

Agriculture and nutrition: a common future



A Framework for Joint Action by:



European
Commission



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations





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Foreword

2014 marks the 22nd anniversary of the first International Conference on Nutrition. While progress has been significant in reducing malnutrition worldwide, under-nutrition persists. More effort is needed to reduce this barrier to sustainable development.

The last few years have seen a growing political commitment to addressing malnutrition: the adherence of the international community to the 2012 World Health Assembly (WHA) targets and the launch of the UN Secretary-General's Zero Hunger Challenge; the €20 billion pledge in 2013 to the Global Nutrition for Growth Compact; and the acceleration of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, now joined by more than 50 countries. The time has come to transform our commitments into concrete actions that yield tangible results.

We will succeed in our efforts only if we support the implementation of effective, targeted, nutrition-sensitive interventions that address the underlying causes of malnutrition. This requires a multisectoral response that cuts across health, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, social protection, food security and agriculture, trade and the environment and is underpinned by multidisciplinary and multistakeholder collaboration and investment from both the public and the private sector. The local, national and regional context is critical.

Agriculture is one of the most promising sectors for supporting nutrition-sensitive interventions. Being key stakeholders working closely with governments and other partners in the agricultural sector and fully engaged in the nutrition arena, the European Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation and the World Bank Group are natural partners in efforts to strengthen the agriculture and nutrition nexus.

This framework reinforces our intention to promote agriculture for improving nutrition outcomes and illustrates how our commitment is being transformed into concrete actions. Together, we will work to make a difference on the ground to help those most affected by malnutrition.

The second International Conference on Nutrition in November 2014 highlights the renewed focus on the role of agriculture in combating malnutrition and gives momentum to our commitment to strengthen the agriculture-nutrition nexus. We are convinced that, with sound agricultural policies, strong political commitment, targeted nutrition education and research programmes, adequate levels and quality of investment and joint action, the WHA 2025 targets can be met. ■



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European Union

The European Union is committed to supporting partner countries to reduce stunting in children under five by at least 10% (representing 7 million children) of the WHA goal by 2025.

The EU has committed to spending €3.1 billion on nutrition-sensitive interventions over the period 2014–2020, mainly through agriculture and food security interventions.

FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is committed to working to increase the effectiveness of food systems to improve nutrition. FAO commits to Zero Hunger where agriculture is environmentally, economically, socially sustainable while being gender sensitive. It supports member states to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by strengthening the knowledge and evidence base, improving governance and building capacities for nutrition-sensitive policies, programmes and investment planning.

Four committed partners

CTA

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation is committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly farmers' organisations, youth and women's groups and research and education institutions in the development of policies, strategies and inclusive value chains that advance food security and nutrition.

It commits to supporting capacity building, awareness raising and knowledge sharing to promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture through its extensive networks.

World Bank Group

The World Bank Group projects that it will nearly triple direct financing for maternal and early childhood nutrition programmes in developing countries in 2013–14 to US\$600 million, up from US\$230 million in 2011–12.

This is in addition to nutrition-sensitive investments the Bank Group is making in other sectors beyond health, such as agriculture. The Bank commits to reviewing every project in the agriculture pipeline as a step toward ramping up activities that improve nutrition outcomes.



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Introduction

In the last few years a broad international consensus has emerged that reducing malnutrition is one of the major challenges of the 21st century. While progress has been made in reducing stunting (from 253 million in 1990 to 165 million in 2011) and wasting (from 58 million in 1990 to 52 million in 2011) in children, under-nutrition continues to hinder nations' economic advancement by at least 8%¹ putting a heavy burden on achieving sustainable development goals. Globally, 2 billion people continue to suffer from deficiencies in micronutrients such as iron, zinc and vitamin A. While the consequences of under-nutrition are alarming, the prevalence of overweight and obesity is increasing

dramatically, leading to a much higher incidence of non-communicable diseases.

The task of addressing malnutrition is daunting but feasible as long as key sectors are adequately identified and leveraged. By providing 90% of food consumed worldwide, agriculture represents an enormous, but still largely untapped, sector to combat malnutrition. Making best use of agriculture to fight malnutrition will require overcoming institutional and human-capacity constraints and other challenges and, most importantly, joining efforts towards a common approach.

Key facts

Approximately one in four children under five is stunted and under-nutrition kills more than 3 million children every year.

Over 2 billion people are deficient in key vitamins and minerals because of low dietary diversity.

One in 15 children less than five years of age (in total some 43 million) is overweight.

The prevalence of wasting (acute under-nutrition) has declined, yet 19 million babies are born each year with a low birthweight.

¹ The Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, June 2013.



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The European Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation and the World Bank Group have made the fight against malnutrition one of their priorities for the years to come and are now ready to translate their commitments into actions that yield tangible results. The four organisations are major and long-standing actors in the agriculture sector at both policy and programme levels, and are together actively working to strengthen the agriculture and nutrition nexus for the specific benefit of the poor and most vulnerable.

This framework outlines the potential of agriculture to improve nutrition, sets out the guiding principles and provides a joint strategic response for shaping policy dialogue and ensuring alignment in the design of policies and operational programmes in agriculture and nutrition. ■



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Relevance of agriculture to nutrition

In the last decade, efforts to reduce malnutrition largely targeted the immediate causes of malnutrition. These interventions, referred to as nutrition-specific, have proved to be insufficient to address the underlying causes of the problem. Indeed, it has been posited that if the 10 nutrition-specific interventions, generally health-based, modelled in the Lancet Series were scaled up to cover 90% of the population in the 34 high-nutrition-burden countries (where 90% of the world's stunted children live) then the prevalence of stunting would be reduced by only 20%.² The SUN strategy framework and road map³ have identified scaling up effective nutrition interventions and implementa-

tion of nutrition-sensitive sectoral strategies as the two most urgent priorities for addressing malnutrition. Agriculture is at the top of the list of the key sectors. Historically the focus of agricultural development has been on increasing production (assuming that increased supply leads to increased access to food through lower prices), and insufficient attention was paid to improving the nexus between agriculture and nutrition. Agriculture is one of the sectors best placed to address the crucial underlying determinants of malnutrition and can positively affect food production, income and consumption of nutritious foods needed for healthy and active lives.^{4,5}

Nutrition-specific interventions



- Folic acid supplementation
- Multiple micronutrient supplementation
- Calcium supplementation
- Balanced energy-protein
- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Complementary feeding
- Vitamin A supplementation (6–59 months)
- Preventive zinc supplementation
- Management of severe acute malnutrition
- Management of moderate acute malnutrition

² The Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, June 2013.

³ Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Strategy (2012–2015) and Revised Road Map, September 2012.

⁴ Pinstrup-Andersen P, ed. The African Food System and its Interactions with Human Health and Nutrition. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

⁵ Headey D. Turning Economic Growth into Nutrition-Sensitive Growth, Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2011.



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Agriculture as a source of food

This is the most direct route to improving the diet (quantity and quality) and is based on two assumptions: (i) that increases in production of a range of foods, including dairy, fish, fruits, grains, livestock, root crops and vegetables, enhance food availability and access to a diverse diet; and (ii) that increased food availability and access will lead to greater intake and improved nutrition at the individual level.

Agriculture as a source of income

This is based upon the assumption that an increase in income from agriculture-related activities (including processing and sale of agricultural products or wages earned) is used to purchase higher-quality, nutrition-dense food that is consumed by individual household members.

Agriculture as a driver of food prices

Increased availability of food through more-efficient production techniques, improved technologies (for post-harvest storage, processing and distribution) and domestic and trade policies affects a range of supply and demand factors and influences the price of food (fresh and processed). This in turn affects the income and purchasing power of households.

Agriculture to empower women

Initiatives that both educate women and enhance their involvement in agriculture-based activities can strengthen women's capacity, increase their access to, and control over, resources and assets, consequently augmenting their power to make decisions on the allocation of food, health and care within their household.

Agriculture to contribute to macroeconomic growth

Agriculture is the dominant productive sector in many developing countries. Increasing agricultural productivity raises national revenue, increasing the funds available to invest in improving essential basic social services, such as education and health, and safety-net programmes, which have been shown to improve nutrition outcomes.

Agriculture to ensure sustainable food and nutrition security and resilience

Protecting and promoting biodiversity is essential to support dietary diversity and the preservation of ecosystems. Agricultural practices that promote the sustainability of natural resources (biodiversity, forestry, soil and water) ensure the long-term future of agricultural production and the sustainability of livelihoods and build resilience to climate change. ■

Why agriculture matters for nutrition

Agriculture is the main occupation of about 80% of people living in rural areas of developing countries.

Women account for more than 40% of agricultural labour and dominate the small-scale food processing sector (50% in Africa).

Agricultural growth is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as GDP growth originating outside the sector.

Why nutrition matters for agriculture

Reducing under-nutrition improves the well-being of farmers and people living in rural areas.

Increasing knowledge on nutrition encourages diversification of agricultural production and reduces risk exposure.

Adopting a nutrition lens incentivises policy-makers to improve women's participation and empowerment.

Reducing under-nutrition can enhance a country's productive capacity (especially in the agricultural sector) and advance economic growth.

Guiding principles for a nutrition-sensitive agriculture

Adopting a nutrition lens in agriculture will require following a set of principles from the policy dialogue up to the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

These principles have been elaborated through an extensive review of experience and consultations with hundreds of practitioners.⁶ ■



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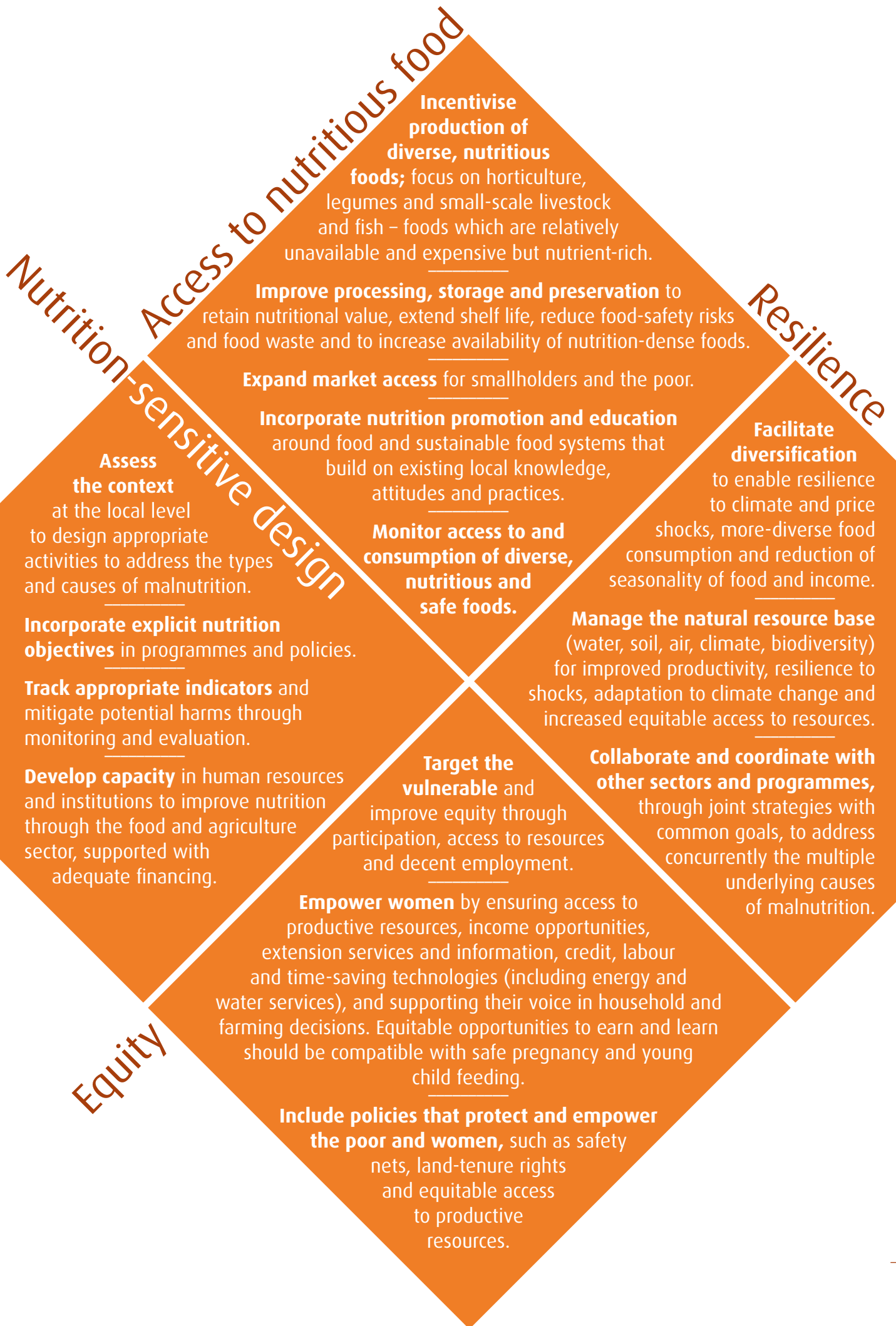


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⁶ Synthesis of Guiding Principles on Agriculture Programming for Nutrition, FAO (2012) <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/aq194e/aq194e00.htm> and Key Recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture http://unscn.org/files/Agriculture-Nutrition-CoP/Agriculture-Nutrition_Key_recommendations.pdf



Moving forward: a joint strategic response

A strategic response is critical both in terms of adding momentum to the efforts of those promoting nutrition-sensitive interventions and to ensure alignment in our approaches to agriculture–nutrition linkages.

While promoting the guiding principles defined above, the four organisations will work around three inter-linked and interdependent strategic priorities.

Enhancing resource mobilisation and political commitment for nutrition will help to scale up actions at the country level. Greater knowledge on nutrition will ensure that such scale-up, and the work on nutrition, is backed up by sound and informed decision-making and strengthened capacity at the country level. ■



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Three strategic priorities



Enhance resource mobilisation and political commitment to strengthen the link between food and agriculture systems and nutrition at:

- The international level through, for example, the Committee on World Food Security, the Global Nutrition for Growth Compact, SUN, the post-Millennium Development Goal agenda and the second International Conference on Nutrition (Rome, November 2014);
- The regional level through bodies such as the African Union-NEPAD, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation; and
- The country level (through governance structures) where there is already a sound degree of political commitment (including membership of SUN).

Scale up proven nutrition-sensitive food and agricultural interventions at country level by:

- Strengthening the human and institutional capacity of government partners and associated organisations to provide effective extension, training and information services at the field level;
- Supporting proven interventions that focus on smallholders, especially women, in areas of high acute and chronic under-nutrition; and
- Raising public awareness and increasing multistakeholder engagement, including of farmers' organisations, value-chain actors, agribusiness, women and youth groups, to advocate for increased production, marketing and consumption of diverse, nutrient-dense foods.

Increase knowledge and evidence to maximise the impact of food and agricultural systems on nutrition through:

- Applied research and better information for decision-making;
- Developing common indicators to track nutritional progress relating to agriculture, such as food consumption and access to diverse, nutritious, safe foods; and
- Monitoring results and ascertaining the nutritional return on investments in food and agriculture.

“Better nutrition and better lives through agriculture”



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