



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-ninth Session

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FAO's Work in Nutrition

Executive Summary

At the 28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) in 2022, FAO submitted an information document providing an update on the implementation of the *Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition*, which highlighted the next steps for FAO's work on nutrition, namely: (i) creating an enabling environment to fulfil its mission in nutrition, including action planning that takes into consideration global and regional contexts; (ii) maintaining attention on the critical role of MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition, while leveraging opportunities offered by the *four betters*; and (iii) holding itself accountable to its efforts to fulfil its mission in nutrition.

This document provides an update on the progress made on these three steps through FAO's work in nutrition at both country and global levels. Advancements are reported on: enhancing availability, access and utilization of, and setting standards for, diet-related data to inform decision-making and actions in countries; increasing capacities and developing tools related to nutrition; generating guidance on good practices on nutrition-related topics; and on partnerships and collaborations that can substantially increase investments and actions in support of enabling healthy diets. FAO is also holding itself to account for commitments related to its work on nutrition through continual improvements in its monitoring and reporting capacities and approaches.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- a) *provide general guidance* on the needed actions and modalities to further increase capacity on nutrition-related work at country level, with the aim to scale up context-specific policy and technical assistance;
- b) *provide guidance* on opportunities and methods to advance the agenda of nutrition for governments in support of accelerating policies and actions with impact across agrifood systems to enable healthy diets for all; and
- c) *provide guidance* on format options that could be considered for the proposed dialogues at the end of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) to reflect on the way forward to continue advancing nutrition beyond 2025.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. In addition to being one of the *four betters* of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, nutrition, along with climate change and biodiversity, is considered a key technical theme of a cross-cutting nature.¹ Nutrition has a dedicated cross-organizational strategy requested by the FAO Governing Bodies with accountability to Members. The *Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition* was welcomed at the 130th Session of the Programme Committee in 2021 and endorsed at the 166th Session of the Council in 2021.^{2,3}
2. At the 28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG 28), an information document as update on the implementation of the *Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition*⁴ was provided highlighting FAO's follow up steps:
 - a) creating an enabling environment to fulfil its mission in nutrition, including action planning that takes into consideration global and regional contexts;
 - b) maintaining attention on the critical role of MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition, while leveraging opportunities offered by the *four betters*; and
 - c) holding itself accountable to its efforts to fulfil its mission in nutrition.
3. In 2023, FAO completed the first biennium of implementing its *Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition* and demonstrated advancement in all three above-mentioned steps. Some examples of advancing the first two steps are included in Sections II and III of the present report, while the third step is addressed in Section IV.

II. FAO's work in nutrition at country level

4. Recalling the Report of the 27th Session of COAG, held in 2020, calling for FAO to support Members in the development and implementation of policy on nutrition and food safety at national and regional levels, as appropriate,⁵ FAO has implemented work on nutrition in all regions and subregions focusing on contextual priorities. Based on the internal FAO Representations Country Annual Report monitoring, in 2023, more than 77 percent of all FAO Country Offices reported implementing relevant activities,⁶ aiming to contribute to healthy diets from efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems through a variety of mechanisms. These can be grouped into the following three categories:

A. Enhancing availability, access and utilization of data to inform actions in countries

- a) In 2023, FAO supported 136 countries with generating, collating, understanding, and using data and metrics on diets, food composition, food safety, food security and agrifood systems, which led in 107 countries to the integration of diet-related data analysis into UN Common Country Analyses.
- b) Furthermore, 78 percent (113) of Country Offices reported their support to host governments to draw on knowledge products on enabling healthy diets, and 77 percent (112) confirmed the use of knowledge products by host governments to analyze synergies and trade-offs associated with agrifood systems.

¹ C 2021/7, para 72 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/4a3e64b5-f107-4652-8b16-5130b5af957b/content>

² PC 130/5 Rev.1 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a76ef638-92fe-45d2-b452-35f8e0f13f76/content>

³ CL 166/REP <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c65f0dab-e4a8-4cc8-a642-9fc9bc4656f8/content>

⁴ COAG/2022/INF/5 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/965f32d8-e2b7-47c2-b506-1b63e4bf989a/content>

⁵ C/2021/21, Report of the 27th Session of COAG <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/36116b93-6090-49b8-8847-2ff95ef3bf75/content>

⁶ FAO. 2023. *FAO Country Annual Report, CARSTAT 2023* [internal document].

- c) FAO also helped address the food composition data gap and is currently supporting the update of national Food Composition Tables for Bangladesh and Ethiopia to ensure they are aligned with international quality standards and guidelines.
- d) The *50x2030 Initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap*⁷ is a global programme jointly implemented by FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, aiming to support countries in the production of timely and high-quality agricultural survey data for evidence-based decision-making. In addition, FAO has recently proposed three partner countries, namely Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the United Republic of Tanzania, to integrate an additional module on dietary diversity allowing its measurement among women using the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) indicator in agricultural households. Furthermore, FAO is developing country capacity to collect, analyse, and interpret dietary diversity data for planning and programme purposes.

B. Facilitating dialogue and providing direct assistance to enhance actions to enable healthy diets appropriate to unique country contexts, as part of regular country reporting

- a) In 2023, FAO also provided legal, normative, policy and technical assistance to 125 countries on enabling healthy diets and supported the development and implementation of dietary guidelines in 57 countries.
- b) FAO has engaged with strategic coordination mechanisms for nutrition in 117 countries advocating for political commitment, governance, and investment in healthy diets, nutrition, and agrifood systems. FAO Country Offices reported engagements in 405 national nutrition governance platforms, such as Food Security Clusters, Nutrition Clusters, national platforms, the Scaling-Up Nutrition Movement, parliamentary alliances for nutrition and others.

C. Supporting regions and countries and increasing capacities on nutrition

5. COAG has previously called for FAO to support Members in the development and implementation of policy on nutrition and noted the need for the establishment of nutrition units in FAO Country Offices, and within existing resources.⁸ There is still an identified capacity gap at Country Office level with more than 50 percent of Country Offices reporting their need for more capacity to realize their ambition for nutrition. In addition, various actions are on-going to enhance supporting regions and countries and increasing capacities on nutrition, such as:

- a) launching an internal introductory e-learning course on FAO's approach to nutrition for all FAO employees, which complements the existing e-learning courses that support development of capacities related to FAO's work in nutrition,⁹ including on MDD-W, agrifood systems pathways to healthy diets, nutrition education, nutrition-sensitive value chains, food loss and waste, and school food and nutrition;
- b) growing the internal Technical Network on Nutrition (TNN), which now has more than 1100 participants;
- c) strengthening the TNN Intranet site and identifying nutrition focal points in the FAO's Country Office Information Network to improve visibility and connection among those working across FAO; and
- d) leveraging and enhancing corporate systems, particularly improving the use of the FAO Nutrition marker in the FAO Field Programme Management Information System (FPMIS), for monitoring progress of FAO's work in nutrition.

⁷ Data-Smart Agriculture Partnership - *The 50x2030 Initiative*. [Cited 2 May 2024]. <https://www.50x2030.org>

⁸ C/2021/21, para 37 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/36116b93-6090-49b8-8847-2ff95ef3bf75/content>

⁹ Nutrition capacity development. In: *FAO*. [Cited 2 May 2024]. <https://www.fao.org/nutrition/capacity-development/en>

III. FAO's work in nutrition at global level

6. Recalling that COAG 27 “noted with satisfaction [...] its articulation of the central role of healthy diets to be achieved through a food system approach”¹⁰, FAO’s communications, normative work, technical and global engagement work maintains attention on the Organization’s work in nutrition, and advances the potential for agrifood systems actions to enable healthy diets. Examples include:

7. Partnerships and collaborations that can substantially increase investments and actions in support of enabling healthy diets and resilient agrifood systems in multiple contexts, such as:

- a) FAO, in partnership with the Department of State of the United States of America, and the African Union, launched the *Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS)* in January 2023,¹¹ which aims to foster more resilient agrifood systems by increasing investments and actions to enhance the production of nutritious indigenous and traditional crops and build healthy soils. VACS will have an initial focus on the African continent, whereby FAO’s engagement will offer Members and development partners in Africa an innovative way to simultaneously support resilient agrifood systems while enabling healthy diets.
- b) In support to the UN Global Action Plan on Child Wasting,¹² FAO launched the *Child wasting prevention action plan (2023–2024)*,¹³ advancing prevention efforts in strengthening food systems to enable healthy diets for children and all.
- c) The UN General Assembly resolution 70/259¹⁴ proclaimed the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (Nutrition Decade) for the period 2016-2025 under the normative framework of the Second International Conference on Nutrition to accelerate global efforts and foster cross-sectoral collaboration towards ending all forms of malnutrition. The Nutrition Decade is jointly convened by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO), and its first action area is on *sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets*. As the end of the Nutrition Decade is approaching, and the UN General Assembly noted the intention of convening open and inclusive informal dialogues towards the end of the Decade,¹⁵ the FAO Programme Committee at its 135th Session in March 2023¹⁶ encouraged such dialogues for reflection on global progress, challenges encountered and identification of the potential way forward beyond 2025.
- d) FAO is also playing a critical role in initiatives that forge new alliances to bridge the *four betters* to support Members to reach multiple national priorities simultaneously, such as the global flagship *Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition* of the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Moreover, FAO is leading and participating in numerous Coalitions for Action created under the auspices of the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and is the host for the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, on behalf of the UN system. FAO has mobilized partners to identify and address policy and investments gaps to support countries in achieving sustainable solutions to food crises. It also hosted the UNFSS +2 Stocktaking Moment in 2023.

8. Setting standards for and enabling better access to diet-related data for decision making, included various activities, such as:

¹⁰ C/2021/21, para 36 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/36116b93-6090-49b8-8847-2ff95ef3bf75/content>

¹¹ PC 137/INF/3 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0c8e25e6-efdc-4a53-a30b-1b4df36942ff/content>

¹² Global Action Plan for Child Wasting. [Cited 2 May 2024]. <https://www.childwasting.org>

¹³ FAO. 2022. *Enhancing nutrition in emergency and resilience agriculture responses to prevent child wasting: FAO’s child wasting prevention action plan (2023–2024)*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/309b03da-5f44-486a-bbed-9cd42edfe184>

¹⁴ A/RES/70/259, <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/259>

¹⁵ A/74/794, para 99, <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/794>

¹⁶ CL 172/8, para 17d, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/bfd44a58-f138-43a6-97b3-76dda1cbe883/content>

- a) Recognizing the importance of diets for health and the lack of consensus on how to measure and monitor healthy diets at scale, FAO, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and WHO joined forces to chart a way forward via the *Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative* (HDMI).¹⁷ The joint mission of HDMI is *to enable national and global decision-makers and stakeholders to monitor and achieve healthy diets for people and the planet*. HDMI is committed to building consensus with national and global stakeholders to guide the generation of actionable, fit-for-purpose dietary data and statistics that can be used to inform evidence-based approaches, policies and programmes. HDMI aims to achieve this by raising awareness, developing guidance for healthy diets monitoring, implementing a prioritized research agenda, and facilitating the uptake and use of metrics for assessing and monitoring diets.
- b) The MDD-W indicator is one of the metrics being assessed by the HDMI. MDD-W reflects the proportion of non-pregnant women who consumed foods from at least five out of ten defined food groups in the previous 24 hours, and the indicator is a proxy for better micronutrient intakes in the population. FAO led the validation studies of the MDD-W indicator and its data collection methods, has published (updated) global guidance on how to collect, analyse, and interpret MDD-W, and developed an interactive e-learning course on MDD-W to support uptake and capacity development on MDD-W.¹⁸
- c) FAO and UNICEF, in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and other UN Agencies, have supported UN Member States to prepare and submit a proposal to include the *prevalence of minimum dietary diversity* among women and children as a future Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 indicator aiming to close an important data gap in the final stretch of the SDGs and help to complete the picture on progress towards achieving SDG 2. FAO is proposed as the custodian agency for MDD-W. The proposal requests the consideration of this indicator during the *2025 Comprehensive Review of SDG indicators*. Moreover, including an indicator on populations’ diets can help inform the actions needed to achieve Zero Hunger, and also ensure the good nutrition, health and development of populations on which all SDGs rely.
- d) Data on the consumption and composition of foods are generally lacking, especially in low- and middle-income countries. To help address data gaps, the Organization is currently leading several important initiatives, such as:
 - i. FAO gathers and publishes data from individual-level quantitative dietary intake surveys in the *FAO/WHO Global Individual Food Consumption Data Tool* (FAO/WHO GIFT), which currently includes 54 datasets from 33 countries, providing detailed information on food consumption that can be used by a wide range of stakeholders to inform policies and programmes.¹⁹
 - ii. The *FAOSTAT Food and Diet Domain* was launched by FAO in 2024 as the first centralized location for sharing of statistics on all types of dietary data. The Domain provides statistics on energy and nutrient availability based on the FAO Supply Utilization Accounts (SUA); apparent intake based on Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys; intake based on individual-level dietary intake surveys; and statistics related to the MDD-W indicator.²⁰
 - iii. FAO published the *Global nutrient conversion table* for the SUA, which includes a global food composition dataset of energy, nutrient values and edible portion coefficients developed to generate statistics based on food supply data for 186 countries and

¹⁷ WHO. 2024. *Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative* (HDMI). <https://www.who.int/groups/who-unicef-technical-expert-advisory-group-on-nutrition-monitoring/healthy-diets-monitoring-initiative>

¹⁸ FAO. 2024. *Nutrition The Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) indicator*.

<https://www.fao.org/nutrition/assessment/tools/minimum-dietary-diversity-women/en>

¹⁹ FAO/WHO Global Individual Food Consumption Data Tool. <https://www.fao.org/gift-individual-food-consumption/en>

²⁰ FAO. 2024. Food and diet. Statistics on dietary data. <https://www.fao.org/statistics/highlights-archive/highlights-detail/new-data-on-food-and-diet-released-on-faostat/en>

territories. The SUA provide a picture of the food availability from the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors in a given country in a given calendar year. They refer to individual products and their quantities, and cover around 500 food items, of which 90 percent correspond to crops and livestock food products and 10 percent to fisheries and aquaculture products.²¹

- iv. FAO is currently updating the FAO/INFOODS (*International Network of Food Data Systems*) global food composition database for fish and shellfish (published in 2016), to expand the coverage of species not included in the current version yet.

9. Development and mobilization of tools and technical support to embed actions in support of improving nutrition across FAO's portfolio, including:

- a) FAO has developed step-by-step guidance to assist countries to develop, implement and use food systems-based dietary guidelines to address their nutritional challenges and priorities while simultaneously contributing to the transformation of agrifood systems towards sociocultural and environmental sustainability. By widening the evidence base beyond the relationship between diets and health, employing a targeted agrifood systems analysis and engaging sectors and actors throughout the agrifood systems, the new approach can propel coordinated actions, interventions and policies in food supply, food environment and consumer practices that lead to the realization of healthy diets for all.²²
- b) FAO has developed a new modelling methodology that can provide policy relevant inputs related to fiscal policies for agriculture and trade that simultaneously optimize agriculture outcomes and contextually appropriate dietary patterns. The approach has been developed in close collaboration with local experts in Ethiopia and will be further developed and tested in two additional countries in 2024.
- c) The *Agrifood Systems Pathways to Healthy Diets* approach,²³ championed by FAO, focuses on programme design and operations to enhance access to nutritious foods while mitigating vulnerability and addressing environmental challenges. This entails prioritizing pathways within agrifood systems, considering costs, conducting reviews, promoting evidence-based approaches for replication, engaging decision-makers, supporting capacity development, and integrating nutrition-sensitive practices throughout agrifood systems.
- d) FAO supports and empowers governments to leverage food markets to implement policies and guidelines to ensure that diverse, safe and nutritious foods are consistently available in both public and private markets, enhancing profitability and efficiency. This contributes to the national commitments pledged in various high-level processes, such as the National Pathways to sustainable food systems, following the UNFSS in 2021. Specifically, FAO supports governments by:
 - i. Developing good practice guidance on how to support agrifood micro small and medium enterprises to increase the availability of nutritious food in public and private markets in a sustainable and profitable way with a nutrition-sensitive value chain approach.
 - ii. Promoting and supporting the implementation of sustainable public food procurement and home-grown school feeding policies and programmes to enhance the accessibility of nutritious food and trigger agrifood systems transformation.
 - iii. Providing technical inputs and contributing to the organization of the World Pulses Day, held on 10 February 2024, under the theme *Pulses: nourishing soils and people*. This presented a unique opportunity to raise public awareness about pulses and the

²¹ Grande, F., Ueda, Y., Masangwi, S. & Holmes, B. 2024. *Global nutrient conversion table for FAO supply utilization accounts*. Rome, FAO <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/e9cfc9a2-f8ba-40b1-9c46-e6f83cba914d>

²² FAO. 2024. *Food systems-based dietary guidelines: an overview*. Rome <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/48b09e6f-bfee-4b80-a2d5-c24440c6d4a8>

²³ FAO elearning academy. 2023. Course: *Agrifood system pathways to healthy diets: A stepwise approach*. <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=976>

- fundamental role they play in the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.
- iv. Supporting the implementation of the International Year of Millets in 2023. FAO compiled and shared food composition data and documentation for different species of millets, reviewed and provided inputs in communication materials referring to nutrition and contributed to the organization of multiple events.
 - v. 2024 was declared the International Year of Camelids (IYC), which are particularly important for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. FAO will support the IYC with important inputs and will share relevant food composition data to raise awareness of the nutritional benefits of milk and meat from camelids.
 - vi. For the first observance of the International Day of Potato on 30 May 2024, FAO has compiled and shared food composition data for different species of potato, and provided inputs to communication materials referring to nutrition and the role potatoes play in the consumption of healthy diets.
10. Generating good practice and guidance on nutrition, for which consensus building and data and evidence reviews are required, including:
- a) Responding to the current high visibility of healthy diets, yet mixed messages that exist, particularly in the public media about what constitutes a healthy diet, FAO is working closely with WHO to develop a joint statement on the core principles of healthy diets.
 - b) Responding to the need to recognize and proactively address the potential trade-offs of actions to address climate change and achieve SDG2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold, FAO brought forward principles of healthy diets and experience in the actions needed to address them in the Roadmap.²⁴
 - c) Similarly, over the past years, there has been a proliferation of messaging in many countries globally about the opportunities presented by animal source foods (ASF) alternatives. These alternatives are referred to by a variety of names and include a variety of product types. To date, there has been no robust synthesis of the current state of evidence related to the potential risks and benefits of such products across the diverse potential areas of impact including nutrition and health, food safety, environment and socioeconomic considerations. To address this gap, FAO has formed an internal Task Force and commissioned a series of evidence reviews to inform of the Organization's position on the current state of ASF alternatives.
 - d) FAO continued preparing the *Global Assessment of the contribution of livestock to food security, sustainable agrifood systems, improved nutrition and the consumption of healthy diets*, which was requested by COAG 27²⁵ and consists of four component documents. Component one was published in 2023²⁶ and components two and three are underway.²⁷

²⁴ FAO. 2023. *Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5 °C threshold: A global roadmap, Part 1 – How agrifood systems transformation through accelerated climate actions will help achieving food security and nutrition, today and tomorrow*, In brief. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/b86cd543-e8ca-4e95-b5d2-06ea6af23842>

²⁵ C/2021/21, para 14 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/36116b93-6090-49b8-8847-2ff95ef3bf75/content>

²⁶ FAO. 2023. *Contribution of terrestrial animal source food to healthy diets for improved nutrition and health outcomes – An evidence and policy overview on the state of knowledge and gaps*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc3912en>

²⁷ FAO. 2024. Committee on Agriculture (COAG); Sub-Committee on Livestock. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. Rome. Cited 25 June 2024; COAG:L1/2024/2 <https://www.fao.org/coag-livestock/sub-committee-on-livestock/second-session/discussion-documents/en/>

IV. Way forward

11. Agrifood systems transformation is very high on the agenda in many if not most countries, and there is still much work to be done to ensure that enabling the consumption of healthy diets for everyone everywhere is an essential outcome of this transformation.

12. Many of the actions noted above are part of efforts to elevate healthy diets as part of the agenda of nutrition for governments and other stakeholders. But significantly more effort is still needed to garner the commitment and inform about effective actions that can achieve dual outcomes for agrifood systems' resilience, profitability and enabling access to healthy diets. Guidance is sought from COAG on opportunities and methods to advance this agenda.

13. FAO recognizes that there are still important capacity and resource gaps that limit the scope and scale of FAO's nutrition-related actions, particularly at country level. Several concrete actions have been undertaken to address this within existing resources, for which further guidance from COAG on additional needed actions is welcome.

14. FAO has worked to strengthen mechanisms for monitoring outcomes from all Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), including those of *better nutrition*. In the first biennium of the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, FAO has strengthened its systems for tracking progress towards nutrition-related commitments and undertaken several actions to inform about their further improvement.

15. Moreover, FAO is tracking progress towards its commitments made at the 2021 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G). In anticipation of the 2025 N4G, FAO recognizes that additional actions will be required to meet those targets. Many of the actions noted in this report can contribute in this regard, but further guidance is needed to expand the scope and scale of nutrition-sensitive actions within FAO's portfolio to reach its 2021 N4G commitments.

16. Recalling that the current *Vision and Strategy for Nutrition* comes to an end in 2025, FAO will update the Strategy in 2024-25, ensuring alignment and complementarity to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and addressing many of the opportunities identified.