



NUTRITION QUICK TIPS SERIES



NUTRITION, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Good nutrition underpins gender-transformative approaches¹: **improved diets and nutrition for women address gender inequalities, contribute to their empowerment** and are key in breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition (see Figure 1) that traps families and communities in poverty. On the other hand, there is a direct relationship between gender equality and the empowerment of women and maternal and child nutritional status: **increased equality in gender roles is essential in eradicating malnutrition.**

Women and adolescent girls are especially likely to have poor diets and to suffer from malnutrition due to increased nutritional requirements (for example during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation) and factors such as social norms and gender inequalities. Investments to reduce malnutrition in women are important not only for women's own health but also for the health and nutrition of their children, given the link between maternal nutrition status and reproductive outcomes². The vicious circle of poverty and undernutrition is perpetuated through the life cycle and across generations, as babies born with low birth weight become stunted children and go on to become malnourished adolescents and adults, with physical, cognitive and economic implications. There are 613.2 million adolescent girls and women aged 15-49 years (32.8%) who are anaemic, with substantially

higher rates in pregnant women³. Pregnant adolescents are particularly susceptible to iron deficiency and anaemia due to a higher iron demand in adolescence during growth increase and the competing demands of the fetus for nutrients⁴.

Ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment cross-cuts the whole Quick Tips series. To meet EU commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment (outlined in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III) and to improve food security and nutrition, with a particular emphasis on stunting reduction (outlined in the EU Action Plan on Nutrition), it is critical to recognise and nurture the mutually reinforcing relationship between healthy diets, good nutrition and increased gender equality and women's empowerment.

1 Gender-transformative approaches seek to transform gender relations to promote equity as a means to reach outcomes, whereas gender-sensitive approaches seek to accommodate gender differences in pursuit of outcomes (UNFPA. [Gender Transformative Programming. Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality and Health](#) – a Global Toolkit for Action.)

2 Victoria, C. [The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition Progress](#), Virtual Event, March 2021.

3 [Global Nutrition Report 2020](#).

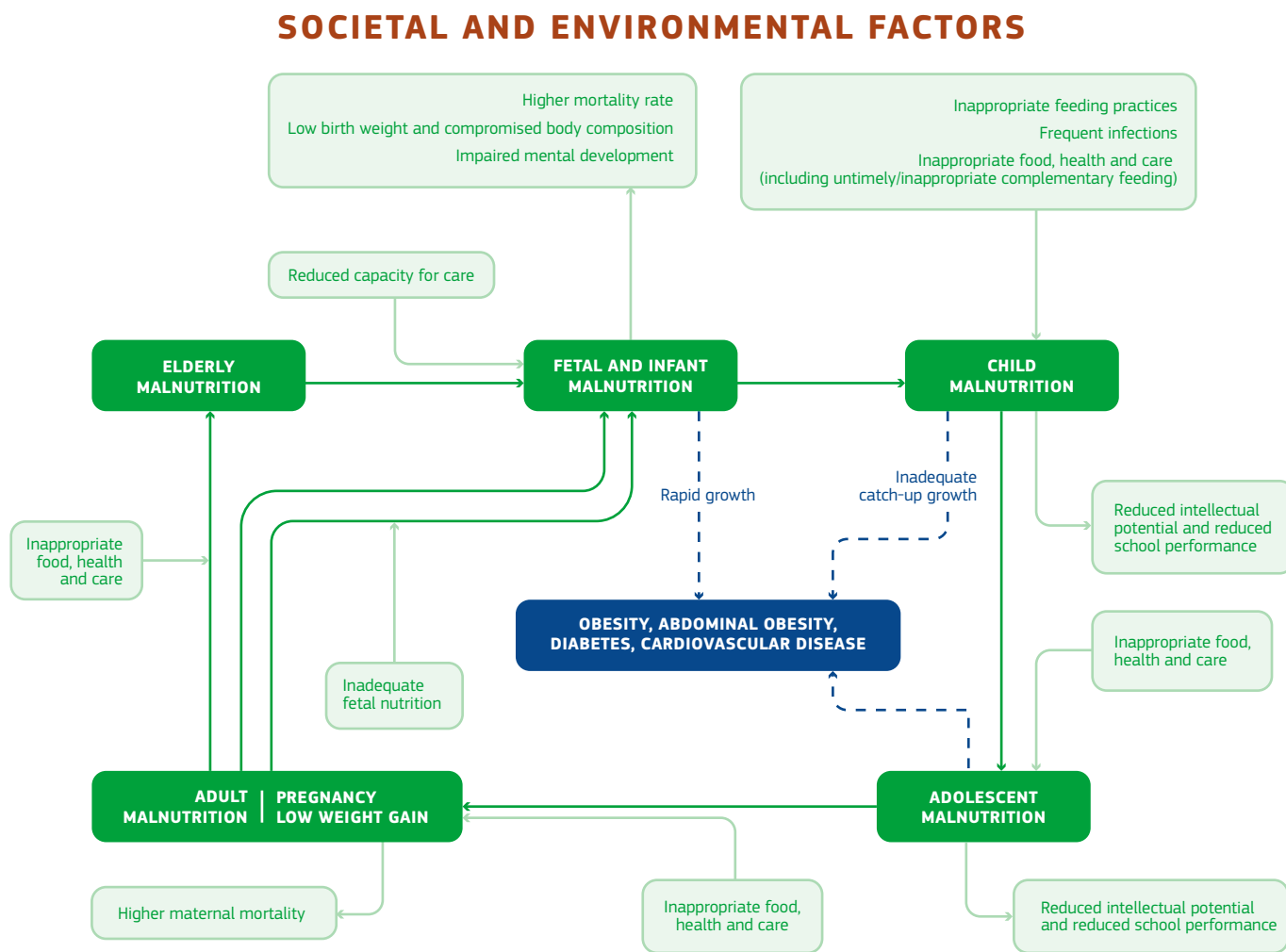
4 Ampiah et al., [Comparative analysis of trends and determinants of anaemia between adult and teenage pregnant women in two rural districts of Ghana](#). *BMC Public Health*, 19:1379, 2019.

Efforts to improve nutrition and healthy diets can be leveraged to achieve the EU's GAP III, which sets out the EU's commitment to include gender equality and women's/girls' empowerment as a significant/principal objective in at least 85% of all new external actions by 2025. In turn, GAP III commitments can be leveraged to achieve the objectives of the Action Plan on Nutrition to improve nutrition, particularly for mothers and children.

increase gender equality and improve the nutritional status of both women and children, addressing multidimensional drivers of malnutrition across a range of sectors. These include measures in different sectors, such as agriculture, livestock and fisheries, social protection, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Other Quick Tips in the series, which focus on specific sectors and intervention types, provide complementary guidance.

This Quick Tips paper includes practical suggestions on how nutrition can be mainstreamed as part of gender-transformative approaches, as well as strategies that aim to empower women,

Figure 1: The intergenerational cycle of malnutrition⁵



5 Nutrition through the life course—proposed causal links. Source: WHO childhood overweight policy brief, based on Figure from Darnton-Hill, I. et al, 'A life course approach to diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases', Public Health Nutrition 2004; 7:101-21, adapted from ACC/SCN 2000.

Strategies

The EU can support gender-sensitive/ -responsive policies and programmes which also promote improved nutrition through policy and programme support to:



Agriculture / food systems⁶

Women play a critical role in agriculture and food systems and are key agents in agricultural development and economic growth.

- Support food systems to improve diets and nutritional status of women through tackling gender inequalities, by promoting their equal access to sufficient diverse, safe and nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and food preferences, as well as to resources and services. These include land, water, livestock, fisheries, financial services, tools and technologies, knowledge, training and extension services and the development of policies to address gender inequities.
- Empower female smallholder farmers and women-led small farm businesses to produce diverse and nutritious foods and to access markets for these through the establishment of women farmer associations and cooperatives.
- Ensure a 'do no harm' approach in the design of interventions, through an in-depth understanding of gender dynamics in agriculture and food systems, to ensure interventions do not disproportionately overburden women (e.g. in terms of workload).



Health⁷

Investment in nutrition as an integral part of basic health services is critical in improving the health of women, children and adolescent girls⁸.

- Integrate nutrition-specific actions as part of universal healthcare.
- Ensure/improve access by nutritionally vulnerable groups to basic health services.
- Promote the consumption of diverse, nutritious diets as well as physical activity to women and adolescent girls within social and behaviour change communication/health promotion.
- Ensure access to reproductive healthcare and integrate actions to ensure pregnant and breastfeeding adolescent girls and women are adequately nourished.



Social protection⁹

Social protection measures can help to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

- Review the design and targeting of social protection interventions to better address undernutrition, through reaching the most marginalised and vulnerable women and children.
- Empower women as recipients of social protection benefits, particularly food/cash transfers, including targeted rations for nutritionally vulnerable individuals within a household.
- Improve the nutritional quality of food transfers and school health and nutrition programmes.
- Integrate nutrition education and promotion within social protection interventions.
- Adapt social protection programmes to improve uptake of services to improve diets and nutrition.

6 See also Quick Tips on Nutrition-sensitive food production, Nutrition-sensitive value chains, and Consumer behaviour and diets.

7 Refer to Quick Tips on Health and nutrition.

8 [Nutrition and health in women, children and adolescent girls](#). Branca, F. et al, WHO 2015.

9 Refer to Quick Tips on Social protection and nutrition.

- Promote diversification of women's diets and livelihoods through the addition of productive assets such as livestock/ agricultural inputs.
- Where relevant, complement social protection with micronutrient supplementation.
- Mitigate the potential effects of shocks on nutritionally vulnerable women, adolescent girls and children through social protection mechanisms which can expand/adapt in a timely manner.



Education¹⁰

Schools play a key role in delivering nutrition and health interventions. There is also an important causal link between female secondary enrolment and stunting reduction.

- Support completion of secondary education by both girls and boys.
- Support evaluative research to determine links between education and nutrition outcomes disaggregated by age, gender, wealth etc.
- Support the development of a national food and nutrition curriculum for schools, with a particular emphasis on adolescent girls.
- Integrate school-based WASH interventions (access to safe water, sanitation services and promotion of improved hygiene) including suitable and segregated WASH facilities for girls.
- Support access by adolescent girls and women to information/ education about the nutritional value of food, healthy diets and infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF).



Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)¹¹

Poor water, sanitation and hygiene conditions are all factors which contribute to malnutrition, through diarrhoeal disease, environmental enteric dysfunction and worm infestations. Improving WASH conditions can significantly reduce gastrointestinal and parasitic infections.

- Prioritise and consult women and girls in targeting investments in WASH. This can facilitate participation in education and employment, reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence and improve child health and nutritional status¹².
- Invest in WASH interventions which reduce the burden of unpaid work (e.g. fetching water) on women and girls.



Governance¹³

The right to adequate food and nutrition is integral to the promotion of good governance, human rights and human development.

- Promote and support high-level commitment to gender, women's empowerment and nutrition, e.g. through gender-sensitive national nutrition/food policies and plans.
- Promote and support the establishment of legal/regulatory frameworks which favour improved dietary diversity and nutritional status of women, adolescents and children.

¹⁰ See Quick Tips on Education and nutrition.

¹¹ See Quick Tips on WASH and nutrition.

¹² [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: A Pathway to Realising Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. Water Aid Canada.](#)

¹³ Refer to Quick Tips on Multisectoral nutrition governance.



Cross-cutting

- Apply a nutrition lens in gender analysis and programme design.
- Target men and boys as advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Reduce gender asset gaps, as well as gaps in decision-making powers between men and women.
- Incorporate gender- and nutrition-sensitive indicators, e.g. minimum dietary diversity for women of reproductive age (MDD-W), anaemia in women of reproductive age and adolescents, stunting reduction¹⁴.
- Build staff/partner knowledge and capacity on the relationship between gender and nutrition.
- Identify and address relevant gender-related nutrition data gaps (including sex-disaggregated data).



Further information

- [Because Women Matter: Designing interventions in food, nutrition and agriculture that allow women to change their lives](#). INTPA F3, 2019.
- [Gender equality matters for nutrition](#) – How EU development cooperation can improve both gender equality and nutritional outcomes in the rural sector, 2019.
- [EU Gender Action Plan III](#), 2020.
- [Gender-Transformative Framework for Nutrition, 2021](#).
- [Gender Resources Booklet](#), IFPRI, 2019.
- [Training Manual on Gender and Nutrition](#) (in French), SPRING, 2017.
- [Gender Considerations for Achieving Nutrition Outcomes Through Agriculture](#): Technical Guidance Brief, USAID, 2017.
- [The impact of gender equity in agriculture on nutrition status, diets and household food security, a mixed methods systematic review](#). Harris-Fry et al, 2020.
- Short video from CGIAR's Gender Platform: Reach, benefit, empower, transform? How to get your project on track for gender equality goals.

Case studies of EU-funded projects for gender equality:

- [MDG1 C Programme](#), Mozambique
- Building resilience through social transfers for nutrition security in the Gambia
- [Suchana](#), Bangladesh
- Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU).

These case studies can be studied further in the [6th Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition](#) and [Projects That Work for Improved Nutrition](#).

The new OECD-DAC policy marker on nutrition was approved by the OECD DAC for official development assistance reporting in 2019 with the support of the European Commission and Member States. According to this marker, 'a project should be identified as nutrition related when it is intended to address the immediate or underlying determinants of malnutrition'. An [OECD-DAC Nutrition Policy Marker Handbook](#) is available.

¹⁴ EU Nutrition Causal Framework (pending revision in 2022).

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