

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021

This is a summary of the following report:

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Rome: FAO.

<https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html>



Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was not on track to meet commitments to end world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. This report presented the first global assessment of food insecurity and malnutrition for 2020.

The report found that the number of people affected by hunger increased in 2020 under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. After remaining virtually unchanged from 2014 to 2019, the prevalence of undernourishment¹ increased to around 9.9% in 2020, from 8.4% a year earlier. An estimated 720 to 811 million people faced hunger in 2020. Approximately 660 million people may still face hunger in 2030; this represents 30 million more people than in a scenario where the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred.

More than half of the world's undernourished are found in Asia (418 million) with an additional one third residing in Africa (282 million). While the global prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity has slowly been rising since 2014, the estimated increase in 2020 was equal to that of the previous five years combined, with the gender gap even larger in 2020 compared to 2019. The high cost of healthy diets combined with income inequality caused healthy diets to be too expensive for around 3 billion people in 2019; this figure is expected to increase for 2020. Globally, malnutrition in all its forms also remains a challenge.

Although it is not yet possible to fully account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic due to data limitations, in 2020 it is estimated that 22% (149.2 million) of children under five years of age were affected by stunting, 6.7% (45.4 million) were suffering from wasting and 5.7% (38.9 million) were overweight. Furthermore, in 2019 an estimated 29.9% of women 15 to 49 years of age were affected by anaemia.

When food systems are transformed with greater resilience to the major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition, such as conflict, climate variability and extremes and economic slowdowns, they can provide affordable, healthy and sustainable diets for all. Such a transformation can be a powerful driving force towards ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. This report recommended six pathways towards food systems transformation depending on the context:

1. Integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict-affected areas
2. Scaling up climate resilience across food systems
3. Strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity
4. Intervening along the food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods
5. Tackling poverty and structural inequalities, ensuring interventions are pro-poor and inclusive
6. Strengthening food environments and changing consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment.

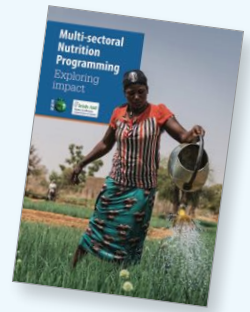
Bold actions such as those described in this report are required to accelerate progress towards ending world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.

¹ The prevalence of undernourishment is an estimate of the proportion of the population whose habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide the dietary energy levels that are required to maintain a normal active and healthy life.

Multi-sectoral nutrition programming: exploring impact

This is a summary of the following report:
Ogada E, Bahwere P, Lelijveld N, Sessions N, Desplats G & Khara T (2021) Multi-sectoral nutrition programming – exploring impact. ENN, Oxford, UK.

<https://www.ennonline.net/mspexploringimpact>



Multi-sector nutrition programmes (MSNPs) have gained increasing prominence over the last two decades to address the many direct and underlying determinants of malnutrition. Both the recent *Lancet* Maternal and Child Undernutrition Progress series¹ and the *Lancet* Series on Adolescent Nutrition² stress the importance of effective multi-sector programmes to prevent and tackle malnutrition at every life stage. However, there are still large gaps in our knowledge on the efficacy, effectiveness and impact of multi-sector approaches compared to single sector interventions, due to limited information on appropriate methods for monitoring and evaluating MSNPs.

This report synthesises the available evidence on the impact of MSNPs and documents the type and quality of monitoring and evaluation systems established to measure impact. The authors conducted a systematic search to identify relevant evaluation reports, programme implementation reports, programme description documents, programme proposals, research reports, peer-reviewed publications, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and country assessments and case studies.

The authors found that most evaluations were of the pre- and post-test design with no comparison group. Even the most rigorously designed evaluations noted the difficulty in attributing any or all impacts on the outcome indicators to the intervention alone. Secondary nutrition outcomes (such as household dietary diversity scores, food insecurity scores, indicators of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) and water, sanitation, and hygiene practices, standardised measures of women's empowerment, and indicators of household finances) were more widely measured and likely to show a positive improvement in household dietary diversity and IYCF indicators. Of the reviews that had a control group, the majority showed a positive impact on primary nutrition outcomes (child stunting, wasting, underweight, or anaemia). Few evaluations included coverage estimates. In addition, while all of the evaluations reviewed were of programmes engaging multiple sectors, interventions were often not delivered jointly or in a coordinated way, and most programmes had yet to go to national scale.

It is therefore recommended that careful attention is needed when implementing MSNPs so that they are implemented in a convergent manner. The scale-up of programmes needs improvement and this may be achieved by better embedding these in government structures. Indicators to assess programme coverage should be integrated into national information systems (within health, agriculture, and education) and a more objective way of comparing levels of programme convergence should be explored.

The authors also recommend that more guidance on effective and standardised MSNP evaluations is needed, as well as greater availability of funding for quality, large-scale evaluations. A minimum level of rigour should be set, ideally allowing for the assessment of change in outcomes between time points interpreted against the backdrop of secular trends. Ensuring the inclusion and importance of secondary nutrition outcomes rather than largely focusing on stunting impact is both important and more realistic for many programmes.

¹ <https://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-child-undernutrition-progress>
² <https://www.thelancet.com/series/adolescent-nutrition>