



**UN-Nutrition input to the thematic review of the 2023
High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
on the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the
full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”**

In 2023, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will undertake an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG17 on partnerships. The forum will look at the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on these goals and their integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature. In July 2023, the HLPF will also help prepare for the 2023 SDG Summit to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly from 19 to 20 September 2023.

UN-Nutrition

As the coordinating United Nations mechanism for nutrition at global and country level, UN-Nutrition plays a critical role in helping to address and mitigate the negative nutritional impacts of global threats. It provides a platform for coherent and coordinated United Nations actions on nutrition, enabling the United Nations to work as “One UN” for nutrition and deliver more impactful and efficient support to Member States with a view to achieving all of the SDGs. There is a critical need to speak in one voice at all levels to deliver on the three main functions set out in the UN-Nutrition Strategic Plan 2022–2030:¹ i) to support an enabling environment for better United Nations coordination on nutrition at country level; ii) to foster global engagement and joined-up discussion with agencies; and iii) to facilitate progress on UN-Nutrition’s strategic priorities. Fulfilling these three functions is essential to achieving the two UN-Nutrition interconnected goals of i) joint, consistent nutrition action and policy implementation at all levels and ii) coherent policies, approaches and positions on evolving nutrition challenges.

The United Nations agencies that have joined forces under UN-Nutrition¹ reiterate their commitment to working together at all levels to provide guidance and support to Member States on integrating nutrition into country programming and policy, in a contribution to all United Nations efforts to achieve the interlinked and indivisible SDGs. UN-Nutrition reports on its progress annually to the United Nations Economic and Social Council² and offers the following input to the 2023 HLPF thematic review.

¹ The UN-Nutrition Steering Committee currently comprises the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. Other members include the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UN Women. CGIAR, through the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture, is an associate member. The Committee on World Food Security Secretariat and the Global Nutrition Cluster are observers.

I. Why improving nutrition is crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda

The world is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. With less than eight years in which to achieve the SDGs, the gap to reaching many of the critical targets is growing wider each year (FAO, 2022).

SDG2 focuses on “ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture”. However, it is fundamentally important to understand that the SDGs are interconnected and indivisible, and that improving nutrition is an essential component of achieving the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

When a community is adequately nourished, it can reach its full developmental (SDG 4) and economic (SDG 8) potential. This helps to reduce poverty (SDG 1) and, when properly targeted, reduce inequalities (SDG 10) and ensure that no one is left behind. Sustainable healthy diets (SDG 2) are the tie that binds environmental sustainability and human health and well-being (SDG 3). Better nutrition is associated with enhanced knowledge and behaviours linked to food hygiene and sanitation, while the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all impacts nutrition outcomes (SDG 6). Access to affordable energy (SDG 7) is essential to producing food, so has an impact on nutrition. It also reduces the time burden on women with regard to the search for firewood, as well as indoor pollution – both directly related to sickness-mediated nutritional compromise.

At the same time, improved nutrition generates demand for better infrastructure (transport, irrigation, energy and information and communications technology), supporting innovation, industrialization and productivity through greater working capacity and increasing demand across food systems (SDG 9). Innovations in food value chains, meanwhile, can make sustainable healthy diets more available and affordable. Healthy diets from sustainable food systems are also linked to responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) by cities and communities (SDG 11). Applying territorial approaches to sustainable food systems and improving life on land (SDG15) leads to more diverse food consumption and production patterns, contributing to greater biodiversity. Partnerships between all sectors and stakeholder groups (SDG 17) are needed, as nutrition requires a multisectoral and multistakeholder approach to mobilize action that generates such synergies.

Despite the fundamental importance of good nutrition, however, 30 percent of all people face micronutrient deficiency. Some 828 million people are undernourished, while 676 million suffer from obesity. Malnutrition in all its forms continues to be affected by the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic, war and conflict, as well as the exacerbation of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The intensification of these major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition trends, combined with the high cost of nutritious foods and growing inequality, will continue to negatively impact nutrition, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable groups, making it more difficult to achieve the SDGs.

II. Proposed key messages for inclusion in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

UN-Nutrition Members, speaking as one, submit the following seven key messages for the consideration of the 2023 HLPF with a view to inclusion in the Ministerial Declaration.

1. Key message on all SDGs: Nutrition is at the heart of sustainable development and underpins all SDGs.

The SDGs are interconnected and indivisible, and nutrition is a maker and marker of sustainable development. Improving nutrition is a fundamental element in the achievement of all SDGs by 2030, so all SDGs need to be explicit about their relationship with nutrition (annex 1). Action-oriented statements on nutrition improvement are essential, not just descriptions of the problem.

Access to adequate food is a fundamental human right, but every country in the world remains affected by one or more forms of malnutrition. In recent years, progress in the fight against hunger and malnutrition has been backsliding. Urgent investments and actions across sectors and stakeholders are needed to address malnutrition and its root causes. Adequate data to identify malnourished populations are often lacking. Country averages tend to hide a skewed distribution affected by intersecting determinants such as gender, age, income, ethnicity, geographical location and disability, making it harder to identify those most in need.

Adopting a human rights-based approach in the fight against hunger and malnutrition is necessary to protect the lives and well-being of vulnerable people. It requires the identification and prioritization of those most nutritionally at risk (including women and children during the first 1 000 days), those for whom the gap is largest (those with intersecting vulnerabilities – age, income, ethnicity, geographical location, health status and so on) and those unable to afford to meet their nutritional needs.

It will also ensure that international and national responses to the current global crisis are more effective and facilitate meaningful participation by affected communities. This involves enabling them to set their own priorities, ensuring their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, policy implementation and the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes to ensure that the benefits reach the intended targets.

By adopting a human rights-based approach, the international community will clearly realize that nutrition underpins all SDGs. If the underlying determinants of nutrition are not addressed, sustainable solutions to achieving the goals will not be found (UNSCN, 2018b).

2. Key message on all SDGs: Sustainable healthy diets are the tie that binds environmental sustainability and human health and well-being.

There is growing awareness of the daunting nutritional and environmental challenges the world faces. Though access to adequate food is a fundamental human right, billions of people around the world live

with food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. Meanwhile, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is worsening, threatening both human and planetary health. Population growth, urbanization, economic growth and the unequal distribution of power in food systems are fuelling a transition to diets high in refined carbohydrates, fat, salt and ultraprocessed foods. These diets tend to have low nutritional quality and a high environmental footprint, exacerbating both environmental and nutritional challenges, making it more difficult to attain all of the SDGs.

At the nexus of these challenges is what people eat, how food is produced and how it travels from farm to plate. Important shifts in what people eat, as well as a transformation of food systems, are urgently required (UN-Nutrition, forthcoming). Ensuring that healthy diets from sustainable food systems are available, affordable and sustainably consumed will bring clear co-benefits for people and planet and is a foundation for achieving all SDGs (UN-Nutrition, forthcoming).

Proven policy approaches exist for national or subnational governments that can provide co-benefits for nutrition and the environment, positively affecting all SDGs. They span the entire breadth of food systems: production, storage, distribution, processing, packaging, trade and markets, food environments and consumer behaviour. Also, policies promoting innovative initiatives and partnerships between governments, farmers and businesses to reduce food loss and waste are key components of the solutions package (UNSCN, 2016a; 2016b; UN-Nutrition, forthcoming).

No one strategy will fit all. Policies and interventions that provide co-benefits for nutrition and the environment are inherently context-specific and cross-sectoral, requiring collaboration between multiple government ministries and subnational authorities, as well as other food systems stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. At the same time, identifying and implementing policies that can address the massive nutritional and environmental crises that the planet faces will require a departure from business as usual at the global level. Still, through collaboration, commitment and the involvement of diverse stakeholders, food systems that support the well-being of people and the planet can become a reality. Developing and implementing policies with co-benefits for nutrition and the environment will be fundamental to achieving all SDGs.

3. Key message on SDG6: Promote close, multilevel, game-changing collaboration on and interlinkages between actions on water and nutrition.

A complex web of pathways links water, food security and nutrition outcomes (annex 2). Progress on these issues, underpinned by a joint approach, is imperative, as there are growing inequities in food and water security, even though they are basic human rights.

Progress on SDG 6 has been unsatisfactory, with several indicators worsening over time, including increases in the number of people at risk of severe water shortage. This lack of progress has been exacerbated by climate change and growing demand on water resources. The consequences of unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) on children can be deadly. More than 700 children under the age of five die every day of diarrhoeal diseases due to a lack of appropriate WASH services. In areas of

conflict, children are nearly 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease than from the conflict itself. At the same time, levels of malnutrition in all its forms are increasing globally.

Reversing these trends will require a much greater effort on the part of the water, food security and nutrition sectors, including stronger linkages between the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and the United Nations International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development. Enhancing the performance of the two Decades requires the systematic exploration of linkages and possibilities for joint interventions, understanding that one does not take priority over the other.

Progress has been made on the interlinkages between nutrition and WASH (SUN, n.d.). However, to deal concretely with the complexity of the water–nutrition nexus and to optimize the outcomes for all SDGs, it is necessary to go much further. It is essential to implement nutrition-sensitive agricultural water management by producing food in adequate quantity and quality, while also safeguarding water and other natural resources, thus increasing the availability of healthy diets from sustainable food systems. It is also critical to address social inequities in water–nutrition linkages by proactively contemplating vulnerable groups and their needs in the design, development and use of water services (UNSCN, 2020b).

4. Key message on SDG7: Promote clean cooking, as well as the efficient distribution and storage of foods for healthy diets.

Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy brings fundamental gains to health, food security, nutrition, job creation, economic development, security, women’s empowerment and environmental protection. Access to clean cooking energy reduces the burden on women who have to collect firewood, often in remote areas, not only increasing their security, but also the time they have available for childcare. Household air pollution accounted for more than 4 percent of all deaths in 2019 (Bennitt et al., 2021). It leads to non-communicable diseases, including stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer, with women and children bearing the greatest health burden (WHO, 2022). Indoor pollution is directly related to sickness-mediated nutritional compromise. Deforestation impacts the water-holding capacity of the soil, making agricultural land more susceptible to flooding, impacting food security and nutrition.

Despite progress, the 2022 *Tracking SDG7* report (IEA, IRENA, United Nations Statistics Division, World Bank and WHO, 2022) estimates that under current and planned policies (which have also been affected by the COVID-19 crisis), 670 million to 764 million people will still lack access to energy in 2030, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, some 2.4 billion people remained without access to clean cooking in 2020, one-third of the global population. Near stagnation in terms of progress since 2010 has led to millions of deaths a year from the inhalation of cooking smoke. Without rapid action to scale up clean cooking, the world will fall short of reaching SDG7 targets for 2030.

Energy is also required to transport food and produce related inputs and materials. The energy used to transport food from producers to consumers, often called “food miles”, accounts for about 5 percent of food-related GHG emissions (UN-Nutrition, 2022). Emissions from transportation are higher for perishable food products, such as fruits, vegetables and animal-source foods, yet safe transport of these

foods is essential to support healthy diets and food safety. Most transport emissions come from local and regional transport on roads and railways rather than international transport by ship or air. Thus, better infrastructure to improve the efficiency of local transportation networks, including those connecting rural and urban areas, as well as investments in urban and peri-urban food systems, could reduce transport-related emissions. Eventually, the improvement of local trade, including the reduction of barriers to local trade, may also reduce food miles over longer distances, as people can rely more on locally produced foods, and increase food sovereignty (UN-Nutrition, forthcoming).

Developing low-cost technologies to improve the energy efficiency of food storage, especially for nutrient-dense foods, is also essential to attain SDG7. Refrigeration contributes about 5 percent of food systems-related emissions (UN-Nutrition, forthcoming). This “cold chain” is essential to reducing food loss and waste by maintaining safe conditions while food is stored and distributed, and it is particularly important for nutritious, perishable foods, such as fruits, vegetables and animal-source foods. Better refrigeration through efficient cold chains is essential to increasing access to safe, diverse and nutritious foods, especially in areas where hunger, food insecurity and micronutrient deficiencies are prevalent. Likewise, simple preserving techniques, such as drying or fermentations, can help to maintain product quality and safety. Thus, innovations in environmentally friendly and low-cost, energy-efficient refrigeration and conservation technologies could have benefits across the SDGs (UN-Nutrition, forthcoming).

5. Key message on SDG 9: Promote, as a matter of priority, the nutrition of mothers, children and all those contributing to a healthy and productive economy through innovation capacity and sustainable industrialization.

Nutrition objectives should be incorporated (at all stages) into building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. A well-nourished workforce can better foster innovation in all industrial sectors, including food supply chains, for making sustainable healthy diets available and affordable, creating a virtuous circle to help achieve the SDGs.

Malnutrition underlies almost half of all child deaths globally, but it also causes lifelong health and developmental challenges for the children who survive. Poor nutrition in the first 1 000 days can lead to irreversible impairment to physical growth and cognitive development, including poor foetal growth or stunting in the first two years of life. These challenges persist over time, as children affected by malnutrition in their early years are more likely to do poorly in school and earn less than their well-nourished peers as adults. Furthermore, the nutritional status of women and girls affects their own health and life opportunities, as well as that of any children they have, perpetuating a vicious cycle of vulnerability and malnutrition.

The first 1 000 days of life, from conception until two years of age, are a unique window of opportunity to change lives and transform communities by building healthy minds and bodies and giving children the best opportunity to fulfil their potential as adults. Investing in nutrition in this period can generate USD 16 in returns for the economy for every USD 1 invested (IFPRI, 2015). Investments in sustainable school meals and schools as a system to improve nutrition are also proven and cost-effective solutions to

the benefit of present and future generations (UNSCN, 2018a). These are the best possible actions for building the foundation of a healthy, well-nourished and capable workforce, able to deliver innovation, productivity and sustainability.

6. Key message on SDG11: Make cities and human settlements work for healthy diets from sustainable food systems as a means of achieving all SDGs.

Making cities and human settlements healthy, inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is closely connected to healthy diets from sustainable food systems and improving nutrition. Strengthening the interlinkages between nutrition and these aspects of urban life can help ensure the achievement of the SDGs. All trends described in key message 4 on clean energy are particularly prominent in urban contexts. As cities worldwide already consume up to 70 percent of the world's food supply and nearly 80 percent of global energy (FAO, 2020), they must play a central role in achieving sustainable food systems that can produce positive nutritional and environmental outcomes.

Rapid urbanization, accompanied by a rise in supermarkets and convenience stores, is changing the dietary habits of urban consumers, resulting in an increase in unhealthy fat consumption, associated with non-communicable diseases. The planning and implementation of efficient, inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban food systems can improve access to nutritious foods for people who live in and near cities. These systems can also alleviate environmental degradation by reducing energy use for food distribution, limiting urban sprawl (which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss) and cutting food waste by creating circular systems in which waste is recycled into food production systems. The characteristics of cities and peri-urban areas are highly variable, so subnational and local governments should engage in the planning of context-specific urban food systems (UNSCN, 2020a; UN-Nutrition, forthcoming).

7. Key message on SDG17: Increase multistakeholder collaboration and multisector policymaking and implementation at all levels for indivisible food security, nutrition, socioeconomic and environmental outcomes.

Combining the efforts of multiple sectors and actors is the only way to fully implement the SDG agenda. At a global level, myriad United Nations initiatives, summits and conventions have been and will continue to be held, focusing on protecting biodiversity, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and transforming food systems with a view to increased resilience and sustainability, among other development challenges. The interlinkages between these efforts should be strengthened as a matter of urgency. The humanitarian–development nexus should be bolstered in all dialogue and operations for efficiency gains to support the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind.

Multisectoral policymaking at the national and subnational level must be encouraged and supported, including for sectors focused on health, agriculture, water, energy, labour, education, and women, youth and children – and in collaboration with non-governmental partners. Such multisectoral initiatives should employ an equity lens, empower women and focus on vulnerable populations with the aim of achieving indivisible food security, nutrition, socioeconomic and environmental outcomes. Multisectoral

collaboration and policymaking often face many challenges, from inadequate funding to a lack of political support and expert guidance. Coordination platforms such as UN-Nutrition and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, play a crucial role in ensuring that the United Nations acts as one to underpin effective national and subnational leadership capable of managing power imbalances and building consensus.

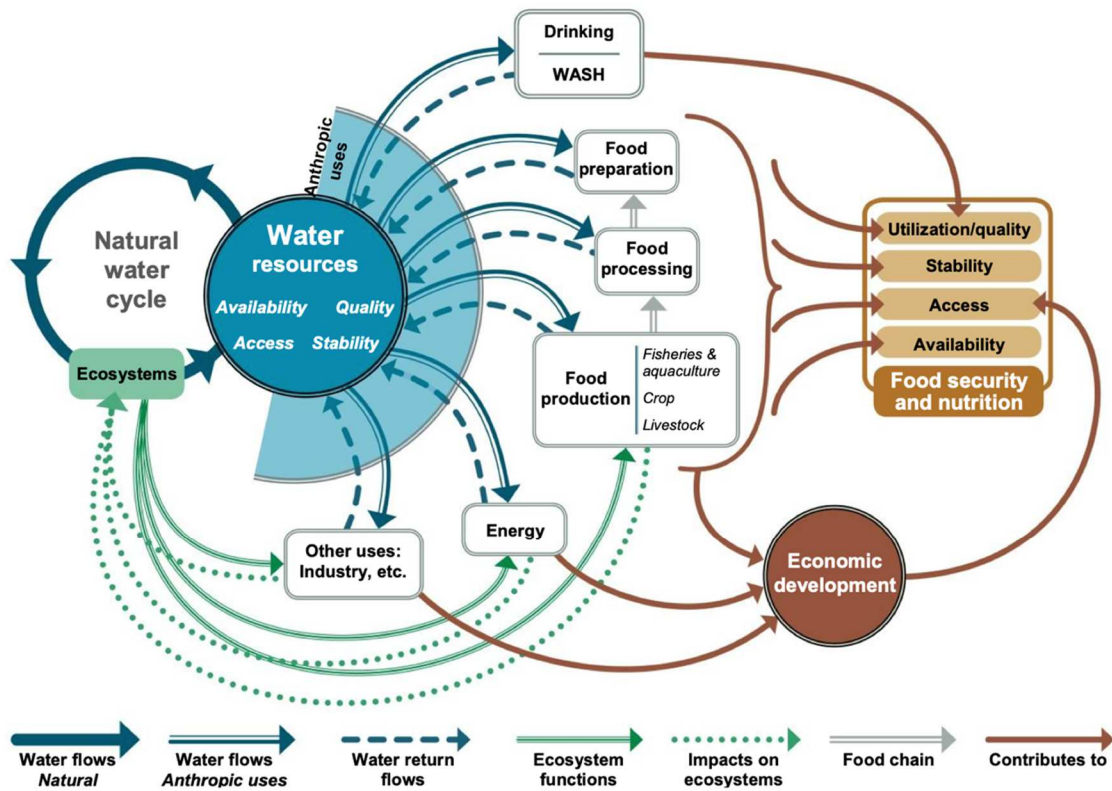
To get back on track, collective and accelerated action to improve nutrition is required now if the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is to be achieved.

Annex 1: Linkages between nutrition and the Sustainable Development Goals

Contributions of nutrition to SDG	SDG	Contributions of SDG to nutrition
Good nutrition results in higher labour productivity, mental capacity and longer, healthier lives. Each added centimetre of adult height is associated with almost a 5 percent increase in wage rates.	1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.	Doubling per capita income cuts child stunting by 15 percentage points. This happens as households escape poverty and governments invest more to tackle malnutrition due to reduced gross national product (GNP) losses.
Good maternal nutrition reduces the risk of low birth weight and improves the care of children. A well-nourished workforce supports productive agriculture and greater demand for food, increased food security and reduced hunger.	2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.	Nutrition would benefit hugely from zero hunger and full food security. Sustainable agriculture supports appropriate diets, income and resource use.
Nutrient-disease interactions are synergic. Good nutrition significantly reduces the risks of sickness and mortality in the context of a host of diseases, as well as maternal health and foetal growth.	3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	Enhancing health, starting with adolescent girls and focusing on the first 1 000 days (including breastfeeding promotion), supports child nutrition and growth while reducing non-communicable disease burdens later in life.
Improving linear growth for children under the age of two by 1 standard deviation adds half a grade to school attainment. Resolving iron, iodine and other nutrient deficiencies supports mental capacity.	4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning.	Access to information, education, schooling and informal knowledge enhances health and food choices, income growth and nutrition.
Improving the nutrition of girls, adolescents and women increases their ability to perform well at school and in the workforce.	5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.	Gender equality (in education, status, earnings) accounts for 25 percent of child nutritional gains. Girls' education delays marriage and first birth.
Improved nutrition is associated with enhanced knowledge and behaviours linked to personal and food hygiene and sanitation, raising demand for clean water and quality sanitation.	6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.	Reducing open defecation and improved access to water cuts bacterial contamination of the food supply and supports hand washing, which impacts nutritional outcomes.
Improved nutrition in all its forms generates demand for food, goods and services, including electrification in the context of demand for refrigeration and food processing.	7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.	Access to energy reduces the time burden on women searching for wood and charcoal. Reduced indoor pollution directly reduces sickness-mediated nutritional compromise.
Nutrition stimulates economic growth, improving the mental and physical productivity of the labour force. Removing undernutrition would prevent GNP losses of 8-11 percent per year.	8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all.	Earning opportunities are key to enabling households to rise out of poverty and to enhancing the adequacy and quality of their diets. Higher GNP allows governments to invest in pro-nutrition policies and programming.
Enhanced nutrition through the lifespan supports learning and later innovation potential. Industrialization and markets only thrive with productivity and growing demand across food systems.	9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive industrialization and foster innovation.	Innovations in productive technology, value chains and marketing enhance food safety and diet quality. Innovation in communication and marketing among the poor supports nutrition.
Resolving stunting has more impact on the poor, reducing current nutrition inequalities that perpetuate future nutrition and income inequalities.	10.Reduce inequality within and among countries.	Reducing inequalities in nutrition allows for more balanced productivity and growth across the population. Less inequality across nations promotes balanced dialogue and engagement.
Lower mortality and morbidity due to enhanced nutrition reduce population pressure on natural resources as fertility falls.	11.Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.	Urban demand for safe, quality diets supports growth in rural production and services, enhancing nutrition. Less water waste and pollution supports nutrition in urban and rural areas.
Falling poverty and improved nutrition raise demand for higher-quality and more diverse diets.	12.Ensure sustainable production.	Product diversity and greater productivity support dietary diversity, food quality (including of complementary foods) and safety, all needed for good nutrition.
Research on nutrient quality as crop traits promoting plant vitality support climate resilient agriculture research. Reduced population pressure on environmental resources comes through better nutrition, supporting reduced mortality and lower fertility rates. More informed consumer demand for high-quality, diverse, safe diets puts attention on the sustainability of production and the impacts of product choices on entire food systems.	13.Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. 14.Conserve and use the oceans, seas and marine resources sustainably. 15.Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.	Research to enhance crop and animal resistance to agroecological shifts linked to climate change will protect food supplies and dietary diversity. Enhanced resiliency of food production and marketing systems can reduce food price volatility that hurts the poor. Production diversity based on sustainable practices leads to lower consumer prices (diversified demand) and, hence, to dietary quality.
Moves to strengthen nutrition accountability and governance globally call attention to the importance of inclusive stakeholder dialogue and cross-sector models for effective policy.	16.Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions.	Discrimination of all kinds, inequity, economic penury and injustice are drivers of conflict, destruction and malnutrition. Peace and justice are preconditions to building accountable institutions needed to achieve good nutrition for all.
Global prioritization of nutrition has never been higher. Multi-stakeholder platforms such as SUN and the Zero Hunger Initiative offer platforms on which to build renewed interest and investment in nutrition.	17.Strengthen and revitalize global partnerships for sustainable development.	A further strengthening of global partnerships and intergovernmental commitments to sustainability and equality offer a foundation for building peace and effective, open and accountable institutions, and improved multisector and multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration.

Source: UNSCN. 2014. *Nutrition and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals: A Technical Note*. Rome.
https://www.unscn.org/files/Publications/Briefs_on_Nutrition/Final_Nutrition%20and_the_SDGs.pdf

Annex 2. The linkages between water and food security and nutrition



Source: HLPE. 2015. *Water for food security and nutrition*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/av045e/av045e.pdf>

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