

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE FORMS OF MALNUTRITION IN THE SUN MOVEMENT THROUGH NUTRITION-SENSITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Why should the SUN Movement scale up a food systems approach to address all forms of malnutrition?

Improving diets, by taking a food systems approach, is crucial to address all forms of malnutrition. Insufficient and unhealthy diets underpin the persistent high rates of stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies and the alarming increase in overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Today, [88 per cent of countries](#) worldwide face a serious burden of either two or three forms of malnutrition, whilst [almost half of SUN countries](#) are facing a ‘triple burden’ of malnutrition.

To promote healthy diets, an understanding of the food environment of the individual, household and community – which means the foods that are accessible, affordable and desirable – is required. The food environment is directly shaped by [food systems](#) – which encompass the people, institutions and processes that keep us fed: growing, harvesting, packing, processing, transforming, marketing, consuming and disposing of food. Food systems are driven by a complex interplay between consumer demand, private sector interests, public regulations, and agricultural, trade and environmental policies.

Agriculture and food production (including livestock, fisheries, and forest products) are the pillars of food systems, and the food processing industry plays an increasingly important role in shaping food security and nutrition. From smallholder farmers to food processing companies, food systems are the cornerstone of the local and global economy – providing employment and livelihood opportunities for [over a billion people](#).

Food systems impact and are impacted by natural resources and ecosystems – the lifeblood of food and nutrition security. Climate change and environmental degradation are increasingly challenging the possibilities to not just feed but to nourish a growing world population – within planetary boundaries. Huge transformation, and innovation along value chains are needed to make global and national food systems both resilient and sustainable, while delivering sufficient quantities of nutritious food that is accessible to all women, men and their families.

Urbanisation and globalisation are driving significant evolutions in food systems, from lifestyle changes to food access and production. Some changes are positive: such as increasing access to a greater diversity of foods and reducing seasonal gaps. Others are negative: in particular the increased consumption of fats and sugar-rich processed foods. Food and agriculture policies need to be more nutrition-sensitive. This entails moving away from a narrow focus on staple and cash crops, which undermines biodiversity and fails to provide sufficient dietary diversity.

The SUN Movement’s approach to fighting malnutrition in all its forms is multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder. However, a gap remains between agriculture, agribusinesses, food producers and health objectives at the country level. To this end, it is fundamental for the SUN Movement to tackle malnutrition, also from a food systems perspective, which requires new ways of working and collaborating to deal with its complexity.

What does it mean to have a food systems approach at the country level?

Adopting a food systems approach requires looking at the needs and demands of all stakeholders, including rural and urban women and men, smallholders and family farmers, households, small-scale and large-scale producers, processors and retailers. Government policies and legislation shape private sector incentives and ways of working. The needs and demands of consumers, including those of women and girls, and public health concerns must be reconciled with the interests and needs of private sector actors – from family farmers, small and medium enterprises to multinational corporations. At the same time, efforts must ensure food systems are sustainable and resilient, and that no one is left behind.

How can Lead Group members assist SUN countries to accelerate efforts for nutrition-sensitive and sustainable food systems?

SUN countries, under the leadership of their governments, can drive a paradigm shift from the traditional sector-driven approach to nutrition and food security through a stronger multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach embracing all components of food systems and enhancing their capacity to deliver healthy diets to all – protecting people and planet, alike. This requires all stakeholders to re-think their efforts and to collaborate more effectively. The SUN Lead Group brings together representatives of critical stakeholder groups that can help drive this change at global, regional and national levels. Lead Group members can help leverage support for key country-level actions to scale up a food systems approach to nutrition, including:

- **Situation analyses:** Broaden the analysis of nutrition and food security by looking at evolutions in food consumption patterns and preferences, constraints in accessing food, the availability of food, food quality and the origin of food, as well as the environmental implications of the food system. To this end, examining and acting on how gender roles and dynamics in food systems condition women's and men's access to produce and consume healthy food, their nutritional status and economic and social empowerment will be essential;
- **National nutrition plans:** Encourage national food and nutrition actors to integrate a food systems approach into national nutrition plans;
- **Policies and legislation:** Broaden the focus of SUN stakeholders' policy and legislative work (currently often centred on fortification and breastfeeding) to other policies that affect the availability, diversity, affordability and desirability of foods, for example food safety and quality; regulation of food marketing; food loss and waste; food trade; agricultural and natural resource management policies; social protection and food subsidies;
- **Engagement with food system actors:** Step up efforts to align health and agriculture-related policies and investments and expand these efforts to partnerships with commerce, trade and industry, food standards authorities, as well as environment-related authorities. It is critical to engage more pro-actively and substantially with the private sector, including smallholder farmers, producer cooperatives, small and medium enterprises and multinational companies, and actors driving innovation on circular food production and consumption. Strengthening national SUN business networks and reaching out to business and consumer associations is key to support such efforts;
- **Local governance and coordination:** Strengthen the capacity of local authorities, to effectively coordinate and monitor the implementation of national policies and laws, also by building synergies between projects and initiatives in a context-appropriate way. Raising awareness of national policies at grassroots level can help promote innovation in a local context;
- **Campaigns on healthy and sustainable diets:** The food industry strives to respond to consumer demand, while investing massively in marketing to shape this demand. Consumers can be empowered to make healthy and environmentally-friendly food choices through well-designed public awareness-raising campaigns;
- **National food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs):** FBDGs can be used to inform nutrition public awareness-raising campaigns, food regulations, as well as set standards for school meals, food assistance programmes and other public food procurement programmes, creating incentives for the food industry to supply more nutritious foods and guide investments in agriculture. Countries are recommended to develop, strengthen, and increasingly use FBDGs, as appropriate, to shape national food systems and nutrition outcomes;
- **Public investments:** Enhance government leadership to make agricultural investments and value chains nutrition-sensitive, strengthen synergies between food and agriculture investments and nutrition-related policies and programmes. Closing the gender gap in agriculture by improving rural women's access to land, assets, resources, technologies, services and opportunities, and the promotion of gender-sensitive policy frameworks need to be at the core of government actions;
- **Private investments:** Large private investors (food industry, private foundations, pension funds, etc.) and venture capitalists should be encouraged to make investments at the country level in initiatives and enterprises that bring healthy foods to local markets, while generating employment opportunities. Investor forums and business accelerators can be organised or leveraged to attract more investments in countries and encourage development of nutrition-sensitive business models;
- **Food systems actors' awareness and capacities:** Raise awareness and strengthen the capacity among public and private stakeholders working in food systems on the importance of nutrition, how food systems can contribute to healthy and sustainable diets, and what they can do, building on existing capacity-strengthening initiatives and resources.

Do Lead Group members have further recommendations and commitments to address multiple forms of malnutrition through nutrition-sensitive and sustainable food systems?