Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN)

Integrating Climate and Nutrition Action for Stronger African Food Systems

What is the tool and why is it needed?

Africa's food systems face major challenges around rising climate risks, persistently high rates of malnutrition, and increasing food insecurity. Climate shocks drive food crises, and fragile food systems heighten vulnerability to climate impacts. The Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN)[1] aims to catalyze climate actions for nutrition benefits, and vice versa. By ensuring climate-nutrition coherence in policies, financing, and programming, countries can build more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food systems.

USER TIPS

The core value of I-CAN lies in:

- Providing an evidence base on climate-nutrition integration across policies and financing.
- Identifying country-level best practices on climate-nutrition integration.
- Highlighting opportunities for, and gaps and barriers towards, closer integration.
- Recommendations to policymakers on action areas for improvement.

Find the full set of briefs | The Food Systems Countdown to 2030 Initiative | The Food Systems Dashboard | Diet Quality Questionnaire | Diagnosing Food Systems Policy Coherence | Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) | The Political Economy Decision Toolkit | Innovative Finance for Food Systems Transformation

Key findings from the I-CAN baseline analysis

The I-CAN baseline report assesses how well climate and nutrition actions are integrated across policies, data and evidence, and financing. It serves as a mirror of where we currently stand, a beacon to where we want to be, and a spotlight for best practices and untapped opportunities. It finds that while climate change and malnutrition are two of humanity's most pressing challenges, opportunities to link action on both remain untapped. Key findings:

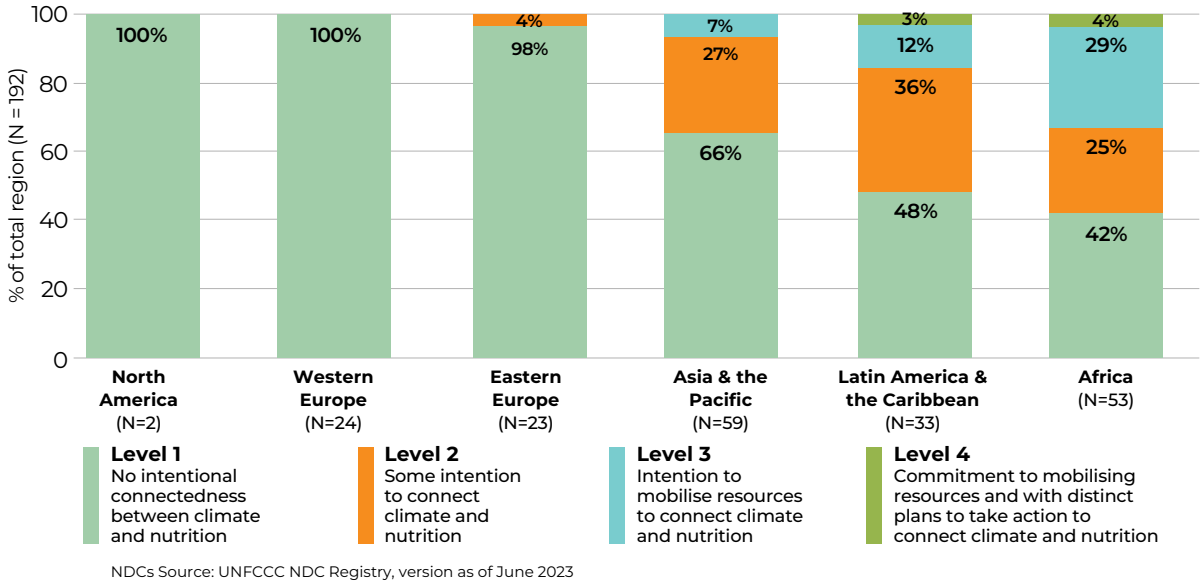
- Africa, Asia, and Latin America are leading in integrating nutrition into climate policies, with Africa showing the highest integration in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Integration between climate and nutrition is low overall, particularly in the private sector.
- Nutrition is also often conflated with food security – while food security tends to be addressed in climate policies, explicit nutrition considerations are far less common.
- Significant barriers persist: a lack of shared definitions, concepts, and metrics.
- Nutrition financing lags well behind policy commitments.

1 Launched by the Government of Egypt at COP27, I-CAN is co-chaired by the Government of Egypt and GAIN alongside working group members WHO, FAO, SUN, and UNEP, sitting under the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH). The aim is to help strengthen existing climate-nutrition efforts, fill gaps, and build a stronger evidence base for integrated climate and nutrition action.

Accelerating Climate-Nutrition Action in Africa: Where We Stand

Over half (58%) of African **NDCs** include some level of nutrition consideration (Levels 2 – 4), with 4% demonstrating full commitment through concrete actions and dedicated resources (Level 4). Although 42% of African NDCs still show no intentional connectedness (Level 1), Africa still leads in overall global integration levels (**Figure 1**). The region's progress reflects both high climate vulnerability and long-standing multisectoral nutrition work, particularly country-led efforts. Box A shares the example of Benin, whose NDC was submitted in Oct 2021 and published in Jun 2022.

Figure 1. Nationally Determined Contributions Levels by Region



NDCs Source: UNFCCC NDC Registry, version as of June 2023

Box A. Benin's NDC exhibits high levels of integration between climate and nutrition

Benin NDC

Benin produced one of the NDCs which scored at the highest level of intergration (Level 4).

These are the key features:

Core National Plan: Climate and nutrition integrated in the National Plan for Agricultural Investment in Food & Nutrition Security (2017–2021)

Government Portfolio Policy and Programs: Multiple connections between climate mitigation with improved nutrition, such as:

- Valuation Support Project Hydro-Agricultural Perimeters (PAVPHA): A project aimed at imroving nutritional security and income for family farms, women and young people by contributing to hydro-agricultural development.
- Projet de securite alimentaire et de renforcement de la resilience (PROSAR): Aimed at improving the food situation of people vulnerable to malnutrition, particularly women of childbearing age and young children

Technology Transfer: Priority technologies identified likages to improved nutrition objectives, such as developing:

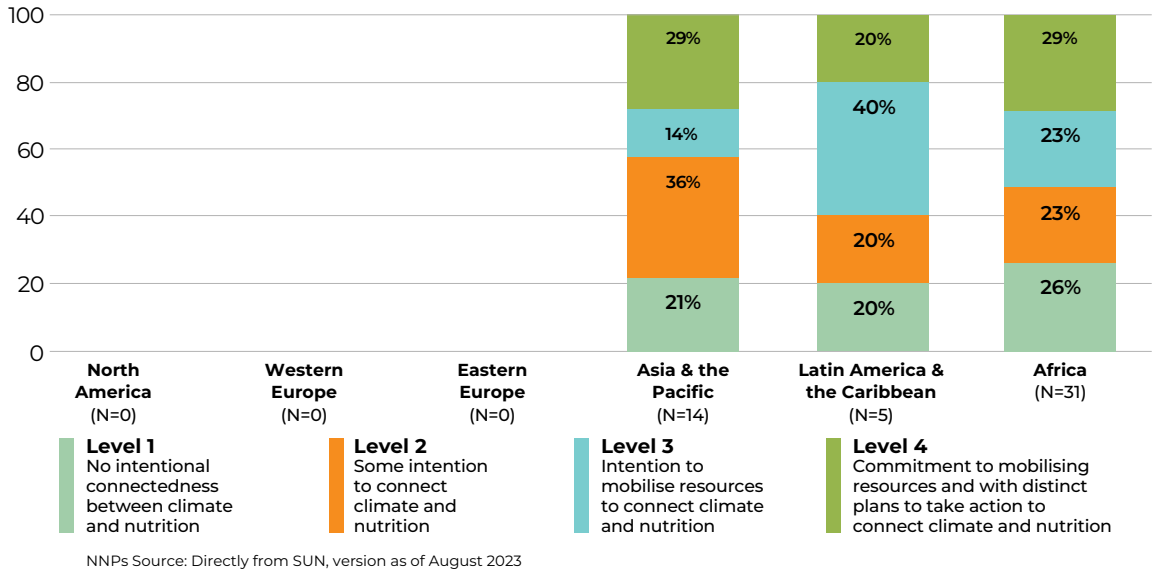
- Technology adapted to climatic constraints in agro-ecological zones to increase yields to ensure nutritional security
- Small watersheds constructed for water availablity and agricultural purposes to improve nutritional security of vulnerable populations

Climate Adaption Measures: Eight adaption measures had direct outcomes for improved nutrition, with associated costs and responsible institutions

Benin NDC Source: UNFCC NDC Registry

On levels of integration in National Nutrition Plans by region (Figure 2), Africa showed roughly the same levels of integration as Asia/Pacific and Latin America/Caribbean collectively, though bearing in mind they have a much larger sample size (31 NNPs out of 50 total). 75% of African NNPs considered climate overall (Levels 2-4). These results show that African nutrition policymakers are incorporating climate resilience into nutrition planning, though still with room for improvement. Box B shares the example of Ethiopia, whose NNP was published in May 2021.

Figure 2: National Nutrition Plans Levels by Region



NNPs Source: Directly from SUN, version as of August 2023

Box B. Ethiopia's NNP exhibits high levels of integration between climate and nutrition

Ethiopia NNP

Ethiopia produced one of the NNPs which scored at the highest level of integration (Level 4)

These are the key features:

Holistic Food System Approach: Comprehensive measures targeting a range of environments, including in agricultural production, at household level, policy environments, community settings, healthcare systems and with the private sector

Reducing Carbon Foodprint: Environmentally friendly agricultural practices listed as an objective, including in ecosystem management, irrigation, waste management and food loss

SMART Objectives: Clearly defined objectives and targets with specific commitments and expected results – for example, one of the strategic objectives listed is " Number of strategies and policies on environmental protection updated/developed in the nutrition lens" – There is context on the baseline, targets for the next 5–10 years, data source, data collection frequency and responsible ministries listed

Stakeholder Engagement: Environment and nutrition are both high on policy agenda and there are plans to engage key influencers and stakeholders across various sectors

Benin NDC Source: UNFCC NDC Registry

Other findings of note include:

- 87% of African National Adaptation Plans include some level of nutrition consideration (Levels 2–4), with a promising 25% of NAPs demonstrating full commitment (Level 4).
- 57% of African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) show climate consideration (Levels 2-4), though the overall number of African FBDGs remains very low at only 7 out of 70 analyzed. Benin and Zambia achieve the highest level of integration (Level 4).
- Of the 93 public food procurement policies analyzed globally, only 7 were from Africa, with 5 showing no integration between climate and nutrition (Level 1), and only Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe showing some consideration (Level 2).
- Out of 166 NDCs globally, 27% of African NDCs mention food security compared to 46% from the rest of the world, which is comparatively lower.

The global baseline shone a light on the current state of integration and provided insights into global best practice. Now, the I-CAN methodology is being adapted and applied at national level in seven countries (Brazil, Cambodia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tanzania). Policy mapping and analysis exercises at national and subnational levels, complemented by stakeholder mapping and analyses, are highlighting positive examples of strong integration, as well as opportunities to enhance coherence and accelerate action.

Solutions and Opportunities for Action

To fully harness the potential of climate-nutrition integration, African policymakers should consider shifting from broad commitments to more specific, actionable measures. Priority actions include:

- Enhancing NDCs, NNPs, NAPs, and other action plans and strategies with concrete nutrition targets, implementation plans, and financing commitments.
- Strengthening cross-sectoral governance, particularly by linking agriculture, health, water, and social protection systems and better alignment across key ministries.
- Mobilizing private sector leadership, especially in sustainable food value chains, climate-smart nutrition interventions, driving consumer behaviour, and in financing.
- Filling data gaps by creating and maintaining centralized databases and collaborating with private sector, NGO, academia, government and other partners on data collection.
- Educating policymakers and key actors on the links between climate and nutrition, concrete actions which could lead to enhanced integration, and co-benefits.
- Electing core processes for reviewing and establishing FBDGs, including regular updates.
- Leveraging public procurement programmes and policies (school meals, hospitals) to drive demand for climate-smart, nutritious foods.

African leaders have a unique opportunity to drive global progress on integrated climate and nutrition action to deliver meaningful benefits for their people. Key reasons to act:

- Win-win outcomes: Joint climate and nutrition action strengthens resilience to external shocks, reduces long-term costs and public health burdens, and improves livelihoods.
- Leadership opportunity: Africa is already the world's leading region in NDCs and other key areas; further scaling up of integration can help to shape global standards, such as best practices of nutrition integration into climate policies, and drive increased investments into Africa, for instance in climate-smart, nutrition-sensitive investments for agriculture.
- Entry points abound: Food security strategies, NDCs/NNPs/NAPs and other key policy updates, school feeding programs, and R&D investments are immediate priorities.

Summary

The I-CAN baseline shows that African countries are leading global efforts to integrate climate and nutrition action, particularly in NDCs and NAPs, though falling short in public food procurement. While gaps and limited data coverage are an issue, African leadership remains critical for food systems transformation. By embedding climate-nutrition linkages across policies, governance, and financing, African policymakers can drive progress toward resilient, equitable, and sustainable food systems.

References

I-CAN Baseline Report (2023). Accelerating Action and Opening Opportunities: A Closer Integration of Climate and Nutrition. I-CAN/FAO/GAIN