundamental human right without inequities. Also acknowledge the crucial importance of good nutrition as a catalyst for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17)

Rationale:

- Good nutrition is essential for health, livelihoods and well-being. It is also a key element of people's defence and resilience against shocks and threats such as COVID-19.
- Access to food and diets that are healthy, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate is a fundamental human right. Not realizing the right to food makes other fundamental rights more difficult to uphold.
- Only when the right to food is fully acknowledged and a human rights approach is adopted will country governments, all stakeholders and the international development community be able to begin tackling the real underlying issues at stake.
- Maintaining and/or creating the most enabling environments for people, especially marginalized and deprived people, to empower themselves, set their own priorities, and ensuring their meaningful participation in decision making is crucial in realizing the right to food.
- Governments have the prime responsibility in creating such enabling environments for improved nutrition. The UN system has the fundamental role of supporting governments in this endeavour. A human- rights based approach to development contributes to improving nutrition, addressing at the same time the right to adequate food and other cross-cutting issues, such as equity, inclusivity, accountability and policy coherence.
- Focusing on nutritional improvements adopting a human rights approach provides key opportunities for establishing synergies between several SDGs under review in 2021, notably 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships, while recognizing their indivisibility.

Key recommendation two: Promote Food System transformation for delivering sustainable healthy diets for all. (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10).

Rationale:

- Food systems everywhere must become sustainable, equitable, efficient and inclusive if they are to deliver nutritious foods contributing to sustainable healthy diets.
- Sustainable food systems need to move toward mostly plant-based dietary patterns, a drastic reduction in food losses and waste, and a major improvement in food production practices using processes and systems that are non-polluting, conserve non-renewable energy and natural resources, are economically efficient, are safe for workers, communities and consumers, and do not compromise the needs of future generations.
- This can be achieved by strengthening sustainable local food systems with shorter supply chains, nutrition outcomes at their core and greater food diversity, enhancing resilience and delivering healthy food for all - leaving no one behind.
- Food systems cannot be sustainable if they do not acknowledge the interdependence of rural and urban areas and to fully understand and leverage the opportunities, best practices and lessons learnt provided by the urban-rural linkages for more sustainable food systems.
- Food environments are where people meet the food systems. People's food environments need to guide and facilitate the move towards making more sustainable and healthy choices. COVID-19 has shown the food environment responds quickly to changes in the wider system. At the same time changes in the food environment (because of people's perceptions , rules and laws) have an impact on the wider food system.
- To gain insights into the food and nutrition disruptions people around the world were facing due to the pandemic and associated measures to contain its spread, an online survey was conducted from 15 to 30 April 2020.⁶ The survey was completed by 2015 people from 118 countries, in primarily urban settings. Results show that at the time of the survey respondent's food accessibility had altered notably and food related daily routines were largely disrupted. The large majority of responses indicated facing important accessibility changes at the point of purchase. On the positive side, over 50% of the respondents indicated an increase in home cooking that seemed to be accompanied by increased awareness of the need to reduce food waste (66%). Despite responses from largely higher income countries, 8% of respondents reported relying on social protection measures such as food banks, while 17% were relying on alternative sources of food such as personal and community food production.

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) developed and launched the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition (VGFSN) The UN Secretary-General will convene the 2021 Food Systems Summit to launch bold new actions to transform the way the world produces and consumes food, delivering progress on all 17 SDGs. These offer unique opportunities for global actors to transform food systems for the better and this is the time to make the best use of them.

⁶ <https://www.unscn.org/en/news-events/recent-news?idnews=2040>

Key recommendation three: Promote the One Health approach for healthier ecosystems and improved nutrition (SDGs 2, 3, 12, 13), for the well-being of people, animals and the planet (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10) so that no one is left behind.

Rationale:

- Humans and animals share the same eco-systems they live in, which are being severely threatened by biodiversity loss, environmental destruction and climate change.
- Different sectors, such as nutrition, public health, animal health, plant health, environmental protection, climate change, urban ecology, conservation sciences, cyber-science and many others should join forces in a One Health approach.
- Nutrition must be a key part of this dialogue, with people's good nutrition status considered one of the major expected outcomes of the joint efforts to One Health.
- Universal coverage of essential nutrition actions is an indispensable prerequisite for improving nutrition, if lives are to be saved and healthcare spending reduced and must be advocated for.

Key recommendation four: Promote scaling up of quality education (SDG4) and social protection systems (SDG 1), with particular emphasis on sustainable and healthy school meals publicly and locally procured, for all school age children leaving no child behind (SGD 1, 2, 3, 10, 12).

Rationale:

- Advocacy to keep children in school, especially girls is essential to support improved nutrition for the girl child but also for their future children, positively affecting the next generations.
- Food procurement of sustainable foods in general and of sustainable school meals in particular has a huge potential for nurturing people and the planet.
- Linking school feeding programmes with local food producers and suppliers is an effective means to provide schoolchildren with food that is safe, diverse, nutritious, while, at the same time, providing local farmers with a predictable market and income.
- If sustainable and healthy school meals are prioritized, public food procurement substantially promotes their production, distribution and consumption while providing a market share to sustainable food suppliers.
- Therefore, public procurement of sustainable and locally produced school meals will improve health and nutrition not only of the children receiving healthy meals, sometimes their only daily meal, but also of their communities and environment.
- Publicly and locally procured school meals together serve as a triple-duty action to prevent childhood undernutrition and overweight/obesity, as well as protect planetary health, further encouraging children to develop sustainable, healthy food preferences throughout their lives.