HLPF 2020 Thematic session:

Ending hunger and achieving food security

Answers to Guiding questions - WHO

1. Which areas and socio-economic groups are especially vulnerable to poor nutrition and food insecurity and what are ways to ensure that food systems transformations leave no one behind?

- Hunger is on the rise in all subregions of Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America. Despite great progress in the last five years, Southern Asia is still the subregion where the prevalence of undernourishment is the highest, at almost 15 percent, followed by Western Asia, where there have been clear signs of continuing deterioration since 2010 and where undernourishment now affects more than 12 percent of the population. (SOFI 2019)
- Not one country is on course to meet all ten of the 2025 global nutrition targets and just 8 of 194 countries are on track to meet four targets. Almost a quarter of all children under 5 years of age are stunted. At the same time, overweight and obesity are increasing rapidly in nearly every country in the world, with no signs of slowing. (GNR 2020)
- Within every country in the world, we see striking inequalities according to location, age, sex, education and wealth – while conflict and other forms of fragility compound the problem. The Global Nutrition Report 2020 finds a strong urban–rural divide, and even larger differences across communities. In children under 5 years of age, wasting can be up to nine times higher in certain communities within countries, four times higher for stunting and three times higher for overweight and obesity. (GNR 2020)
- Children especially from lower socio-economic families in both rural and urban poor - are the most vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurity. The nutritional consequences of food security to children are more immediate and serious.
- From the nutritional point of view, there is no doubt about the importance of proper nutrition to ensure growth and development, especially during childhood, and in adulthood, proper nutrition plays the role of promoting and maintaining health and well-being. Food insecurity, leading to under-nutrition, remains a major public health issue in many low and middle-income countries. In the Western Pacific in particular recent estimates suggest that more than 6 million children under-five in the region chronically undernourished.
- When food availability is limited, children are exposed to nutritional deficiencies and exhibit poor growth conditions, contributing to increased vulnerability to infections and malnutrition.
- A significant proportion of people suffering and dying from foodborne illnesses are children under the age of five. Foodborne disease surveillance systems in many countries are weak, but we know that low-income and vulnerable population groups are of higher risk of foodborne diseases than high-income and resource rich people.
- Policies, programmes, initiatives, practices should be put in place to:
  - promote an enabling environment for sustainable nutrition-sensitive food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition of various food insecurity and nutrition-vulnerable groups of population;
  - strengthen the leadership capacities in food and nutrition, including the competencies in nutrition policies and programmes in middle- and high-level managers and application of systematic evidence generation for nutrition-enhancing budget allocation and investments.
  - improve healthy diets and improve food security and access to health services across these vulnerable populations over time.

- To ensure that healthy and sustainably produced food is the most accessible, affordable and desirable choice for all, sectors must work together to mainstream nutrition into all elements of the food system.
- Implement strong regulatory and policy frameworks to support healthier diets for all at country and community level and across sectors, from production to consumption.
- Optimise agricultural subsidies and increase public investment for producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods.
- Provide support for public transport schemes and shorter supply chains for fresh-food delivery products, particularly to the most nutritionally disadvantaged or harder-to-reach groups.
- Implement, monitor and evaluate evidence-based food policies to support healthy, sustainable and equitable diets, such as fiscal, reformulation, school- and worksite-based, labelling and marketing policies.
- ***Consider holding the food industry accountable for producing and marketing healthier and more sustainable food products through strengthened mechanisms.***
- Strengthen and increase research spending to address major nutrition questions, identify cost effective solutions and stimulate innovation. (GNR, 2020)
- As well, COVID-19 presents challenges to health and human development priorities, social stability, and economic growth; that specific population groups will be hardest hit with repercussions that last much longer than the pandemic; that addressing health and social needs of *everyone* in COVID-19 preparedness & response will contribute equitable impact of the pandemic; and that community engagement can support with the promotion of equity.

2. **What fundamental changes are needed to make our food systems an engine for inclusive growth and contribute to accelerating progress towards ending hunger and achieving food security for all in the Decade of Action?**

- Food systems need to prioritise access for all to safe and healthy diets, sustainably delivered (see the Mid Term Review Foresight Paper).
- Both governments and business must create food systems and environments that deliver affordable, accessible and desirable healthy diets for all. There are opportunities to lead taken by communities, cities and city networks to be scaled up. International action to ensure shared learning and mutual support is vital to tackle this universal problem.
- Increased understanding of the high potential role of sustainable food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition and of necessary systemic changes.

   a) **How could they be designed and implemented to generate synergies and strengthen existing ones with other Goals and Targets?**

- Enhanced policy coherence and collaboration between line sectors (agriculture, health, education, social protection, finance) to work throughout the food system for initiating actions to promote better diets and address malnutrition in all its forms in line with ICN2 outcome documents and Work Programme of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. Agreed strategic priority areas or action, practical entry points, and policy recommendations. Many global and regional organizations have developed policy frameworks that provide a conceptual basis for the development of national policy and practical guidance on inclusive planning processes. These processes are essential for promoting and supporting the partnerships needed at country level for improving food security and nutrition based on their national context.
- Shared knowledge, experiences, good practices in food policy development and strengthened policy capacity of national experts to formulate efficient inter-sectorally based programmes for sustainable school food and nutrition and targeting other nutrition-vulnerable groups.

- Trade-offs between environment, health and economics and further opportunities to enable sustainable healthy diets through the food system need to be identified and addressed . (MTR Foresight Paper)
- Sustainability aspects need to be built in national Food Based Dietary Guidelines

b) What are some of the possible trade-offs from these changes and how can they be mitigated?

- Healthy diets are not affordable to the majority of the world population. Sustainable intensification of certain productions is needed, to reduce prices and increase access to an increasing world population. Environmental limits need to be considered in different world regions. International trade needs to target improved access to healthy diets.

3. It is important to prioritise the health and wellbeing among groups living in vulnerable situations and address health inequities. By promoting cooperation, collaboration and dialogue between multiple sectors (i.e. health, education, labor, agriculture, culture and sports, etc.) it is essential to take approaches which make limited resources go further, avoid duplication and generate synergies between actors and efforts working toward SDGs and targets that go beyond health. **How might COVID-19 facilitate or complicate the implementation of needed food systems changes?**

- COVID19 pandemic is already affecting the entire food system. Restrictions on movement within and across countries can hinder food-related logistic services, disrupt entire food supply chains and affect the availability of food. As the COVID19 crisis unfolds, disruptions in domestic food supply chains and other shocks affecting food production, and loss of incomes and remittances are creating strong tensions and food security risks in many countries. This include Interruption of school meals/food programs with school closures. Impacts of COVID19 have been posingcritical challenges to food production, thus jeopardizing food security for all people, and hitting especially the most vulnerable and the lowest socio economic group. This pandemic put a heavy toll on populations' health, livelihoods, food security and nutrition.
- The COVID crisis demonstrates how vulnerable our food systems are. COVID-19 is not a food security issue as such, but an emergency that has significant impact on food security. The crisis can serve as an opportunity to reflect on how food systems are working and how they can become more resilient to external shocks and disasters, such as COVID-19.
- Multiple forms of overlapping malnutrition require responses that overcome traditional silos and target all forms of malnutrition. Humanitarian and development communities need to build common platforms and establish frameworks and joined-up financing mechanisms to effectively address nutritional needs, for immediate and longer-term impact.

a) Will it aggravate and/or reduce vulnerabilities?

- The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting food systems worldwide and challenging the food security, nutrition and health status of millions of vulnerable populations. It is a global problem requiring a global response.[1] Urgent, pro-active measures are critical and will cost less today, before the growing crisis starts drawing more heavily on limited economic resources. This is doubly the case given growing expectations of a global recession. (SOFI 2020)
- Labor shortages (due to morbidity, movement restrictions, social distancing rules) are starting to impact producers, processors, traders and trucking/logistics companies in food supply chains – particularly for food products that require workers to be in close proximity. At the same time, loss of income and remittances is reducing people's ability to buy food and compensate farmers for their production. The United Nations World Food Programme has warned that an estimated

265 million people could face acute food insecurity by the end of 2020, up from 135 million people before the crisis.[1]

- The poor and vulnerable have been hardest hit by the pandemic; governments should expand and improve emergency food assistance and social protection programs to ensure access to nutritious foods. (SOFI)

- **b) What are the changes in design and implementation of policies affecting food systems which are necessary to prevent and better deal with food security and nutrition impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and pandemics in the future?**

- Food security preparedness plans should be in place at the national and local level.
- Food control systems based on the Codex Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems and other relevant Codex guidelines for food control systems should be put in place in all countries.
- The food industry should install Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles to manage food safety risks and prevent food contamination[2]. (WHO 2020)
- Countries should consider trade and tax policies that keep global trade open and promote the purchasing and consumption of nutritious foods; restrictions on the movement of goods will cause food losses and disrupt production, processing, distribution and sales of diversified, safe and nutritious food. (SOFI)
- Countries need to work together to strengthen cooperation during this pandemic that is affecting all regions of the world. It is important to ensure that policies, such as short-term measures to restrict trade, do not distort global markets.
- Collective action is needed to ensure that markets are well-functioning, and that timely and reliable information on market fundamentals is available to all. This will reduce uncertainty and allow producers, consumers, traders and processors to make informed production and trade decisions.
- The food value chain should be kept alive by focusing on key logistics bottlenecks, and to avoid unnecessary spikes in the cost of food, ensuring the affordability of diversified safe and nutritious food for all. (SOFI)

- c) **What of the current immediate actions we are seeing will contribute to the long-term resilience of food systems?**

- Expand existing safety nets, such as cash transfer programmes, to provide temporary relief for households whose incomes have been impacted and whom otherwise may face challenges in buying food and seeking nutrition-related health services.[3] [4]Safety nets will be particularly important for persons employed in the informal economy, as they are more vulnerable to economic shocks.
- Food distribution programmes from governments to guarantee access to people under lockdown and for children that are not receiving their school meals.

---

[1] World Bank: Food Security and COVID-19 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-and-covid-19)

[2] COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Businesses. https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-and-food-safety-guidance-for-food-businesses

[3] Levy S (2020). Suggestions for the Emergency. UNDP LAC C19 PPS Number 2. UNDP Latin America and the Caribbean – COVID-19 Policy Document Series.
(https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/library/covid-19--policy-papers.html)

[4] World Bank. 2020. "East Asia and Pacific in the Time of COVID-19" East Asia and Pacific Economic Update (April), World Bank, Washington, DC.
(https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33477/9781464815652.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y)

- Social determinants of food insecurity and vulnerability assessments must be systematically integrated into food security strategies and programmes.
- Advocate across sectors for the continued provision of school meals for families reliant on them for adequate nutritional intake, as prolonged absence of these meals can have long-term effects on health and human capital[5].
- Connect farmers to consumers to guarantee access to healthy food.
- Food workers to be considered as frontline workers as well, being protected and able to keep the food supply chain functional, including all the supply chain stakeholders.

4. What knowledge and data gaps need to be filled for better analyzing current successes and failures in food systems and the trade-offs and synergies, across SDGs, in implementing food systems changes to fix these failures?

- Research is needed on how best Food-based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG) could be improved to guide healthy diets as well as include quantifiable recommendations for food groups, which would allow the use of FBDGs to shape agricultural production strategies and plans, and agro- ecological approaches for more diverse food production in support of sustainable agriculture. (SOFI 2020)
- Further research is needed to better understand the most important cost drivers of nutritious food and how the high cost of food that constitute a healthy diet can best be addressed through various policy measures. (SOFI 2020)
- Further investments in integrated data systems are needed, with tracking of indicators on the coverage and quality of essential nutrition actions and developing local capacity to use such information effectively. (MTR Foresight Paper)
- Global institutions could continue to gather data and support development of methods and indicators to better understand trade policy impacts on nutrition. (MTR Foresight Paper)
- The 'nutrition data revolution' is yet to be realized, and improved national data on nutrition indicators is needed. Better tools to measure policy impact on nutrition outcomes are also required, along with more reporting of disaggregated data, which is vital to identify disparities. (MTR Foresight Paper)
- Food safety indicators and better estimates of the global, regional and national burden of foodborne diseases are urgently needed (including source attribution).
- We need more comprehensive subnational data to better understand where burdens are located, and what the direct and underlying causes of malnutrition and failures of food systems are in these localized areas to better target programming and interventions. Lack of data affects our understanding of several contributors to malnutrition.
- Engaging in policy dialogue and coordinated activities with countries and development partners to address food security and nutrition challenges. Instruments include rapid country diagnostics and data-based monitoring instruments.
- The science, knowledge and data gap between local levels and national, regional and global levels must be addressed to strengthen human well-being. Community engagement for health is an essential model to address this gap. Community engagement is a process of developing relationships that enable communities and organizations to work together to address health-related issues. As such, community engagement can bridge the divide between communities and national, regional, and/or global organizations and stakeholders. This will ensure localized knowledge and data is brought to the forefront. Localized knowledge spans the expertise at the community level of available and relevant resources and networks, unique issues and challenges being faced, and appropriate "grounds up" solutions that are relevant and applicable to the local context and people. Through a collaborative

---

[5] WFP (2020). Futures of 370 million children in jeopardy as school closures deprive them of school meals – UNICEF and WFP. Press release of 29 April 2020. Rome : https://www.wfp.org/news/futures-370-million-children-jeopardy-school-closures-deprive-them-school-meals-unicef-and-wfp

relationship, science and disaggregated data at national and regional levels can also support and inform planning and decisions at the local level. Further benefits of community engagement are better reaching and engaging with vulnerable and unreached populations, encouraging buy-in with health promoting and prevention measures, and empowering communities as key actors in health.

•

5. **What partnerships and initiatives are needed to harness synergies and/or reduce trade-offs in food systems?**

   a) **What are the most critical interventions and partnerships needed over next 2 years, 5 years, 10 years?**

   • Over the next 10 years critical partnerships will include those across sectors that shift the focus away from siloed approaches to multisectoral approaches. Countries should update intersectoral policy documents to include all global nutrition targets and translate them into costed operational plans. The food and agriculture, trade and industry sectors should include nutrition objectives and the promotion of healthy diets. Work with the environmental, climate change and biodiversity communities should be intensified in advancing research, policymaking, and metrics. Other sectors, such as the environment, social welfare, planning, finance, trade and industry, need to be more involved. (SG progress report on the Nutrition Decade 2020)

   • In terms of critical initiatives for food systems, greater focus is needed on actions to promote the diversification of crops, increase the production of fruits and vegetables, legumes and pulses, raise production of oils that contribute to healthy diets, create healthy food environments and implement food price policies to support healthy diets. (MTR Foresight Paper; SG report)

   • Governments should scale-up "Double Duty Actions" into their policy response to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms (e.g. implementing the International Code of Breastmilk Substitutes, exclusive breastfeeding promotion, maternal nutrition and antenatal care programmes, adapted school feeding programmes, food and agriculture policies that support a safe and continuous production of food and healthy diets, and universal health coverage).

   b) **Can these be scaled up or adjusted to fit other contexts?**

   They need to be adjusted to local contexts.

   c) **How can private sector support investments for sustainable agriculture production and supply reduce food insecurity?**

   • The private sector should commit to producing food in a sustainable way by reducing the use of pesticides, antimicrobials and other chemicals that can have a negative impact on environment and trigger the development of resistant bacteria and/or insects, respectively. In addition, the private sector should ensure a correct usage and treatment of water to reduce contaminated effluents that only aggravates the environmental contamination problem. [6]

   • Public investment should trigger private investments to increase the availability and affordability of healthy diets from sustainable food systems.

   • Multi sectoral and multi stakeholder partnerships have gained prominence as part of a new approach to food security and nutrition governance in various countries such as in Western Pacific. Leverage the potential of food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition in a

---

[6]

multi-sectorial and multi stakeholder collaborative and coherent manner. It is important to note that context should inform the national partnership.