

INTRODUCING THE POLICY BRIEF “SCALING UP NUTRITION: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION¹”

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Background: The burden of under-nutrition

The millions of our world’s people who have experienced under-nutrition early in life face many challenges as they grow up. They encounter increased risks of illness and death when young, experience difficulties at school and are often not able to make a full contribution to the social and economic development of their households, communities and nations when they become adults.

Why is this? Children who are under-nourished early in life face two particular disadvantages when compared to the well-nourished. First - they are more likely to die (about three million of the nine million deaths of children under five every year are linked to under-nutrition). Second - if they survive they have a higher risk of life-long mental and physical handicap. Their under-nutrition is a clear indicator of the difficult social and economic conditions under which they live and - in particular - of their inability to access and utilize the food they need at the times they need it.

What is meant by under-nutrition? Under-nourished children grow less than those who are well-nourished – and when they are a lot shorter, they are referred to as stunted. The under-nourished also show signs of specific nutrient deficiencies. Under-nutrition is more common when household income is low, and is associated, within households, with chronic food shortage, monotonous diets lacking in diversity, high rates of infectious diseases and inappropriate infant feeding and care (such as early cessation of breast-feeding) due to lack of knowledge. To tackle these factors households depend on cash and mothers’ time. If mothers face heavy demands on their time - to earn an income or tend the family farm (as often happens in poor households) - few hours remain for supporting children’s nutritional health.

The physical signs of under-nutrition are most likely to be seen in the hundreds of millions of households most at risk of food insecurity. So - if development programmes are well designed and implemented in ways that address the community-level drivers of under-nutrition they will

¹ *This policy brief has been prepared as a public good. There are no proprietary rights, and it may be used in part or in whole, adapted or modified without citation or attribution. It is available to all who wish to advance the cause of human well being through improved nutrition. It is the product of a broad partnership and an intensive program of work that included a series of face to face consultations hosted by the Center for Global Development, the European Commission, the International Conference on Nutrition, the Standing Committee on Nutrition, USAID, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. It is a consensus document, based on the thinking and experience of the many individuals and institutions who participated in the process. This collective effort includes developing countries, academic and research institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, bilateral development agencies, United Nations specialized agencies -- FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO -- and the World Bank. It has been assisted by generous financial support provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Japan, UNICEF and the World Bank.*

result in better growth and well being of children, improvements in their longer term prospects, and nutritional gains for all family members. This multi-pronged *nutrition-sensitive* approach to development is **the** route to sustained reductions in under-nutrition.

One key element of *nutrition-sensitive* development is to dramatically reduce the immediate and long-term effects of child under-nutrition through a limited set of high-impact actions during pregnancy and the first two years of life. Actions during this “window of opportunity” have a direct impact by reducing death, diseases and irreversible harm to future economic productivity. These actions are not costly and offer high returns over the entire lives of children at risk - in terms of their mental development, earning power and contribution to the economies of their communities. These *nutrition-specific* interventions have repeatedly been identified among five of the top ten development investments that yield the highest social and economic returns.

Successful strategies to improve the nutrition of communities are therefore based on two elements. First is nutrition-sensitive development across sectors – a consistent focus on nutritional outcomes and indicators within local and national initiatives to end hunger and improve food and nutrition security, to improve living conditions and to ensure social protection - among both rural and urban populations. Second is particular attention to the challenges faced by those most affected by under-nutrition - young children and women – through nutrition-specific interventions.

The neglect of nutrition in development strategies

Most policymakers do not appreciate the benefits for individuals and society that result from consistent action to improve nutritional indicators, and to counter the specific effects of under-nutrition on the most vulnerable. Few governments have sought to prioritize under-nutrition as a development problem in their national development plans, and of those that do only half actually included budget allocations for explicit nutrition activities. One reason for this omission is that neither the economic consequences of under-nutrition, nor the comparatively low cost of acting to prevent them, are well recognized.

The worldwide pursuit of vital strategies to improve nutrition will need backing through a strong public information programme which focuses on the importance of (a) making the economic impact of under-nutrition visible (b) engaging decision makers as activists for attention to under-nutrition in the context of food security, health and social protection in order to tackle this negative economic impact, (c) encouraging public participation in a social movement that empowers households and communities for better nutrition.

Leading the effort to scale up actions for better nutrition

Over the past year a broad group of leaders from national governments, non-governmental organizations, the European Commission, several bilateral donor organizations, UN systems agencies and the World Bank came together to support a framework for scaling up actions to address under-nutrition and the funding needed to support them. This reflects an important extension of the ongoing movements being led by world leaders to increase the numbers of

people able to enjoy food security (initiated at the L’Aquila Summit in Italy, 2009) and to improve maternal and child health (specifically through the “International Health Partnership”).

Their commitment is presented as a **Framework for Action to Scale Up Nutrition (SUN)**: it has been developed and promoted by a group of committed stakeholders for use by anyone who finds it helpful. It represents a consensus on key issues. This SUN Framework should be shared widely in different fora during 2010 with adaptations (as required) to reflect the interests of political and development leaders.

The SUN Framework’s stakeholders intend that it be used within both industrialized, middle income, developing and least-developed countries whose people are affected by under-nutrition. Their efforts will have succeeded if the Framework encourages a broad range of local and national level entities to work together in order to realize its different elements, and to do this by working within the context of an overarching national strategy for food, health and nutrition security.

About the Framework for Action

The SUN Framework calls for two complementary approaches to reducing under-nutrition, one is direct nutrition-specific interventions (NSIs) focusing on pregnant women and children aged less than two years with short-term direct interventions that are known to be effective such as the promotion of good nutritional practices, micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), and complementary feeding to prevent and treat under-nutrition. The second is a broader multi-sectoral nutrition-sensitive approach to development that acts to counter the determinants of under-nutrition – specifically by promoting **agriculture and food insecurity** to improve the availability, access to and consumption of nutritious foods, by improving **social protection** (including emergency relief) and by ensuring access to **health care** (including maternal and child health care, water and sanitation, immunisation and family planning). When implemented in a nutrition-sensitive way, these interventions can improve nutrition of all household members. The multi-sector nutrition-sensitive approach also calls for nutrition objectives in all sectors’ policies so that – when the policies are implemented - any negative consequences on nutrition can be identified and reduced. Nutrition outcomes would be a key indicator for each of these sectors, providing incentives and accountability for those who give increased priority to preventing and responding to under-nutrition.

This SUN Framework then sets out what has to be done to make a difference, makes the case for a scale-up in investment so as to make it happen, and suggests how the investments can be used most effectively to yield sustainable improvements in the nutritional status of individuals, households and their communities.

Responding to the political interest: As we move into 2010, more stakeholders are putting nutrition higher on the agenda, including different arms of government, civil society, the research community and the private sector. The SUN Framework responds to this increasing political interest in a multi-partner initiative for tackling under-nutrition. It is designed to be of use to participants in the upcoming G8 and G20 summits and the MDG summit in September 2010. It will be accompanied by a communication strategy and a forum through which nutrition leaders

exchange results. An increasing number of committed media people (journalists, communications experts and activists) are already stimulating greater political interest in the long-term human damage posed by under-nutrition and the opportunities for mitigating it.

Coordinated action: The SUN Framework is designed to help national governments, civil society, donors, and the UN system to coordinate their efforts in a number of spheres:

Country engagement: The SUN Framework for Action recognizes that nutrition-sensitive development succeeds if people's nutritional well-being is placed at the centre of national priorities and led from within countries – at the national, community and (especially) household levels. These national priorities are far more important, in terms of sustainable results, than what outside bodies (like donors or UN agencies) do when they interact with countries. More and more governments are seeking ways to tackle under-nutrition with multi-sectoral approaches and with a particular emphasis on the interests and needs of women. Others have still to address under-nutrition and this relative neglect is reflected in the absence of political attention to the issue, sectoral programmes and budget lines. The potential gains from effective nutrition-sensitive development programmes deserve to be more widely understood. National authorities that have understood this and sought ways to improve food and nutrition security – including Mexico, Brazil, China, South Africa, Nepal, Thailand Vietnam and Senegal – have many lessons to share at the global level. Others that are still struggling to address these issues may have much to learn from these examples.

Civil society and the private sector: There is now a group of major international and national Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that supports the SUN Framework for Action while emphasizing specific aspects related to their mandates. To intensify this progress there is a need for CSOs to have adequate space and leadership opportunities within which they can be active and can mobilize their political and operational constituents to impact on their regional and international partners (political bodies, bilateral governments, the UN system and the multilateral development banks). There is also an opportunity for more engagement from the international and national private sector, contributing to supplementation and fortification initiatives all over the world, and moving on to the social marketing of practices that will lead to better nutrition, improving the nutritional content of processed foods and committing to the creation of shared value through concerted action.

Increasing engagement of donors: Many bilateral and multilateral donors are now seeking ways to scale-up investments for nutrition-sensitive development at country level, building on recent momentum and on increased support from private foundations as well as CSOs. The focus should be to advance beyond nutrition planning processes and projects to the achievement of nutrition outcomes through innovative mechanisms such as results-based financing. This calls for emphasis on capacity development of national governments, and rapid scale up of existing programmes that converge at the household level. Country ownership, alignment and harmonisation of donor assistance in-line with Paris and Accra are all vital principles for sustained success.

UN system coordination: Given the need for multi-sectoral action to address under-nutrition, several UN entities are working on this agenda. The on-going reform of the UN system Standing Committee on Nutrition offers an opportunity for it to help achieve synergy within the

UN system. The revitalized Committee on World Food Security will serve as the political platform of the evolving Global Partnership on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition: it will be able to draw on this SUN Framework as a base for its own food security strategies and for supporting their effective implementation within countries. The UN Secretary General's High Level Task Force (HLTF) on Global Food Security – an interagency coordination mechanism set up in 2008 – is well placed to encourage comprehensive approaches that link food security and nutrition in the work of the 22 Task Force entities. The HLTF's **Comprehensive Framework for Action** on responses to the Global Food Security Crisis (CFA 2008) is being updated in 2010 to propose an integrated set of outcomes for food **and** nutrition security, both in response to immediate needs and in the longer term. It, too, draws on the contents of the SUN Framework.

Communication: There is little public understanding that nutrition interventions have been shown to yield high returns for development. It is important that a wide range of actors engage in dissemination at country level. Advocacy and political mobilization efforts will be supported through the production of communications materials in multiple formats and languages, designed to engage civil society and opinion leaders in all nations - beyond the nutrition community. The overall intention of this communications strategy is to encourage pride and satisfaction for public participation in a social movement to empower households and communities for better nutrition. Communications must make the social and economic impact of under-nutrition visible (usually it is not seen by persons other than those most affected) and should seek to engage decision makers as activists for nutrition-sensitive programming within the domains of food security, health, social protection and humanitarian action. This is especially relevant in fragile states.

Next steps: The SUN Framework proposes immediate and intensified support for the growing political movement to tackle under-nutrition effectively, scaling up investments at the country level. At the same time there is need for more detailed action plans spelling out roles and responsibilities, targets and progress indicators for country-led action to improve nutritional outcomes, prepared in consultation with a range of partner countries and with a focus on how best to support country-specific national nutrition strategies. The action plans should set concrete priorities with an emphasis on the specific needs of pregnant women and children to age two. It should also be disaggregated to look at ways that agriculture and food security initiatives and social protection measures influence and improve the nutrition outcomes of different functional groups in society. And there is a need to identify low-budget institutional mechanisms that can encourage sustained leadership, ensure synergy among different stakeholders – at local, regional and global levels - and help catalyze successful implementation of large scale country initiatives that reflect best development practice and yield demonstrable results.
