Nutrition and Food Systems

A report by the
High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition

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Why this Report, and Why Now?

- 2 billion people lack key micronutrients like iron and vitamin A
- 2 billion adults are overweight or obese
- 155 million children are stunted
- 41 million children are overweight
- 52 million children are wasted
- 88% of countries face a serious burden of either two or three forms of malnutrition

In these 6 countries, 38 million people are severely food insecure:

- Nigeria
- Ethiopia
- Yemen
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Kenya

Countries with famines declared

Countries with drought-like conditions
Food Systems Are Central to Diets & Human Health
Many Types of Food Systems & Environments

- Traditional food systems
- Mixed food systems
- Modern/Formal food systems
Burdens of Malnutrition Differ Across Food System Types

Prevalence (%)

- Under-5 mortality
  - Formal: 13%
  - Mixed: 30%
  - Traditional: 71%

- Under-5 stunting
  - Formal: 11%
  - Mixed: 20%
  - Traditional: 37%

- Under-5 wasting
  - Formal: 3%
  - Mixed: 5%
  - Traditional: 8%

- Under-5 overweight
  - Formal: 7%
  - Mixed: 7%
  - Traditional: 5%

- Adult overweight
  - Formal: 57%
  - Mixed: 50%
  - Traditional: 27%

- Adult obesity
  - Formal: 23%
  - Mixed: 20%
  - Traditional: 8%

- WRA anaemia
  - Formal: 20%
  - Mixed: 30%
  - Traditional: 35%

- Vitamin A deficiency
  - Formal: 15%
  - Mixed: 19%
  - Traditional: 37%
As food chains lengthen, the opportunities for nutrition to move in (and out) increase.

More Nutrition in

Less Nutrition out

Source: Fanzo et al. (2017b).
The Motivation to Act

- The scale of malnutrition raises alarms.
- The societal costs of unhealthy diets and their health outcomes are considerable.
- Food systems can be part of the solution as well as part of the problem.
- If trends continue, the costs generated by the current collective mismanagement of the world’s natural resources and food systems will rise.

Credit: Jess Fanzo
The Motivation to Act

- The scale of malnutrition raises alarms.
- The societal costs of unhealthy diets and their health outcomes are considerable.
- Food systems can be part of the solution as well as part of the problem.
- If trends continue, the costs generated by the current collective mismanagement of the world’s natural resources and food systems will rise.
- Solutions and evidence to act are available.
- Leadership must come from governments and intergovernmental organizations.
- We need disruptive change and action cannot wait.
- Seize this moment to make the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and the SDGs impactful.
Getting Over Barriers and Obstacles

- Failure to recognize the right to adequate food (and nourishment)
- Getting “Nourishment” onto the agenda
- Imbalance of power across food systems and an imbalance of awareness
- Inability to identify, prevent, manage and mitigate conflicts of interest
Overarching Recommendations 1

1. Strengthen the integration of nutrition within national policies, programmes and budgets. *Diversity of systems, Inclusive dialogue, Food and nutrition literacy, Nutrition budgets, Coherence, Capacity* (e.g. new generation of food system professionals).

2. Strengthen global cooperation to end hunger and malnutrition. *ODA. Resilience.*

3. Address the impacts of trade and investment agreements on food environments and diets. *Do no harm. Consistent with nutrition policies* e.g. dietary guidelines.

4. Address the nutritional vulnerabilities of particular groups. *Specific measures.*

5. Improve nutritional outcomes by enhancing women’s rights and empowerment. *Equal access to resources. Recognise and value unpaid work. Participation and representation of women in policymaking. Enabling environment to promote breastfeeding.*
Overarching recommendations 2

6. Recognize and address conflicts of interest. Ensure participatory mechanisms to address CoI. Ensure accountability and transparency. Protect integrity of science.

7. Improve data collection and knowledge sharing on food systems and nutrition, including diagnostics. Draw on unusual suspects.

8. Enhance opportunities to improve diet and nutrition outcomes along food supply chains. Incentives to actors along food chain to make food supply healthier. Incentives, technology, to produce nutritious food. Food safety, prevent food loss.


So what’s different about this report? (my take)

- **Produced through an inclusive process.** Report team was balanced by geography, disciplinary background and organization type.

- **Subversively, a bit radical.** For example, statements such as “The risks of making well intentioned but inappropriate policy choices are much smaller than the risks of using a lack of evidence as an argument for inaction” are fairly heretical for many nutrition investors guided by Lancet 2008 and 2013.

- **Equal focus to three features of food systems:** food supply, food environments and consumer orientation. Some of the other reports mentioned have not been as balanced and especially do not spend enough time on the creation of the demand for healthy food.

- **Action orientated.** For example, there are 26 pages of text on priorities for action in food supply chains, food environments, and in orienting consumer behaviour.
What’s different? 2

• **Takes on barriers and enablers for action**: these are all quite context specific and deal with power asymmetries. This kind of political economy analysis needs to be developed further in future HLPE (and other) reports.

• **The private sector is taken seriously**. Not merely characterized as a malevolent actor. One of the HLPE team members was even from the private sector – a first, I believe for the HLPE, but brave and necessary. Given, as the report notes, the public sector is the duty bearer for ensuring food systems enhance food security and nutrition for all, and the private sector is main investor in food systems, it makes sense for the two sides to understand each other better.

• **Climate issues are woven throughout the report**, not confined to one section or chapter. Other environmental footprint issues could be strengthened in future reports, the evidence on the wider environmental footprint of different foods in different countries is sorely lacking.
Thank you!

Download the Report here: