

I-CAN, We Can

COP27 was not the first time nutrition and climate have been mentioned in the same breath at a COP. That was in Paris in 2015 and no one really listened. Timing is everything and in Sharm El Sheik seven years later the timing was right. The urgency on the nutrition side is driven by the need for allies to combat a reversal in nutrition outcomes caused by climate, covid and conflict. The urgency on the climate side is caused by the need to find additional allies to scale up climate action.

Nutrition, with its work on healthy diets, nutrient enriched staples, efforts to reduce food loss and promote food safety is a natural ally for climate.

The vision of the Egyptian Presidency of the COP gave us the opportunity for a formal initiative on climate and nutrition. With WHO and FAO, GAIN has worked hard over the past six months to shape the Initiative on Climate and Nutrition (I-CAN).

I-CAN was launched on 12 November at COP27 by the Egyptian Ministers of Health and Environment. This combination of Ministers was wonderful to see.

So what does I-CAN aim to do? For me, its main contribution will be to integrate climate and nutrition in four areas highlighted throughout the COP by the Egyptian Presidency:

1. Implementation
2. Policy
3. Capacity
4. Finance

On implementation, I-CAN will establish benchmarks and targets for things like the percentage of NDCs that include nutrition and the percentage of National Nutrition Plans that include climate.

An example on policy is the percentage of public procurement of food for schools, as well as safety nets focused on climate and nutrition consideration.

On capacity, a start point is examining estimates of tradeoffs between climate and nutrition goals. How easy is it to put together climate and nutrition data?

On finance, what per cent of Green Climate funds focus on nutrition? What per cent of World Bank loans for climate also focus on nutrition? And what per cent of nutrition sensitive spending in agriculture is focused on climate smart agriculture?

The work on I-CAN has only just begun. Now it is in the public domain, we need to go from promise to delivery. That means developing benchmarks and targets, and working with partners to help meet those targets.

GAIN will contribute fully to this effort because it is absolutely central to our mission for the coming years. The bidirectional relationship between nutrition and climate change is at the very core of what is needed to ensure everyone has the nutrition they need, produced and delivered in an environmentally and financially sustainable way.

We have to avoid climate and nutrition passing each other like ships in the night. I-CAN marks the beginning of the beginning for a coordinated journey towards improved planetary and human health. We must start now.