



# **SEIZING MOMENTUM: Amplifying Nutrition at the UN Food Systems Summit**

International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN) and Scaling Up  
Nutrition Civil Society Network (SUN CSN)

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# Introduction

On December 14, 2020, world leaders committed more than US\$3 billion to address the hunger and nutrition crisis and celebrated the launch of the [Nutrition for Growth \(N4G\) Year of Action](#). The Government of Japan, hosts of the N4G Summit in December 2021, presented their updated vision and roadmap for the N4G Year of Action to integrate nutrition actions throughout major events leading up to the Summit – including the UN Food Systems pre-Summit in July and the Summit in September. With this comes opportunities for the world to respond with bold and re-energized commitments to global nutrition programs and policies that protect the health and well-being of children, women, and families around the world.

Hunger and malnutrition have been exacerbated by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented global crisis has revealed profound systemic failures in the systems that support nutrition.<sup>i</sup> The pandemic demands a rapid response that includes life-saving nutrition actions. Building on multi-sectoral work in countries, **this year presents a unique opportunity to align global players and financial incentives behind country-led actions, to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, while ensuring the systemic transformation needed to achieve the nutrition goals and catalyze progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

Climate change is also impacting the kinds of foods available, increasing the urgency for global actors to re-consider how our **health, agriculture, and environmental systems are linked**, and how greater collaboration and discourse across these sectors could protect the health and lives of us all. **We must aim higher and seize the momentum to ‘build forward better’ towards more resilient systems**



**that can sustainably provide good nutrition for all, even in the face of multiple crises.<sup>ii</sup>**

**It is critical to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to transforming food systems.** Every country needs a tailor-made approach, and this will require dialogue across multiple sectors and actors, including civil society and youth to reach a consensus of perspectives to develop a nutrition and climate smart sustainable path forward for our world's food systems. Global stakeholders must facilitate this process and align behind country-owned solutions for greater results and impact.

# Document Purpose

This document aims to **equip civil society with key messages related to nutrition to be amplified during the UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS) preparatory processes underway at global and country levels.** Civil society has an opportunity to leverage and strengthen capacity around the food systems agenda at the country level, elevating nutrition as a key lever and outcome of food systems transformations and to support engagement of underrepresented groups, including youth. The UN FSS and N4G Summit are just one moment in time, thus these messages must continue to be amplified beyond this Year of Action.

As part of the UN FSS, all stakeholders are invited to engage in national-level and independent dialogues, bringing nutrition and food system stakeholders together and engaging them in considering how they can unite around transformative actions in support of the SDGs. Expected outcomes include initiating transformative action to achieve sustainable impact for the sake of people's nutrition, health, and well-being, while at the same time catalyzing ambitious commitments across all nutrition stakeholder groups throughout 2021, in the lead up to the N4G Summit.



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# Key Messages and Priority Areas for Action

**Improving nutrition, particularly during the critical first 1,000 days of life, is one of the best investment governments can make to ensure brighter, more prosperous futures for all.** Each dollar invested into nutrition returns \$16 in economic benefits and has the power to save lives.<sup>iii</sup>

COVID-19 is currently rolling back decades of progress made in improving the nutrition and health of children and women around the world. Unprecedented strains to our global health and food systems have interrupted the delivery and scale-up of essential preventative and life-saving nutrition services. It is expected that **by 2022, 9.3 million more children could suffer from wasting, 2.6 million more children could suffer from stunting and 168,000 more children could die.**<sup>iv</sup> Moreover, malnutrition may exacerbate the impacts of COVID-19 - undernutrition compromises the body's immunity,

and emerging evidence suggests that obesity may predispose individuals to the most serious impacts of the virus.<sup>v</sup>

To mitigate these alarming impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on child and maternal nutrition, globally we will need to raise **an additional US \$1.2 billion per year**, on top of the \$7 billion per year called for by the [Global Nutrition Investment Framework](#).<sup>vi</sup> During this 2021 [Nutrition Year of Action](#), we must take stock of all the opportunities for increasing policy and financial commitments towards global nutrition programming. Solutions and commitments that come out of the UN FSS and N4G summit must aim to accelerate progress towards achieving the 2030 SDGs, particularly SDG 2, ending hunger. But as Figure 1 highlights, driving down rates of malnutrition through food and health system solutions has the power to drive progress.



Figure 1: Developed by Sight & Life

## Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all

According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World's 2020 report, a staggering **three billion people around the globe cannot afford a healthy diet**.<sup>vii</sup> We know nutritious foods have the power to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, as well as non-communicable diseases (NCDs).<sup>viii</sup> Improving nutrition, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, can improve the health and well-being of our communities.

Transforming food systems to deliver safe, sustainable, affordable, and nutritious foods for all must also aim to improve the political enabling and supporting environments at the national level. This requires governments and other stakeholders to approach the issue through a multi-sectoral lens that fully integrates nutrition-aligned policies and practices across all ministries.

### *What does this look like in action?*

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHER DUTY-BEARERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO:**

- **Promote the positive deviance approach, straying away from the norm in a beneficial way.** Despite poverty and food scarcity, some families and communities find ways to raise well-nourished children. The approach of sharing methods of positive deviance within the community has proven successful in reducing the prevalence of childhood malnutrition, building local capacity to treat malnourished children, sustaining the rehabilitation of children, and preventing future malnutrition.
- **Scale up access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)** with a particular focus on low-income settings. Access to proper WASH facilities is key to guarantee safety across the food system. Yet it remains inadequate in many low and middle-income countries and continues to pose a barrier to ending malnutrition by 2030. Poor WASH causes diarrhea (a leading cause of death in children under five globally), which diminishes nutrient absorption and can lead to, or exacerbate, undernutrition. Guaranteeing access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation is particularly critical in the first 1,000 days when a child is most vulnerable to adverse effects of undernutrition. Poor access to water can also detract from time that mothers may dedicate to proven nutrition actions, such as exclusive breastfeeding.
- **Use agroecology to enhance nutrition through dietary diversity.**<sup>ix</sup> Changes in farming and land-use practices over the last 60 years have resulted in a significant decline in overall agrobiodiversity. This decline in domesticated crop and livestock breeds, as well as edible wild plant and animal species, is occurring at an incredible rate. In sharp contrast to the drive for increasing uniformity in industrial food and farming, agroecology seeks to regenerate social, economic, and ecological diversity throughout food systems and the landscapes in which they are embedded. As such, agroecology contributes to sustainable diets which contribute to food and nutrition security.)
- **Coordinate policy, practice, resourcing, and monitoring of interventions across nutrition and food systems.** Goals and commitments must be endorsed by the highest level of government and engage the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including national and international organizations from civil society, youth, indigenous peoples, the private sector, the UN, donors and researchers.
- **Prioritize the nutritional needs of women and adolescent girls.** Anemia in children and women has largely remained unchanged since the World Health Assembly target on anemia was globally agreed to in 2012.<sup>ix</sup> Like other forms of malnutrition, inadequate diets are at its core, but solutions to prevent and end anemia must go beyond improving diets. Both health and food systems must work jointly to address the failures in making nutritious foods available while also scaling the solutions to ensure women and girls have access to essential vitamins and nutrients to secure their health.

## Shift to sustainable and healthy consumption patterns

Rising rates of food and nutrition insecurity and the threats of climate change urge us to promote foods and diets that are both nutritious and have low environmental impacts. These diets must also be economically accessible for all and respectful to locally accepted cultural practices and traditional knowledge. In 2019, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) held an international expert consultation on Sustainable and Healthy Diets to reach consensus that “sustainable healthy diets” are “dietary patterns that promote all dimensions of individuals’ health and wellbeing; have low environmental pressure and impact; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and are culturally acceptable.”<sup>x</sup>

Transformative solutions must aim at improving the consumer demand for greater access to affordable nutritious foods that are also sustainably produced and traded.

### *What does this look like in action?*

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHER DUTY-BEARERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO:**

- **Develop and adopt fiscal policies that are contextually relevant to promote nutritious and sustainable foods**, such as:
  - Taxation of specific ingredients e.g., sugar, salt, etc.;
  - Restrict or ban the use of certain products e.g., trans fats, etc.
- **Put in place regulatory measures around the labelling, promotion and marketing of certain foods**, such as:
  - Banning marketing of ultra-processed, high-fat, high-salt and high-sugar foods to children between 0 -18 years old;
  - Adopting and monitoring the WHO International Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes to protect every mother’s right to breastfeed without undue influence from manufacturers of breastmilk substitutes;
  - Giving preferential market space for the promotion of sustainable and nutritious foods
- Regulating front of pack labeling of food and beverages.
- **Promote, support, and finance double-duty actions** that have potential to reduce the risks and burdens of undernutrition (stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies) as well as overweight, obesity, and/or diet-related NCDs.<sup>xi</sup>
  - For example, combining school feeding programs with proper nutritional education in schools can empower communities with the knowledge needed to increase consumer demand for sustainable and nutritious foods.
- **Promote the fortification and biofortification of staple foods and crops with essential micronutrients, offer supplementation programs, and provide healthcare services to optimize both child and maternal nutrition and health, especially in low-resource settings.** Pregnant and breastfeeding women and children have specific micronutrient needs that help children to reach their fullest potential and help protect against life-threatening health complications. If these nutritional needs cannot be met through the food systems, governments must promote fortification and biofortification as well as affordable and accessible nutrition services via the health system, such as providing multiple-micronutrient supplementation for pregnant and lactating women and girls, improving access to antenatal care programs, and administering vitamin A supplementation to children.
- **Create globally recognized labeling and certification processes for food products** and hold food and beverage manufacturers accountable to providing accurate information to consumers about the nutritional value of their products.
- **Improve the consumption of sustainable and nutritious foods to simultaneously address the growing problem of food waste.** Governments should develop financial incentives and implement them across the food supply chain to help reduce food waste and loss.



## Boost nature-positive production at scale

Evidence shows that by 2050, the increasing CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in our atmosphere will result in crops losing their nutrition value by 3-17% relative to current conditions.<sup>xii</sup> When adapting crops and agricultural interventions to promote environmentally friendly food production, we must include nutritional status as an explicit objective. Greater nutritional improvements occur when agricultural programs embrace indicators such as birthweight or the micronutrient intake of adolescent girls and pregnant or breastfeeding women, and improvements are even more effective when paired with nutrition and health behavior change communication and women's empowerment interventions.<sup>xiii</sup>

Attention to increasing food security, agricultural production, and economic growth must be complemented with improved nutrition impact targeted towards the most vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. A “nutrition smart” approach to boosting “nature-positive” production ensures we avoid the risk of creating a greater malnutrition crisis when working to avert the climate crisis.

### *What does this look like in action?*

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHER DUTY-BEARERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO:**

- **Measure the impact of funding for agriculture and food security by improved nutrition outcomes for children and women.**
- **Prioritize smallholder farmers, particularly women,** in funding and global coordination for agriculture and food security
  - About 80 percent of the world's food is produced by small-scale farming. Women make up on average 43 percent of this agricultural labor force in developing countries. Yet they produce 20 to 30 percent less than male farmers because they face multiple barriers – as smallholder farmers and as women. Equalizing this gap could boost agricultural output and decrease global hunger by 17 percent.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Smallholder farmers comprise one of the biggest target groups for food assistance yet are likely to make the most difference in reducing hunger and undernutrition. The priority of smallholder farmers, and particularly women, in agriculture and food security investment must be clearly and proportionately reflected in the resources, including sufficient flexible and long-term program funding for various actors.
- Innovation, research, and peer-to-peer learning are needed to scale-up solutions that achieve nutrition results and impact with smallholders.
- **Promote climate and environmentally friendly foods that are safe, affordable, and nutritious** and prioritize the production of nutrient dense foods and investments in value chains to ensure nutritious foods reach markets.
- **Promote agricultural practices such as agroecology that preserve biodiversity.** Access to a sufficient and nutritious variety of food is a fundamental determinant of health. Nutrition and biodiversity are linked at many levels: the ecosystem, the species, and the genetic diversity within species.



Photo Credit: 1,000 Days





Photo Credit: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

## Advance equitable food systems

The first 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday provide a unique window of opportunity for promoting the nutritional security of women and children and building healthy, thriving communities. However, unaddressed power imbalances across our global food systems are driving nutritional and dietary inequities, leading to increasing rates of malnutrition in all its forms.<sup>xv</sup> Building healthier, sustainable, and equitable food systems require all actors across global, regional, and national levels to address inequitable processes and policies across the food system framework<sup>xvi</sup>, because these will eventually lead to unequal outcomes around the availability, affordability, and consumption of nutritious foods.

To achieve equitable food systems transformation, all actions must be transdisciplinary, inclusive, and aligned with rights-based approaches. This includes building processes and policy platforms on democratic principles, including transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation to ensure that interventions are both evidence- and rights-based.

### *What does this look like in action?*

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHER DUTY-BEARERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO:**

- **Increase knowledge about nutritional needs** by supporting nutrition-specific approaches that directly affect the nutritional status of women and children; support dietary diversity; and place nutrition at the forefront of preventing all forms of malnutrition and other illness and disease.
  - Increase investments in women's nutrition and health in the first 1,000 days including but not limited to improving workforce policies that support and enable more mothers to reach their breastfeeding goals and providing education around improving infant and child feeding practices.
- **Improve and expand social protection programs** that enable the most vulnerable families to access the food, nutrition, and support they need to thrive.
- **Carry out assessments of social norms that reinforce inequities in food systems.** Develop cross-sectoral response strategies that have clear indicators and targets to promote the rights of children, women, and other marginalized groups to food, decent work, reliable markets, and healthy environments.
- **Promote actions and programs that specifically support smallholder farmers and other vulnerable actors in food systems<sup>xvii</sup>,** particularly women and children, in funding and global coordination for agriculture and nutrition and food security. For example, provide agricultural extension services and crop insurance for crops higher in nutritional value which help to raise income and grow access to more nutrition foods (in turn helping to reduce malnutrition amongst smallholder farmers).

## Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

Impacts from shocks, such as climate change, pandemics, conflict, and economic disruptions, always hit the most marginalized and vulnerable groups the hardest. Climate change is making some crops less nutritious<sup>xviii</sup> and is also an underlying driver of conflict. Conflict not only causes economic and public health delivery disruptions, but it is one of the major drivers of food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted how disruptions to national health and food systems disproportionately impact access to affordable and nutritious foods.

Evidence shows that good nutrition, especially in the first 1,000-day window, has the power to promote health and long-term resilience to stressors like infectious diseases. Malnourished individuals are at far greater risk of contracting and dying from infectious diseases, allowing these diseases to spread more easily.<sup>xix</sup> Despite the power good nutrition has in building long-term resilience, funding for basic nutrition programs declined by 10% in 2018.<sup>xx</sup> Barriers to equitable access to affordable and nutritious foods (many identified above) must be co-addressed through both health and food systems. A healthier population supports sustained prosperity to better endure emergencies and conflicts.

### *What does this look like in action?*

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHER DUTY-BEARERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO:**

- **Enable effective resilience building through actions, funding, and multi-sector and stakeholder coordination.** Resilience building is key to the long-term impact and sustainability of nutrition and food security, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states and in areas vulnerable to disasters and crises. Such initiatives must be targeted to the most vulnerable groups and coordinated with appropriate social protection, without compromising the communities' and countries' long-term abilities for livelihood and stability.
- **Strengthen efforts to grow the capacity of mothers and caregivers** to detect and monitor their children's nutritional status using low-

literacy/numeracy tools including mid-upper arm circumference tapes.

- **Improve early warning systems based on Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) protocols** to enable communities and institutions to prepare for shocks. A people-centered early warning system comprises four key elements: knowledge of the risks; monitoring, analysis and forecasting of the hazards; communication or dissemination of alerts and warnings; and local capabilities to respond to the warnings received.<sup>xxi</sup>
- **Ensure that staple crop cultivation is diversified and where possible biofortified** to ensure that the foundation of all diets is both resilient and nutritious. Dietary diversity is the gold-standard approach to positive nutrition and health outcomes. Biofortification must always be part of a larger strategy involving diversification of foods (beyond staple foods), and empowerment of small-scale farmers in low and middle-income countries.
- **Reinforce the humanitarian-development nexus.** It is critical we ensure access to life-saving nutrition interventions and food assistance in times of crisis. But this needs to be combined with prevention and longer-term transformative actions that bridge the continuum between food and health systems. The tendency in times of crisis is to focus on food security measures and on the treatment of severe forms of malnutrition. **While this is important to save lives in the short term, we need fully financed national multisectoral nutrition plans that will result in long term sustainable nutrition impact.** This includes integrating basic nutrition interventions into Universal Health Coverage and improving child feeding habits, access to health services for adolescent girls and pregnant women, and vaccines and WASH programs. Continuity of investments in multi-sectoral nutrition programs contributes to improved recovery from disease and resilience to economic shocks. **Since resilience is a common feature of the N4G Summit, the UN FSS can act as a powerful springboard.**



# How to Get Involved

## A. Make the most of the Food Systems Summit Dialogues

1. **Engage in FSS Dialogue's preparatory process in your country.**
  - a. Advocate for the nomination of a [Member State FSS Dialogue Convenor](#) (if not already nominated) and work collaboratively to organize the FSS Dialogues program in your country.
  - b. Ensure planned Dialogues are inclusive of all nutrition Stakeholders, linking up to your networks, and ensuring special attention is paid to the inclusion of young people, women and communities.
2. Join the upcoming **Member State Food Systems Summit Dialogue** (organized by your Government) or **convene your own independent Dialogue** at a national or sub-national level, ensuring meaningful participation and representation of women, youth, communities and other vulnerable groups.
3. **Use the Dialogues to elevate nutrition as a key lever and necessary outcome of any food systems transformation.** Build on the multisectoral and multi-stakeholder work in your country to outline priority actions needed to create nutrition impact from a food systems perspective.
4. Use the Dialogues to **raise awareness about the Nutrition for Growth Summit.**
5. **Make sure your voice is heard in the Action Tracks through global public consultations** as well as dedicated constituency consultations. [Register](#) for the next round of public forums for the UNFSS in May by selecting a specific Action Track of your interest.

## B. Mobilize joint commitments in the lead up to the UNFSS and N4G Summit

1. Work with government counterparts, businesses, multilateral institutions, donors, civil society and other development and humanitarian partners to **develop commitments.**
2. Nutrition-related outcomes of the FSS Dialogues (as detailed above) should form the basis for N4G commitments. Commitments should be **ambitious and SMART** and address existing bottlenecks, integrate contributions of different sectors, and accelerate the progress and impact of National Nutrition Plans.
3. Make plans to leverage the N4G opportunity with advocacy strategies, key moments, champions, and allies to **ensure N4G contributes to increased political momentum for nutrition** in your country ahead of the N4G Summit and beyond.
4. **Build contacts and develop mobilization plans** to engage with Multi-Stakeholder Platforms, SUN Networks and other like-minded CSOs and coalitions.
5. Develop **policy briefs and advocacy material** to highlight the importance of investment in nutrition.
6. Engage with **parliamentary fora** (Standing Committees, SDG Taskforce, Parliamentary Champions) to prioritize a nutrition agenda in national policies, strategies, and plans.
7. **Advocate** to make policy and financial commitments before or during the UN FSS and N4G summits. Find the SUN Movement's guidance for the 2021 Nutrition Year of Action [here](#).

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