



Parliamentary action for improved nutrition

Good nutrition provides the foundation for health and development and is one of the best investments for boosting the economic potential of families, communities and nations.

All countries struggle with one or multiple forms of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, as well as overweight, obesity and resulting diet-related non-communicable diseases. It is estimated that malnutrition affects as many as one in three people globally. Today, more than 2 billion people are overweight and obese, and despite progress made, 149 million children are still chronically malnourished or stunted.¹ Hunger is on the rise after a decade of decline, exacerbated by conflict and climate change. Undernutrition contributes to almost half of all deaths of children under five years and prevents girls and boys from reaching their full physical and cognitive potential.² At the same time, one in five deaths globally are associated with poor diets – obesity alone is estimated to cause 4 million deaths each year.³ The impact of malnutrition on the global economy could be as high as USD 3.5 trillion per year – largely driven by healthcare costs and lost economic productivity.⁴

Improving nutrition is crucial to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nutrition is a smart investment that builds human capital and ensures that current and future generations of citizens survive, thrive and can contribute to the prosperity of their communities and nations.

To end malnutrition in all its forms, political commitment, a coordinated approach and increased investments are needed. Multiple stakeholders and sectors – including health, agriculture, education, women’s empowerment, water and sanitation, trade, social protection

and natural resource management – need to come together around a multi-sectoral plan for joint action and results. Improving nutrition for everyone, everywhere, requires a systemic change, across multiple sectors. Food systems need to be transformed to deliver nutritious food to all, while ensuring environmental sustainability across the food chain. Essential nutrition services must be available to all through universal health coverage. It is crucial to address underlying socio-economic root causes of malnutrition, and to prioritise the needs of the poorest and most marginalised.

Parliaments are crucial actors, through their legislative, budgetary and oversight mandates, to ensure nutrition remains high on every country’s political agenda and that the right laws, policies and plans are adopted, enacted, funded and enforced to address malnutrition.



- 1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2019. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019.
- 2 Development Initiatives, 2018. Global Nutrition Report: Shining a light to spur action on nutrition.
- 3 The Lancet 2019; Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017.
- 4 Development Initiatives, 2018. Global Nutrition Report: Shining a light to spur action on nutrition.



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What you can do to improve nutrition as parliamentarians:

- Encourage the government to adopt and/or strengthen a **multi-sectoral approach to nutrition** – ensuring all relevant sectors have integrated nutrition objectives and contribute towards delivering a costed multi-sectoral nutrition plan;
- Ensure the allocation of an adequate **budget** to achieve national nutrition targets and/or scale up the nutrition allocation in official development assistance (ODA) and monitor that this funding is disbursed to relevant ministries, departments and other stakeholders;
- Promote and implement **policy, legislative and regulatory measures** to tackle malnutrition;
- Encourage your government to make ambitious policy and financial commitments at the [2020 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit](#) and use parliamentary oversight mandates to hold governments accountable for delivering on their commitments.

Concrete examples of parliamentary action:

1. Schedule a parliamentary debate on nutrition, to place and keep nutrition high on the political agenda and encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders across relevant sectors. The debate should ideally be hosted by the Speaker of Parliament with participation of actors working on nutrition at the national and decentralised levels, including parliamentary committees, relevant government ministries, civil society, academia and United Nations.

The debate could cover the following topics:

- Discuss causes and consequences of malnutrition, as well as progress and challenges in addressing it, based on national nutrition data;
- Review food and nutrition policies and development cooperation plans to determine

if they are fit-for-purpose, adequately funded, implemented and coordinated with other key policies;

- Assess the alignment of national plans with commitments made on nutrition, including [the Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [World Health Assembly Global Nutrition Targets](#);
- Discuss whether the budget allocated to nutrition and sustainable food systems, such as domestic and external spending, and the proportion of ODA allocated to nutrition, is sufficient to reach domestic and international nutrition targets;
- Identify priority areas where further action is needed to improve nutrition.

2. Ensure sufficient investment in nutrition.

Parliamentarians can engage throughout the budget cycle to keep oversight that the budget allocated and spent on nutrition is optimal.

Key actions at different stages of the budget cycle could include:

- **Planning:** Work with nutrition stakeholders from across government ministries, civil society, academia, the United Nations and donors to estimate the amount of money required to meet nutrition targets in your national nutrition plans, and/or official development cooperation. Conduct budget tracking to analyse the amount allocated to nutrition across ministries.
- **Negotiation and approval:** Use costing and budget tracking information to advocate for adequate budget allocation to nutrition. Ensure that the budget approved by parliament is sufficient to reach national nutrition goals. Where relevant, encourage an increase in the proportion of ODA allocated to nutrition programmes, in line with global commitments.
- **Implementation and review:** Work with nutrition stakeholders to track actual expenditure on nutrition - if expenditure was lower than allocation, conduct an audit to identify bottlenecks.



3. Make improving people's nutrition a cross-cutting priority in parliament.

- Ensure nutrition is placed at the heart of the national development plan and prioritise nutrition in your party's political manifesto ahead of the next national or local election;
- Maintain contact with nutrition stakeholders, (e.g. across government, academia, civil society and the United Nations) to exchange information, coordinate actions and receive support;
- Highlight the impact of nutrition on health, cognitive development and people's productivity in parliamentary debates and in the work of relevant committees;
- Engage your constituency on matters of nutrition, highlighting the local nutrition picture and priorities for improvement with the media and in face-to-face constituency meetings;
- Seek guidance and support from national, regional and global parliamentary networks focused on food security and nutrition.

Examples of key policy measures to improve nutrition:

- **Protect and promote exclusive breastfeeding** for six months and continued breastfeeding with nutritious complementary foods, [according to WHO recommendations](#). This includes implementing the [International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes](#), ensuring maternity and paternity leave and facilitating adequate childcare and nutrition, including for working parents.
- Ensuring large scale **food fortification** according to national context and needs, especially iodisation.
- **Fully integrating nutrition into national health systems**, including in policies and plans to implement Universal Health Coverage. This include ensuring nutrition services such as breastfeeding and dietary counselling, child growth monitoring, provision of micronutrient supplements and management of acute malnutrition are available to all, especially pregnant and lactating women, children and adolescents, and ensuring health workers are trained and supported to deliver these services.
- **Take measures to ensure food systems contribute to good nutrition and environmental sustainability** across the food value chain. Examples include policy incentives in the agricultural sector which favours local, nutritious crops over cash crops and staples, and developing national food-based dietary guidelines used to guide public awareness campaigns, food regulation and public food procurement (e.g. school meals) and to create incentives for the food industry to supply more nutritious foods.
- **Strengthening social protection programmes** to ensure that the most vulnerable and furthest behind have access to sufficient, nutritious diets and essential services, including access to clean water.
- **Acting on gender-sensitive legislative reform for improved nutrition**, scaling up support to laws that elevate the economic and social status of women, in addition to safeguarding accountability and financial tracking of government policies and programming through a gender lens.



For more information, guidance or support:

The SUN Movement convenes partners who support national and regional parliamentary networks focused on food security and nutrition. Feel free to contact the SUN Movement Secretariat if you are interested in connecting with such a parliamentary network, if you have questions about this guidance or would like further support regarding the actions proposed in this note.

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The SUN Movement at a glance

Since 2010, [the Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement](http://www.scalingupnutrition.org) has inspired a new way of working collaboratively across sectors and stakeholders to end malnutrition in all its forms. With governments in the lead, it unites people – from civil society, the United Nations, donors, businesses, academia and parliaments – in a collective effort to improve nutrition. Today, 61 countries and 4 Indian States are members of the SUN Movement.

Learn more: www.scalingupnutrition.org