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United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025: Opportunities for agriculture to contribute to healthy diets and improved nutrition

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COAG 26

I. Background to the Decade of Nutrition

1. On 1 April 2016, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted resolution 70/259¹ through which it proclaimed 2016-2025 the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (“Decade”²). The proclamation of the Decade was recommended at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), which was co-hosted in November 2014 by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) and at which the Rome Declaration on Nutrition³, laying down ten broad policy commitments, and its companion Framework for Action, setting out sixty recommended actions⁴, were adopted.
2. The UN General Assembly acknowledged in 2015 the ICN2 commitments by including in the 2030 Agenda a specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” (SDG 2), as well as embedding nutrition-related concerns in the other SDGs.
3. In resolution 70/259, the UN General Assembly also mandated FAO and WHO to: (i) co-lead the implementation of the Decade, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); (ii) cooperatively develop a work programme for the Decade, using coordination mechanisms such as the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), in consultation with other international and regional organizations and platforms; and (iii) produce biennial reports for use by the UN Secretary-General to inform the UN General Assembly about the Decade’s implementation.
4. The Work Programme of the Decade⁵ was drawn up through an inclusive and collaborative process, which included four face-to-face discussions with Members. The Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) and the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM) for relations with CFS actively participated in two online consultations.
5. The Decade provides all stakeholders with a unique time-bound opportunity to strengthen joint efforts to implement the ICN2 commitments and the nutrition-related SDGs.
6. The first progress report on the Decade was released⁶ in 2018 and was conveyed by the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly during its Seventy-second session.

II. Means of implementation of the Decade of Action on Nutrition

7. The Work Programme of the Decade embraces six inter-connected and cross-cutting thematic action areas, based on the ICN2 recommendations and in line with the SDGs, namely:
 - a) Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets;
 - b) Aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions;
 - c) Social protection and nutrition education;
 - d) Trade and investment for improved nutrition;
 - e) Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages;
 - f) Strengthened governance and accountability for nutrition.

¹ A/RES/70/259 - <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/259>

² <https://www.un.org/nutrition/home>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bs726e.pdf>

⁶ <http://undocs.org/A/72/829>

8. The means of implementation of the Decade through its Work Programme include:
- a) the submission by Member States, to FAO and WHO, of their ICN2 Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) commitments for action, in the context of national nutrition and nutrition-related policies, set out in dialogue with a wide range of relevant stakeholders;
 - b) the convening of action networks, for example informal coalitions of countries that focus on a specific nutrition-related action area and aim to strengthen collaboration on nutrition action;
 - c) the convening of fora for planning, sharing knowledge, recognizing successes, voicing challenges and promoting collaboration among relevant stakeholders;
 - d) the mobilization of financial resources to support implementation of national policies and programmes.
9. During the 70th World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2017, Brazil and Ecuador became the first two countries that made ambitious, concrete commitments for action as part of the Decade.⁷ In November 2017, commitments made in connection with the Decade at the Global Nutrition Summit held in Milan, Italy, included domestic funding by countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, India, Madagascar, the Niger, Nigeria and Zambia, among others.⁸
10. In December 2016, FAO and WHO co-hosted in Rome, under the umbrella of the Decade, the International Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition.⁹ The symposium aimed to increase awareness of today's urgent food and nutrition challenges, and to create a forum to discuss strategies for regulation and reform, in the aftermath of the ICN2 and under the umbrella of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025. Nine parallel sessions comprising expert presentations and country case studies were organized under three subthemes: Supply-side measures for diversifying food production and for increasing availability and affordability of nutritious foods for healthy diets; Demand-side policies and measures for increasing access and empowering consumers to choose healthy diets; and Measures to strengthen accountability, resilience and equity within food systems.
11. In addition, five follow-up Regional Symposia¹⁰ took stock of the regional dimensions and challenges of sustainable food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition; shared key features of food systems in the respective regions, and how these influence dietary patterns; identified regional policy processes and experiences for tackling nutrition through a food systems approach; and triggered the development of policy actions in line with the ICN2 Framework for Action and the Decade's Work Programme.

⁷ <https://extranet.who.int/nutrition/gina/en/commitments/summary>.

⁸ <https://nutritionforgrowth.org/press-release-global-nutrition-summit-2017-milan/>.

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/sustainable-food-systems-nutrition-symposium/en/>;
<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/I9025EN>.

¹⁰ For Latin America and the Caribbean (San Salvador, 5-7 September 2017), for Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok 10-11 November 2017), for Africa (Abidjan, 16-17 November 2017), for Europe and Central Asia (Budapest, 4-5 December 2017) and for the Near East and North Africa (Muscat, 11-12 December 2017); <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/sustainable-food-systems-nutrition-symposium/regional-symposia/en/>.

III. Contribution of Agriculture to healthy diets

12. Poor dietary habits are the second-leading risk factor for global deaths and global disease burden.¹¹ The 2017 Global Nutrition Report shows that 88 percent of countries face a serious burden from two or more forms of malnutrition.¹² Thus, the world is off track to reach the global targets on nutrition. In many of today's food systems, nutritious foods that constitute a healthy diet are not available or affordable for many people.

13. For the world to meet the ICN2 commitments, the 2025 WHA global nutrition targets¹³, the global diet-related NCD targets¹⁴, and the nutrition-relevant targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, prioritized and accelerated action-oriented efforts within the Decade are needed.

14. At ICN2, Member States committed in the Rome Declaration on Nutrition to "enhance sustainable food systems by developing coherent public policies from production to consumption and across relevant sectors to provide year-round access to food that meets people's nutrition needs and promote safe and diversified healthy diets".¹⁵

15. Overall, both the International Symposium and the five Regional Symposia helped to raise awareness, build consensus and illustrate practical examples for using a food systems approach, including through the agriculture sector, to improve nutrition. For example:

- a) during the Regional Symposium for Latin America and the Caribbean, an example of a National Programme for the Reduction of Food Loss and Waste was presented¹⁶ and experiences with agroecological production and distribution for healthy diets were showcased¹⁷;
- b) during the Regional Symposium for Asia and the Pacific, experiences with enhancing nutrition for upland farming families were shared and the "Leveraging agriculture for nutrition in South Asia (LANSA)" project was presented, which focuses on increasing availability of nutrient-dense cereals and pulses by enhancing production at the farm level and improving diet diversity through on-farm crop diversification;¹⁸
- c) during the Regional Symposium for Africa, presentations were given on, e.g., the role of underutilized nutritious food sources such as non-wood forest resources in the food systems of Africa, programs with smallholder farmers to create a sustainable and affordable supply of animal source foods for improved diets across the African continent and on measures to ensure multisectoral coordination and regulation of the food supply chain to ensure approved systems for the provision of safe and nutritious food;¹⁹

¹¹ Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 84 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990-2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32366-8.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(17)32366-8.pdf).

¹² http://165.227.233.32/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Report_2017-2.pdf.

¹³ <http://www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.who.int/nmh/ncd-tools/definition-targets/en/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>.

¹⁶ <https://www.slideshare.net/ExternalEvents/presentacin-de-la-experiencia-del-programa-regional-de-prdidias-y-desperdicios-de-alimentos-de-argentina/1>.

¹⁷ <https://www.slideshare.net/ExternalEvents/presentacin-de-la-experiencia-sobre-produccin-y-distribucin-agroecologica-para-una-alimentacin-sana-y-soberana-en-los-andes-de-venezuela/1>.

¹⁸ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bt729e.pdf>.

¹⁹ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/raf/uploads/files/Nutrition_Symposium_AbidjanNov2017_-_Final_-_Final_Act.pdf.

- d) during the Regional Symposium for Europe and Central Asia, the soil geochemical aspects of nutrition-friendly agriculture in Central Asia were addressed, as well as approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems in Europe and Central Asia;²⁰
- e) during the Regional Symposium for the Near East and North Africa, highlighted topics included sustainable food systems and a sustainable Arab diet for mitigating natural resources scarcity.²¹

16. The agriculture and the food sectors play a major role in nourishing people by increasing the availability of, and access to, diverse, safe, nutritious foods that contribute to healthy diets. Agricultural programmes and investments can strengthen their impact on nutrition if they, for instance, incorporate explicit nutrition objectives and indicators in their design, maintain or improve the natural resource base, facilitate production diversification, and increase the production of nutrient-dense crops and small-scale livestock.²²

IV. Country-led action networks under the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition

17. The Decade encourages and supports countries to strengthen collaboration on nutrition action by establishing Action Networks. Led and coordinated by one country or several countries, these Action Networks allow countries to exchange knowledge and good practices, illustrate successes and challenges, and provide mutual support to accelerate progress in specific areas, with the final objective of improving food systems, diets and nutrition for all through the establishment of policies and legislation.

18. There is no limit to the number of countries that can join the Action Network. Members of the Action Network represent ministries or other national public institutions covering nutrition-related areas of work. Membership is open to more than one ministry or public institution from each participating country to guarantee the multisectoral engagement necessary to integrate and sustain action. In becoming members, countries commit to participate actively in Action Network activities, including by suggesting points of action and supporting implementation.

19. Norway announced, at the Ocean Conference in June 2017, the establishment of a Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition²³, under the umbrella of the Decade and as a direct follow-up to the SDGs. The first meeting of this Global Action Network took place in Rome on 5 July 2018. Two additional regional networks were announced at the Global Conference on Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) held in Montevideo, Uruguay, in October 2017²⁴: the Action Network for the Americas on Healthy Food Environments, led by Chile, and the Action Network for Ending Childhood Obesity in the Pacific, hosted by Fiji. Brazil has proposed to lead five action networks: 1) to promote food-based dietary guidelines for the prevention of obesity and reduction of NCDs (co-chair: Uruguay); 2) to reduce sodium consumption in order to prevent and control cardiovascular diseases (co-chairs: Costa Rica and Colombia); 3) on food and nutrition security governance; 4) on public purchasing of family farming-produced food; and 5) sustainable school feeding. France and Australia are joining efforts to lead a network on nutrition labelling.

²⁰ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2017/FNsymp/Programme_en.pdf.

²¹ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/rne/img/docs/Regional-Symposium-Oman-Agenda-EN.pdf.

²² <http://www.fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes/toolkit/en/>.

²³ <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/?id=19383>.

²⁴ <http://www.who.int/conferences/global-ncd-conference/montevideo-report.pdf>.

20. As a follow-up to the International Year of Pulses in 2016, member countries are encouraged to establish an “action network on pulses” to share among themselves their experiences gained, challenges faced or lessons learnt in, for instance: (i) including pulses in multicropping systems; (ii) addressing trade policies concerning pulses; or (iii) taking policy measures to increase national production and consumption of pulses.

21. In addition, member countries are encouraged to establish an "action network on fruits and vegetables" with the aim to increase their availability all year round to the entire population at an affordable price. This network can highlight the critical role fruits and vegetables can play in ensuring food security and nutrition, share knowledge and lessons learnt, for example, by introducing incentives to increase fruit and vegetable production, improving market level efficiencies, promoting investments in storage facilities at market places or reducing food loss and waste through packaging.

22. Climate variability and exposure to more frequent and intense climate extremes negatively affect rural incomes and access to food as agricultural production falls. Additionally, evidence shows that climate variability affects micronutrient content of crops.²⁵ This may compromise the quality of the food consumed and the diversity of the diets.²⁶ Member countries may consider the establishment of an "action network on climate resilience for improved nutrition" to share knowledge and lessons learnt with implementing disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation policies and programmes that are also nutrition sensitive to strengthen the resilience of people’s livelihoods and food systems climate effects.

²⁵ https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/F9D843CAD8E1153C64519D918F575CE1/S0029665115000026a.pdf/droughtresistant_cereals_impact_on_water_sustainability_and_nutritional_quality.pdf.

²⁶ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5128e.pdf>.