

A woman with dark hair, wearing a beige short-sleeved shirt and a floral patterned apron, is smiling broadly. She is holding a white ceramic bowl with a floral design on a light blue tray. In the background, a busy market scene is visible with various fresh produce and other people.

# The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement at WHA77

Advocacy asks and messages

May 2024

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# WHA77 - Scaling Up Nutrition advocacy asks and messages

## 1. Maternal infant and young child nutrition

**Ask:** Strengthen global commitment to maternal and child nutrition to accelerate progress on World Health Assembly Global Nutrition Targets and SDG targets.

### Messages:

- Currently, 3.1 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, and approximately 45% of deaths among children under five years of age are linked to undernutrition<sup>1</sup>. Overweight and poor diets elevate the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which in turn contribute to death and disability worldwide.
- Half of all preschool-age children and two-thirds of women of reproductive age globally suffer from at least one micronutrient deficiency<sup>2</sup>. Advocate for policies and investments in scaling up cost-effective micronutrient interventions like food fortification, multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS), and small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS) to enhance nutritional status among women in both humanitarian and development settings.
- Undernourished women are more likely to become undernourished mothers with a greater chance of giving birth to low birth-weight babies more prone to infections and growth failure. This perpetuates an inter-generational cycle of malnutrition.
- 14.7% of infants were born with low birthweight in 2020. They are approximately 20 times more likely to die than those with adequate birth weight, and those who survive face long-term development and health consequences<sup>3</sup>.
- Obesity rates among children and adolescents worldwide have increased fourfold from 1990 to 2022, while obesity rates among adults have more than doubled. In 2022, 159 million children and adolescents and 879 million adults were living with obesity<sup>4</sup>.
- Based on current trends, it is likely that over 80% of countries will not achieve their national maternal mortality targets<sup>5</sup>, 63 countries will miss the neonatal mortality target,

<sup>1</sup> SOFI Report 2023: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

<sup>2</sup> Stevens et al., Micronutrient deficiencies among preschool-aged children and women of reproductive age worldwide: a pooled analysis of individual-level data from population-representative surveys, The Lancet Global Health, Volume 10, Issue 11, 2022, Pages e1590-e1599

<sup>3</sup> SOFI Report 2023

<sup>4</sup> NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC). Worldwide trends in underweight and obesity from 1990 to 2022: a pooled analysis of 3663 population-representative studies with 222 million children, adolescents, and adults. Lancet. 2024 Mar 16;403(10431):1027-1050. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(23)02750-2. Epub 2024 Feb 29. PMID: 38432237; PMCID: PMC7615769.

<sup>5</sup> Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023.



and 54 countries will miss the under-five mortality target by 2030<sup>6</sup>. Focused, urgent, and coordinated course-correcting, country-led action is necessary in these countries to ensure maternal, newborn, and child survival and to achieve the SDGs. Investment in better nutrition for women and children will help improve neonatal and under five mortality.

- Eliminating anemia, addressing undernutrition, and confronting the growing challenges of obesity and overweight among adolescents can save hundreds of thousands of lives and increase economic productivity by up to 17 percent<sup>7</sup>.
- Malnutrition is also a violation of human rights. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “When people are not able to feed themselves and face malnutrition and resulting illnesses or death by starvation, their right to life is at stake.”



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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2022, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> [UNICEF. Adolescent Girls - The Investment Case. 2023](#)

## 2. Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

### **Ask #1: Essential nutrition actions must be integrated into health systems as a foundational component of UHC.**

#### **Messages:**

- Essential nutrition services, such as protecting and supporting breastfeeding, providing counseling for adequate complementary feeding, providing iron and folic acid to pregnant women, supplying vitamin and mineral supplements to young children, and preventing and managing acute malnutrition, should be part of the standard package of healthcare services, universally available to all.
- At least 4.5 billion people — more than half of the world's population — were not fully covered by essential health services in 2018.
- People living in rural areas and the poorest populations are the least likely to be fully covered by essential health services and also face higher rates of financial hardship.
- Nutrition quality care, both preventive and curative, must be fully integrated into national health-sector plans, supported by a strengthened multisectoral approach.

### **Ask #2: Better equip the Health Workforce to deliver high quality and effective nutrition care**

- Universal health coverage relies on expanding the health workforce. Globally, there are only 2.3 trained nutrition professionals per 100,000 people, with less than 20 hours of pre-service nutrition training for health workers on average<sup>9</sup>. This inadequacy hampers the delivery of effective nutrition care. Frontline workers, especially community health workers, are essential for meeting the growing demand for nutrition services. It's crucial to ensure they receive proper nutrition training and resources to deliver quality care.
- Enhancing governance and institutional capacity for workforce planning and management, including strengthening multisectoral policy dialogue, is essential to deliver the intersectoral actions required to improve capacity of healthcare workforce, especially of community health workers, peer breastfeeding counselors, etc. to improve acceptability and uptake of services.

<sup>8</sup> [WHO Universal Health Coverage Factsheet. 2023](#)

<sup>9</sup> [2020 Global Nutrition Report](#): Action on equity to end malnutrition. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives.

### 3. Immunization Agenda 2030

**Ask: Combine provision of nutrition and immunization services through primary healthcare to improve vaccine efficacy and reduce child mortality.**

#### Messages:

- Malnutrition and infectious diseases are key factors in child morbidity and mortality, impairing immune responses and increasing the risk of infection and vaccine ineffectiveness. Acutely malnourished children face a dramatically increased risk of dying from pneumonia (2.5 to 15 times higher)<sup>10</sup> and diarrhea (up to 8 times higher)<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, infections can lead to malnutrition, with repeated bouts of diarrhea linked to up to 43% of stunting cases<sup>12</sup>. Despite the clear connection, nutrition and immunization services are rarely provided together.
- Stunted children are 32% more likely to be zero-dose (children who have not received any routine vaccine) than to have received at least one vaccine<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, poor vaccination status is associated with an 18% higher likelihood of a child being wasted and a 7% higher likelihood of a child being stunted. Yet these services are rarely provided together to a child.
- Integrating these services is cost-effective: every dollar invested in nutrition can return up to \$37 (MMS)<sup>14</sup>, and every dollar spent on immunization in Gavi-supported countries yields a \$21 return<sup>15</sup>.
- Adopting an integrated approach to nutrition and immunization within primary healthcare systems, as part of the efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), can improve outcomes for both services, especially as malnourished children are often also lacking essential vaccinations.

<sup>10</sup> Chisti M.J., Tebruegge M., et al. 2009. Pneumonia in severely malnourished children in developing countries – mortality risk, etiology and validity of WHO clinical signs: a systematic review.

<sup>11</sup> Chisti M.J., Pietroni M.A.C., et al. 2011. Predictors of death in under-five children with diarrhea admitted to a critical care ward in an urban hospital in Bangladesh

<sup>12</sup> Guerrant RL, DeBoer MD, Moore SR, Scharf RJ, Lima AA. The impoverished gut--a triple burden of diarrhea, stunting and chronic disease. *Nat Rev Gastroenterol Hepatol*. 2013 Apr;10(4):220-9. doi:10.1038/nrgastro.2012.239. Epub 2012 Dec 11. PMID: 23229327; PMCID: PMC3617052.

<sup>13</sup> Wendt, Andrea, Thiago M. Santos, Bianca O. Cata-Preta, Luisa Arroyave, Daniel R. Hogan, Tewodaj Mengistu, Aluisio J. D. Barros, and Cesar G. Victora. 2022. "Exposure of ZeroDose Children to Multiple Deprivation: Analyses of Data from 80 Low- and Middle-Income Countries." *Vaccines* 10 (9): 1568.

<sup>14</sup> Hoddinott et. al., 2023 Larsen B, Hoddinott J, Razvi S. Investing in nutrition – a global best investment case. *Journal of Benefit Cost Analysis*. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, Tom, Yashodhara Rana, and Eric Sarriot. 2023. "A Literature Review and Proposed Learning Agenda on Immunization-Nutrition Integration." Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Eleanor Crook Foundation.

## 4. Gender, health, and nutrition

### **Ask #1: Support the implementation of gender-responsive health policies.**

#### **Messages:**

- Gender inequality is both a cause and a consequence of malnutrition, hunger, and poverty, often dictating who eats last and least, access to health and nutrition services, decision-making over household resources, access to land for food production, and consumption. Reaching a world free from malnutrition in all its forms means taking a multisectoral systems approach to address gender inequality and malnutrition across the life cycle, and empowering women and girls through different sectors from health to agriculture, education and social protection.

### **Ask #2: Implement strict global guidelines to regulate and monitor digital marketing practices of breast-milk substitutes (BMS).**

- National legislation needs to be updated or developed to align with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, WHA resolutions and WHO's guidance. This is crucial for the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding, safeguarding the health of infants and mothers.
- Digital marketing is challenging the ways in which national legislation is enforced and monitored. Digital platforms have now emerged as the major driver for BMS marketing representing 61% of the incidences of non-compliance<sup>16</sup>. There is an urgent need to introduce legislation and enforce regulations on digital marketing in line with the latest guidance by WHO on restricting digital marketing of foods for infants and young children.

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<sup>16</sup> [ATNI BMS Index 2024](#)

## 5. Climate change, food systems and health

**Ask: Nutrition must be a critical component of any Climate-Health initiatives including the proposed Global Action Plan on Climate and Health.**

### Messages:

- Diets and food systems are at the core of the nutrition–environment nexus. The food we consume, how it is produced, and its journey from farm to plate determine how food systems affect human and planetary health.
- Elevated CO<sub>2</sub> could cause an additional 175 million people to be zinc deficient. More than 1 billion women and children could lose much of their dietary iron intake, putting them at greater risk of anemia and other diseases.<sup>17</sup>
- Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is projected to result in an additional 250,000 deaths annually<sup>18</sup> and an increase of 25 million undernourished children.<sup>19</sup>
- Child stunting rates are expected to rise significantly due to climate change, with dire consequences for human capital and economic development.<sup>20</sup>
- Moreover, research shows a direct link between rising ambient temperatures and an elevated risk of preterm births and deliveries with low birth weight.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, climate change amplifies the risk of overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases.<sup>22</sup>
- It is therefore essential to promote healthy, sustainable, diverse and affordable diets and resilient food systems that benefit both human and planetary health, considering food production, processing, and consumption practices. This includes promoting local and indigenous foods with low environmental footprints.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0253-3#citeas>

<sup>18</sup> Source: WHO <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

<sup>19</sup> Source: IFPRI <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/climate-change-impact-agriculture-and-costs-adaptation>

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd SJ, Kovats RS, Chalabi Z. 2011. Climate change, crop yields, and undernutrition: development of a model to quantify the impact of climate scenarios on child undernutrition. *Environ Health Perspect* 119(12):1817–1823, PMID: 21844000

<sup>21</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2767260>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.enonline.net/attachments/4215/Nutrition-and-Climate-Change-Current-State-of-Play-Scoping-Review.pdf>





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