



**UN-Nutrition input to the thematic review of the 2024  
High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on  
“Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective  
delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”**

In 2024, the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will review in-depth: **Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

UN-Nutrition was invited to contribute to the 2024 HLPF thematic review. The UN-Nutrition Steering Committee members,<sup>1</sup> therefore, offer the following joint input to be submitted online [through this form](#).

The collective input is the voice of “One UN for Nutrition” and does not preclude or supersede any other input provided by the individual agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Nutrition heads from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

**(a) Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.**

The compounding impacts of economic instability, chronic poverty and inequalities, urbanization, trade inefficiencies, wars and conflicts, as well as severe and extreme weather events due to climate change, are major, persisting challenges that continue to negatively affect all aspects of food systems, from food production, food processing, and food distribution and procurement to consumer behaviour). This has resulted in a growing number of people unable to access healthy diets, suffering from hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. The intensification of these key 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 and hindering progress on the SDGs.

The *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023* shows that global hunger, as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment, is still far above pre-pandemic levels, affecting around 735 million people in 2022. This means that 122 million more people are suffering from hunger than in 2019, before the global COVID-19 crisis struck, impacting people's health and well-being, compromising economies and affecting livelihoods. Another key SDG 2 indicator (target 2.1), the prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity, depicts an equally daunting situation of 2.4 billion people living in food insecurity in 2022, of which about 900 million are severely food insecure. Food insecurity continues to have a disproportionate effect on rural dwellers and women, with a gender gap of 2.4 percentage points in 2022 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

As the world strives towards the universal realization of the right to adequate food, diet quality remain an issue – and not only in terms of quantity or sufficient intake of calories. More than 3.1 billion people around the world – or 42 percent of the global population – were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021. The affordability of a healthy diet is becoming increasingly critical for households living in peri-urban and rural areas, who show a growing reliance on food purchases (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

Eating a healthy diet throughout life is critical to preventing all forms of malnutrition. Children, in particular, are highly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. Worldwide in 2022, an estimated 148.1 million children under the age of five (22.3 percent) were stunted, while 45 million (6.8 percent) were wasted, not attaining their full growth potential. Moreover, 1 in 2 preschool-aged children and 2 in 3 women of reproductive age worldwide are affected by vitamin and mineral deficiencies (Steven et al, 2022). Childhood undernutrition is associated with poorer school performance and lower income-generation capacity in adulthood, perpetuating and aggravating the poverty cycle. Childhood overweight, meanwhile, has significant impacts on children's physical health and psychological well-being. Worldwide, in 2022, an estimated 37 million children under the age of five (5.6 percent) were overweight (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

Despite progress on reducing child undernutrition, both stunting and wasting, the world is not on track to achieve the associated 2030 targets, nor is any region on track to achieve the 2030 target for low birthweight, so closely linked to the nutrition of women before and during pregnancy. Steady progress is only being seen when it comes to exclusive breastfeeding (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

Reference:

**FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO.** 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

**Stevens G.A et al** on behalf of the Global Micronutrient Deficiencies Research Group. 2022. Micronutrient deficiencies among preschool-aged children and women of reproductive age worldwide: a pooled analysis of individual-level data from population-representative surveys. *Lancet Glob Health* 2022; 10: e1590–99. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2214-109X%2822%2900367-9>

**(c) Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.**

**Urgent action 1: Transform food systems to enable everyone to consume a healthy diet.**

Despite access to adequate food being a fundamental human right, billions of people around the world live with food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and 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, added sugars, unhealthy fats, salt and highly processed foods. These diets tend to have low nutritional quality and a high environmental footprint, exacerbating both environmental and nutritional challenges, hindering progress on achieving all SDGs. At the nexus of these challenges is what people eat, how food is produced and how it travels from farm to fork. Vital shifts in what people eat and a transformation of food systems are urgently required (UN-Nutrition, 2023). Transforming food systems to deliver more nutritious and sustainable diets is, therefore, essential if we are to achieve the SDGs and end malnutrition in all its forms while protecting the health of people and planet. Furthermore, in many fragile contexts, access to a healthy, nutrient-adequate diet is even more limited due to conflict, political instability, climate shocks, persistent inequalities and disrupted health, food and social protection systems. In these settings, targeted solutions are essential to help move the needle on current nutrient gaps, while working to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups and systems to deal with crises in the longer term.

Healthy diets are the tie that binds environmental sustainability to human health, economic prosperity, equity and well-being. Ensuring that healthy diets from sustainable food systems are available, accessible, affordable, desirable and sustainably consumed will bring clear co-benefits for people and planet and act as a foundation for achieving all SDGs (UN-Nutrition, 2023; FAO, 2023). Proven policy approaches exist for national and subnational governments that can provide co-benefits for nutrition and the environment, including agroecology, with a positive effect on all SDGs. They span the entire breadth of food systems (UNSCN, 2016a; 2016b; UN-Nutrition,

2023). Mexico, for example, is implementing a comprehensive approach to help consumers make healthy food choices, including front-of-pack labelling, restricting marketing to children, and implementing a sugar tax. Moreover, 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, 2023). Through collaboration, commitment and the involvement of diverse stakeholders united in a shared vision and free from conflicts of interest, 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.

**Urgent action 2: Ensure that every child can receive a healthy, nutritious meal in school by 2030.**

Investments in sustainable, nutritious school meals and schools as a system to improve nutrition are a proven and cost-effective solution for combatting hunger and malnutrition, to the benefit of present and future generations (UNSCN, 2018a). Healthy school meals from sustainable food systems have the potential to impact multiple sectors and contribute directly to SDG 2, SDG 4 and SDG 5 and indirectly to SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 10 (WFP, 2017). School meals contribute substantially to education by helping children get into school and stay there, while also helping cognitive development and learning, so they can reach their full potential. The school system is an effective platform for delivering health and nutrition services, such as deworming, micronutrient supplementation and awareness of healthy diets and eating habits. When properly designed to prioritize homegrown and locally produced food purchases, school meals can create reliable and stable markets for smallholder farmers. Climate-smart action can be linked to school meals in a variety of ways, including by giving preference to public-sector purchases of food produced locally through sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring the reduction of food loss and waste. The city of Milan, for example, is promoting healthy and sustainable school meals (including drinking of tap water) with reduced amounts of meat, presence of other types of proteins such as legumes, and reduced salt content. With over 70 million school meals provided per year, this is a major achievement in supporting healthy diets from sustainable food systems while reducing GHG emissions of school meals by 40%. Importantly, school meals can be designed to ensure girls'

enrolment and schooling, helping to narrow the gender gap and reduce discrimination against girls (WFP, 2017).

### **Urgent action 3: Boost the capacity of urban and peri-urban agriculture.**

With almost seven in ten people projected to live in cities by 2050 (World Bank, n.d.), urbanization is shaping agrifood systems and, consequently, their capacity to deliver affordable healthy diets for all and to help eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Urban and peri-urban agricultural practices on land and other spaces within cities and surrounding areas yield foods and other outputs from agricultural production and related processes (transformation, distribution, marketing, recycling and so on). These involve urban and peri-urban actors, communities, methods, places, policies, institutions, systems, ecologies and economies, largely using and regenerating local resources to meet the changing needs of local populations while serving multiple goals and functions (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023). The planning and implementation of efficient, inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban food systems, leveraging connectivity across the rural–urban continuum, can improve access to healthy diets 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 nature and biodiversity loss) and cutting food waste by creating circular systems in which waste is recycled into food production systems.

The concept of a simple rural–urban divide is misleading and does not capture the growing links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas. This increase in connectivity across the rural–urban continuum is key to understanding the functioning of value chains (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023). Local and regional governments have successfully promoted the importance of local and territorial food systems in achieving overall food systems transformation and the SDGs. The emphasis has now shifted to greater facilitation and an acceleration of coherent national and local action. Implementing effective solutions requires agrifood systems governance mechanisms and institutions to cross sectoral and administrative boundaries and rely on subnational and local governments. The characteristics of cities and peri-urban areas vary considerably, so subnational and local governments should engage in planning context-specific urban food systems (UNSCN, 2020; UN-Nutrition, 2023). Local governments are not only fundamental to implementing

essential policies and solutions that make healthy diets available and affordable for all, but to increasing community engagement and empowering citizens (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2023).

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**(d) Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.**

UN-Nutrition is the interagency coordination mechanism that brings together United Nations agencies, programmes and funds at global, regional and country level with a mandate or interest in improving nutrition and, as such, is not an intergovernmental body. Rather, UN-Nutrition aims to maximize the coherence of policies, approaches and positions on nutrition challenges across the United Nations System, enabling the United Nations to work as “One UN for nutrition” and deliver more impactful and efficient support to Members with a view to achieving all of the SDGs.

In his address to the United Nations Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment, the United Nations Secretary-General said:

Governments and businesses must work together to build systems that put people over profit. I call on governments and the food, agricultural, transportation and retail industries to explore new ways to lower the cost and increase the geographic availability of fresh, healthy food for all people.

A strong, common, and trusted United Nations voice on nutrition, together with programmatic alignment and harmonized advocacy on nutrition, are essential to support Members in their national and subnational efforts to implement their shared commitments to end poverty, hunger and malnutrition in all its forms everywhere, combat inequalities within and between countries, and build peaceful societies that leave no one behind.



**(e) Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.**

**Key message 1: Place nutrition at the heart of sustainable development, as it 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 achieving the 2030 Agenda as a whole, and all SDGs need to be explicit about their relationship to nutrition. Action-oriented statements on improving nutrition, not just descriptions of the problem, are essential (UNSCN, 2014; Development Initiatives, 2017).

SDG 2 focuses on “ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture”. 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 ensures that no one is left behind. Healthy diets from sustainable food systems (SDG 2) are the tie that binds environmental sustainability to human health, economic prosperity, equity 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 affects 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 who must search for firewood, as well as indoor pollution – both related to sickness-mediated nutritional compromise (UNSCN, 2014).

At the same time, improved nutrition fuels demand for better infrastructure (transport, irrigation, energy, and information and communications technology), supporting innovation, industrialization and productivity through greater working capacity and increased demand across food systems (SDG 9). Innovations in food systems, 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 (SDG 15) 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 (UNSCN, 2014).

**Key message 2: Adopt a human rights-based approach in the fight against hunger and all forms of malnutrition.**

Access to adequate food is a fundamental human right. Despite this, in recent years, progress on the fight against hunger and malnutrition has been backsliding. 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.

Furthermore, the proportion of the population that cannot afford the lowest-cost nutrient-adequate diet can be as high as 60–80 percent in fragile settings, and the affordability gap (that is, the gap between the lowest cost and what households are able to spend on food) can be very large (more than 50 percent), especially among the poorest households. The cost difference between an energy-sufficient and a nutrient-adequate diet is often higher than in more stable settings, indicating the fragility of local food systems, including low demand for more diverse diets.

Adopting a human rights-based approach to 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. There is an urgent need to accelerate efforts and investments to ensure everyone everywhere can access a healthy diet.

Adopting a human rights-based approach 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 (UNSCN, 2018b).

**Key message 3: Promote, as a matter of priority, the nutrition of women, adolescent girls and children, focusing on the first 1 000 days.**

Malnutrition underlies almost half of all child deaths globally (WHO, 2023), but 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 as adults than their well-nourished peers (De Onis and Branca, 2016). Furthermore, the nutritional status of women and adolescent girls affects their 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, including in the protection and support of breastfeeding, can generate USD 16 in returns for the economy for every USD 1 invested (IFPRI, 2015). It is the best possible investment for building the foundation of a healthy, well-nourished and peaceful society with a capable workforce, able to deliver innovation, productivity and sustainability.

**Key message 4: Increase multisector policymaking, collaboration 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 2030 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 and nature, 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 dialogues 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, environment, water, energy, trade, finance, labour, education, social protection, and women, youth and children – also in collaboration with non-governmental partners. Such multisectoral initiatives should employ an equity lens, empower women and focus on vulnerable populations with a view to 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 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.

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