

Knowledge, Policy, Action in the Decade of Nutrition 2016-2025

What is working or not? Where are the gaps? What needs more effort or change?

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Background

Today, nearly one in three persons globally suffers from under-nutrition, micronutrient deficiency, overweight and/or obesity (Food and Agriculture Organization et al, 2018; Development Initiatives, 2018) – and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) affect a large part of the world's population (NCD Countdown 2030 collaborators, 2018). Overall, poor diet is a factor in one in five deaths worldwide (GBD 2016 Causes of Death Collaborators, 2017). These different forms of malnutrition co-exist – within the same country (Development Initiatives, 2018), community (Tzioumis and Adair, 2014), household (Aitsi-Selmi, 2015; Raskind et al, 2018) or individual (Gosdin et al, 2018; Jones et al, 2017). The causal factors are complex and multidimensional and the impacts of sub-optimal nutrition on development, society, health and well-being are serious and lasting, for individuals and their families, for communities and for countries (Swinburn et al, 2019; Webb et al, 2018).

Global food production is the largest pressure exerted by humanity on this planet, threatening local ecosystems and natural cycles such as carbon, water, nitrogen and others that stabilise the “Earth system” (Tilman and Clark, 2014; Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, 2016; Willett et al, 2019). Current dietary patterns and nutrition transition, combined with projected population growth to about 10 billion by 2050, will accelerate risks to people and planet (Popkin et al, 2012; Alexandratos & Bruinsma, 2012; Godfrey et al, 2010). The global burden of NCDs is predicted to increase (NCD Countdown 2030 collaborators, 2018) and the effects of food production on greenhouse-gas emissions (Poore and Nemecek, 2018; Vermeulen et al, 2012), nitrogen and phosphorus pollution (Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008; Sutton et al, 2013), biodiversity loss (Tilman et al, 2017; Sala et al, 2000), and water (Von Braun et al, 2017) and land use (Von Braun et al, 2017; Foley et al, 2005) will be exacerbated. Unhealthy and unsustainably produced food therefore poses a global risk to people and the planet.

Climate change is looming both as a cause and consequence to considerably compound these health and food production challenges (Myers et al, 2017; Springmann et al, 2016). Recent reviews have suggested that climate change, obesity and under nutrition have common system drivers, including car-oriented transport systems and high consumption of cheap energy sources both as food and for agricultural and industrial purposes (Swinburn et al, 2019; Willett et al, 2019).

There are many calls for action to address these issues at every level (WHO, 2013; FAO, 2014; UN, 2015a; UN, 2015b; HLPE on Food Security and Nutrition, 2017; Caron et al, 2018; Swinburn et al, 2019; Willett et al, 2019). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015a) seek to end hunger and malnutrition as well as poverty and other determinants which directly or indirectly impact nutrition and environment.

In 2016 the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2016-2025 as the Decade of Action on Nutrition (UN General Assembly, 2016), with the aim to accelerate implementation of the ICN2 commitments (FAO, 2014), achieve the Global Nutrition and diet-related NCD targets by 2025, and contribute to the realisation of the SDGs by 2030. The associated work plan and action (UN, 2017) is centered on six cross cutting, integrative areas for impact, derived from the ICN2 recommendations and relevant to related SDGs. As we approach the mid-point of this decade, there is need to pause to reflect on how we are progressing in our efforts to address public health nutrition issues across the world, to discuss our successes and failures and to consider where to next.

World Public Health Nutrition Congress 2020

The World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA) will hold its third World Public Health Nutrition Congress in Brisbane, Australia 31 March to 2 April 2020. (WPHN Congress 2020, nd). The overarching theme of the Congress will address the current state of knowledge, policy and action in public health nutrition at the mid-point of the Decade of Nutrition, and ask the questions: What is working or not? Where are the gaps? What needs more effort or change?

Sub-themes for the Congress are drawn from the six Action Areas for the Decade of Action on Nutrition (UN, 2017), with capacity development for public health nutrition action identified as a seventh theme fundamental to WPHNA functions. The seven themes will provide content streams that progress from knowledge to policy and action across the three main days of the Congress. Working Groups in each stream will prepare pre-congress issues papers and collate recommendation and outcomes from the Congress. Our aim is to identify priority issues from each sub-theme that will become the focus for WPHNA policy, advocacy and action following the Congress.

The Congress program is designed to provide lively and productive discussions and contributions from people engaged in public health nutrition and related fields. As with previous WPHNA Congresses, there will be an emphasis on sharing between and within the global north and south to identify key knowledge, effective policies and actions. The South East Asia and Pacific region will be a focus, but with emphasis on knowledge translation and learning from the global community.

World Nutrition

Leading up to the Congress, the Association journal, [World Nutrition](#), will publish the Congress Working Group issues papers and invite readers to comment in letters to the editor. Readers and congress participants are also invited to contribute papers relevant to the themes to a special issue of this journal. The lead author of one paper each submitted by November 30 2019 from low or low-middle income countries from Asia/Pacific, Africa and Latin America will be awarded conference fees, airline tickets, and hotel costs for attending the Congress.

Box 1. Action Areas for the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025

1. Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets;
2. Aligned health systems providing universal coverage of essential nutrition actions;
3. Social protection and nutrition education;
4. Trade and investment for improved nutrition;
5. Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages; and
6. Strengthened governance and accountability for nutrition.

Note: WPHN Congress 2020 will include an additional theme: Capacity development for public health nutrition action

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