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A CALL TO ACTION

SCALING UP GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT TO FIGHT MALNUTRITION

Why should the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement address gender inequality and promote the empowerment of women and girls?

Overcoming the obstacles created by gender-based inequalities, unequal access to resources and exclusion continues to be 'the best bet' for development. It is essential to reach all Sustainable Development Goals and to make sure the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition becomes a thing of the past. Simply put, we will not succeed in scaling up nutrition if we do not address the drivers and impact of gender-based discrimination. Promoting diversity inclusion, and gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment must be at the centre of the SUN Movement's work. Gender inequality means girls get less food, are more likely to get sick, and are less likely to be able to attend school, receive an education and get a job. They are more likely to marry and get pregnant too young, to be poorly nourished and have under-nourished babies.

Women make up more than half of the global agriculture workforce but remain the minority when it comes to decision-making. For women and girls who work as food producers, gender inequality means they often accept lower paid work and lack access to land, services and social protection.¹

It is essential to target women and girls in efforts to improve nutrition and food security. To this end, SUN Movement efforts (and beyond) have, so far, focused on the first 1,000-days as 'the most critical window' to reach women during and after pregnancy, as well as their children up to two years of age.

New research, however, focuses on adolescence as offering a 'second critical window' of opportunity to improve girls' nutritional status, whilst breaking intergenerational cycles of malnutrition. Improving adolescent nutrition is an investment in the future well-being of a nation.² And yet, too little attention is given to the nutritional status of adolescent girls, leaving them vulnerable at a time when the experiences and consequences of gender inequality become more acute. It is critical that we recognize the value of adolescent girls and their rights, beyond their nutritional needs as young mothers.

7 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW: FACTS AND FIGURES

1. Gender inequality is both a cause and effect of malnutrition, hunger and poverty; however, these policy areas are tackled separately at country and global levels.
2. Today, out of an estimated 820 million chronically undernourished people worldwide, 60 percent are women and girls.
3. Women are more likely than men to be affected by crisis, which undermines food security and nutrition.
4. By 2030, current projections predict there will still be 119 million stunted children due to malnutrition; a majority of them children of young mothers.
5. When more income is put into the hands of women, the entire family's nutrition, health and education improves.
6. If female agricultural workers had the same access to productive resources as men, they could raise total agricultural output in these countries by 2.5 percent to 4 percent.
7. Empowerment works! The SUN Movement has seen that the most successful nutrition actions to date are those that have recognized and addressed gender and social inequalities.

¹ Asian Development Bank. (2013). Gender equality and food security – women's empowerment as a tool against hunger. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/wairdocs/ar259e/ar259e.pdf> [accessed February 2019].

² The SUN Movement. (2018). MEAL Brief. Adolescent girls and women. Available at: <https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SUN-MEAL-Brief-Adoles-girls-women.pdf> [accessed December 2018].



More than 60 percent of SUN member countries find themselves in fragile contexts or crisis.³ In fragile contexts, women and girls are more likely to: reduce their food intake (voluntarily or as a result of external pressure) in favour of other household members, worsening their own nutritional status. They also face constraints in accessing essential humanitarian services as a result of insecurity, cultural discrimination and limited mobility. Pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls are at a higher risk of undernutrition and anaemia due to their increased physiological needs.

Good nutrition will only happen when women and girls are empowered. Actions that recognize and address gender and social inequalities are empowering and effective ways of tackling malnutrition. At the same time, nutrition investments provide important entry points to address underlying drivers of inequality: educational opportunities; household power and income distribution; sexual and reproductive health and rights; gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage. SUN is well-placed to lead on integrated gender equality and nutrition actions – resulting in strong nutritional outcomes for all, especially women and girls.

What does it mean to ensure gender equality and empowerment for women and girls at the country level?

Improved nutrition and empowerment enable girls to miss fewer school days and be more attentive in class. Improved school performance also helps girls to grow up to become more productive, increase their autonomy and decision-making power. Nutrition provides a foundation for empowerment. With the knowledge that girls – particularly those in low and lower middle-income countries – are less likely to enrol in secondary school, and an average of 31 percent of girls living in SUN Movement countries are married before they turn 18,⁴ targeting this key group offers an essential opportunity to fight malnutrition.

If women and men were to have the same access to resources, including land, it is estimated that agricultural yields would rise by almost a third – resulting in up to 150 million fewer hungry people in the world.⁵ Children have significantly better prospects for the future when their mothers are healthy, financially stable and educated.

Much like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an ecosystem – from the household level to the community, its leaders, laws and policies – to empower women and girls. The SUN Movement is country-led and driven and is uniquely placed to drive action in support of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment with its ability to bring together stakeholders from multiple sectors. With the remit

of learning-by-doing, SUN countries can share their unique experiences and learn from one another – as no one solution or blueprint fits all, nor are there any quick fixes to improving gender equality.

How can SUN countries accelerate efforts for gender equality, empowerment and improved nutrition?

All SUN Movement actors need to reorient their work, to translate their gender equality and empowerment commitments into action and results at the country level. Our goal is a world free from malnutrition – transforming gender inequalities and power structures is critical to achieving this goal. SUN country teams must play an active role, with the help of each level of the support system, by:

- » **Getting informed:** Undertaking systematic analyses of social, economic, cultural, and political barriers and drivers of gender-based inequities in nutrition (e.g. drivers of child, early and forced marriage such as food insecurity) and in decision-making, at every level. This should include drawing on qualitative data that bridges the knowledge gap in girls' and boys' nutritional status after the age of five, into adolescence. National information platforms for nutrition can be utilized to hold governments accountable and to influence national nutrition actions. Learning from countries that have successfully ensured that gender determinants of undernutrition have been addressed is also critical;

SCALING UP GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

Policies, programmes and laws are gender-transformative when gender is central to promoting equality, the rights of women and girls, and achieving positive development outcomes. This work will often involve engaging men and boys to transform unequal gender relations and promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment (UN Women, Gender equality glossary).

- » **Driving progress through enabling environments:** Advocating for and ensuring inclusive, sustainable, non-partisan political action and traction for legislation, administrative structures, budgets, policies and shock-responsive programming that recognize women's and men's roles in improved nutrition is critical. Moreover, scaling up work with parliaments and gender machineries to support laws that elevate the economic and social

³ The SUN Movement, (2018). MEAL Brief. SUN member countries with high humanitarian risk levels. Available at: https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SUN-MEAL-Brief_Humanitarian-contexts.pdf [accessed November 2018].

⁴ UNICEF, (2018). Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/> [accessed January 2019].

⁵ FAO, (2016). Women hold the key to building a world free from hunger and poverty. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/460267/icode/> [accessed August 2018].



status of women, while equipping policy-makers and practitioners with the capacity to identify and respond to gender concerns and opportunities, is essential;

- » **Amplifying girls' voices in decision-making:** Making sure the voices of young and adolescent girls resonate, advocating for and creating systematic mechanisms for their leadership and participation in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting and monitoring of health and nutrition policies and plans; and enabling them to become powerful agents of change;
- » **Paying attention to boys' and men's nutritional needs, too:** Taking action to ensure that boys and men are not only instrumental to women's and girls' empowerment and to achieve gender equality in nutrition, but recognizing that they are also affected by malnutrition and poverty and face specific vulnerabilities and limitations based on their gendered roles;
- » **Fostering and multiplying champions:** Harnessing the role of traditional, religious and community leaders, women and girls, men and boys, and activists who have the power to bring about change, at both local and household levels;
- » **Spreading the word:** Raising awareness of how gender equality is not a 'zero-sum' game, but to the benefit of everyone – men and women, girls and boys alike;
- » **Leaving no one behind:** Putting in place and institutionalizing coherent and systematic approaches and systems that address socio-economic inequalities, to improve the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of nutrition programmes;
- » **Leading excellence and ensuring equitable quality scale up:** Generating evidence and good practices on changing social norms for gender-transformative nutrition, sharing experiences of what works, unlocking potential for innovation and best practice to ensure that gender determinants of malnutrition are addressed across sectors, also beyond those associated with women's and girls' reproductive and traditional roles.

How can SUN Movement stakeholders support countries to step up their work to ensure gender equality and the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls?

The SUN Movement has access to a range of stakeholders, including national nutrition communities and multi-stakeholder platforms comprised of civil society, business, the UN and donors, leaders and change-makers in SUN countries, as well as heads of regional or international institutions and organizations. We must rally this vast membership. As the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promises, we must leave no one behind. Each member of the Movement, at every level, must champion gender equality in their daily work and make sure that gender-transformative nutrition is, and remains, a top priority.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Any member of the community can:

- » Learn more about how actions and programmes towards better nutrition impact women, men, girls and boys differently;
- » Garner support – at all levels – for the need to address good nutrition, child development, the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality, in tandem;
- » Include women and adolescent girls in discussions about nutrition and development and consider their voices in decision-making;
- » Encourage leaders to commit through improved public investments and use of gender-responsive budgeting in programmes that address nutrition.



Leaders in SUN countries (also at the level of local governments) can:

- » Raise awareness among policy-makers, communities and other decision-makers on the essential links between nutrition, women's and girls' empowerment and the benefits of gender equality for all individuals, families, societies and nations;
- » Include adolescents – both girls and boys – in the design and implementation of policies and programmes at community and national level that address nutrition and related issues which impact nutritional status;
- » Work with parents, educators, community leaders, women's groups, and adolescent girls and boys to address discrimination, stereotypes and attitudes and to transform negative social norms that undervalue girls and other marginalized groups;
- » Advocate for intentional sex and gender-based analysis and address traditional norms and practices that hamper the achievement of gender equality and better nutrition for all, also through dialogue and collaboration with traditional, religious and community leaders;
- » Harness the role of parliamentarians to act on gender-sensitive legislative reform for improved nutrition at the country level, by making sure they understand the importance of empowering women and girls.



Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and foundations can:

- » Introduce, enforce, cost, fully fund and implement nutrition policies and strategies that address gender equality and empowerment, as well as share success stories, especially in SUN countries;
- » Ensure gender equality and socio-economic empowerment is, and remains high, on the political agenda during international engagements and meetings that address areas such as education, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene;
- » Scale up and track funding for both nutrition and empowerment actions, built on evidence of gaps and needs;
- » Challenge traditional views that focus on women's and girls' roles in nutrition as caregivers only and those that downplay their integral roles in sustainable food systems;
- » Deliver gender equality results through challenging the ways and spaces in which decisions are made by identifying and exploiting spaces for transformative actions. This should include promoting the empowerment of adolescents through information and by providing opportunities for them to engage in improving their own nutritional status and that of their families.



Civil society organizations can:

- » Advocate for change in SUN countries by challenging and shifting gender norms from the local level up, and promote strengthened legislative and institutional change for the empowerment of women and girls;
- » Strengthen the capacities of local civil society organizations, especially women's rights and youth-led organizations, and activists to advance gender equality and to enable vulnerable women and girls to better exercise their rights;
- » Ensure accountability, including financial tracking, of government policies and programming through a gender lens, and engage parliaments in these processes;
- » Advocate for systematic mechanisms for adolescent leadership and participation and support adolescents, enabling them to become the most powerful agents for positive and sustainable change. This should include creating a space for adolescent girls to raise issues they believe affect their nutritional status – which can include nutrition-sensitive issues (such as access to education or the fight against child, early and forced marriage) and nutrition-specific issues – and facilitate a forum which enables potential solutions to be explored and implemented.



Businesses can:

- » Make gender equality central to business practices at every level – from the boardroom through the value chain – including considerations of how governance structures might discriminate against or could be used to empower women, and by investing in women-owned initiatives and enterprises;
- » Ensure equal pay for work of equal value, paid maternity leave and adequate breastfeeding and lactation facilities for female employees, in addition to considering paid paternity leave;
- » Support gender balance in decision-making, especially in SUN countries.



Regional and other international organizations can:

- » Place the needs of women and girls – including adolescents – at the core of humanitarian efforts and decision-making, also by adopting a longer-term, sustained focus on good nutrition for all women, men, girls and boys;
- » Advocate for the scaling up and enforcement of access to health services and sexual and reproductive health and rights and family planning measures;
- » Ensure adequate investments, track and publicize gender equality funding and results in SUN countries.



Academic institutions and alliances can:

- » Put in place and make use of conceptual tools to name all forms of power that hinder good nutrition for all, including those deemed 'hard to see';
- » Expand the knowledge base and ensure that gender equality success stories and results are brought to scale, including examining the roles of boys and men.



All women and girls can:

- » Continue to advocate for gender equality and empowerment, including in nutrition interventions, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, at all levels.



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A call to action issued by the SUN Movement Lead Group, in collaboration with Global Affairs Canada, Nutrition International and Save the Children