INVESTING IN NUTRITION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Message from Abidjan, from the SUN Movement Global Gathering, 7 to 9 November 2017

For the attention of the 5th African Union-European Union Summit 2017

A sustainable, healthy food system and good nutrition is both the starting point and the foundation of a sustainable future in Africa and beyond. A world without hunger and malnutrition, where every child grows up to realise his or her full potential is within our reach. But to make this a reality, it is essential to put nutrition at the heart of public policies and make the right investments starting today.

Malnutrition threatens sustainable development in Africa, because it prevents many of its young people from achieving their full potential. It is the underlying cause of almost half of all child deaths, undermining children’s immune systems and making them vulnerable to diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia that a well-nourished child can overcome.

Malnutrition during the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, from conception to two years, can cause irreversible damage to children’s brains and bodies. Children suffering from malnutrition in early life are more likely to have learning difficulties at school compared to well-nourished children. As adults, they will find it harder to secure well-paid employment. Malnutrition contributes to the vicious circle of poverty: children of malnourished mothers are more at risk to be disadvantaged, and as adults they will be at higher risk of having malnourished children. Good nutrition is not simply a matter of eating enough. To grow and thrive, children also need nutritious food suitable for their age, as well as adequate care.

According to the 2016 and 2017 Global Nutrition Reports, a reduction in chronic malnutrition rates of children aged under five years was observed in at least 10 African countries between 2015 and 2017. However, progress is slow and susceptible to being set back by conflicts and climate-related shocks and stressors, currently exacerbating hunger and malnutrition in many African countries. 59 million African children suffered from chronic malnutrition in 2016, according to the 2017 Global Nutrition Report. This number is increasing because of population growth. In addition, overweight, obesity and chronic diseases linked to poor diet are also increasing, creating a double burden of malnutrition in Africa. Moreover, malnutrition is expensive, since it weakens the prosperity of families and nations.

For the first time, the SUN Movement Global Gathering has taken place in a member country of the SUN Movement, and specifically in an African country, Côte d’Ivoire. In 2017, 39 of the 60 member countries of the SUN Movement are African. The significant attendance at the SUN Global Gathering is a reflection of the growing attention paid to nutrition by governments, civil society, private sector actors, academia and technical and financial partners. All stakeholders recognise that investing in nutrition is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030.
The positive effects of good nutrition include progress at school, better health for individuals, increased individual and family incomes and greater economic growth. It can even promote peace and security by breaking the vicious intergenerational cycle of inequality and poverty. Improving nutrition is a smart investment because one dollar invested in this area brings a sixteenfold return, stimulating economic growth by 10% or more.

African Heads of State and Governments set out their Pan-African vision for an "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena" in the African Union’s Agenda 2063. To ensure this vision becomes reality, Heads of State and Governments of the African Union and of the European Union are encouraged to demonstrate strong political leadership to combat malnutrition in all its forms, particularly in the first 1000 days of life, through a multisectoral and multi-actor approach.

It is essential to mobilise national budgets for nutrition, accompanied by investments from donors, in order to translate ambitions into actions and impact. Donors are committing to scale up investment in nutrition, including at the Nutrition for Growth Summit in London in 2013, at the World Bank Human Capital Summit in 2016 and the Global Nutrition Summit held in Milan in November 2017. All Governments and donors are encouraged to realise their commitments to implement effective actions at scale, leaving no-one behind.

Ending malnutrition requires political commitment, large-scale investments in sustainable and nutrition sensitive food production and consumption, combining national and international funding, and coordinated implementation of multisectoral interventions. All stakeholders, African, European or international Governments, the United Nations, civil society, business and academia, are invited to work together to eliminate malnutrition in Africa.