



PARIS  
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sur la PAIX

# NUTRITION AT THE HEART OF A FUNCTIONING GLOBAL ORDER

SOLUTIONS AT HAND TO  
COMBAT MALNUTRITION

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# Preamble

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Malnutrition, including poor growth during pregnancy and childhood, deficiencies in essential vitamins and nutrients and overweight and obesity, has devastating consequences in terms of increased mortality of children and mothers; preventable disabilities, poor cognitive and physical development and non-communicable diseases. The evidence for investments and policies that lead to improved nutrition is robust and continues to improve. Significant progress has been achieved where political leadership has been combined with evidence-based investments and policies, demonstrating an ability to act at scale. Despite progress, crises of food prices, insecurity, pandemics are undermining progress and threaten backsliding. The climate crisis poses particularly grave threats to progress, undermining all systems that contribute to good nutrition and exacerbating pre-existing inequities.

The tremendous potential of evidence-based investments and policies to address malnutrition has yet to be realized. The World Bank Investment Framework for Nutrition underscores that nutrition is one of the best-buy development investments. Malnutrition drives economic productivity losses, and every dollar invested in early nutrition interventions can generate \$23 in return on average (1). Good nutrition is a marker and a maker of human capital and inclusive economic growth and an essential ingredient in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The [Paris Nutrition for Growth Summit](#), March 27-28, 2025, continues a tradition of Summits, calling on all actors to step up their investments, policies and political commitments.

**Purpose of the Independent Expert Panel on Nutrition and Recommendations:** As a partner in organizing the Nutrition for Growth Summit, the Paris Peace Forum brought together globally recognized nutrition experts from across the world, in their independent capacity, to synthesize the highest priority investments and policies to accelerate progress on tackling malnutrition at this critical juncture. These recommendations are intended to prioritize actions to improve global nutrition, and to contribute to broad mobilization among stakeholders ahead of the Summit, recognizing that there is a critical opportunity to act with the momentum and evidence available at this point in time. As such, they provide input for the Thematic Groups preparing the Summit, for national governments, regional institutions, governmental and philanthropic donors, development banks, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions and private sector actors who are formulating commitments for the upcoming Summit (More details on the Independent Expert Panel are available below.)

**Acting Within Sectors, Acting Across Sectors:** The Independent Expert Panel recognizes that investments and policies are usually decided within sectors, and has formulated recommendations for the five key sectors that contribute to improved nutrition: **Health systems**; **Agrifood systems**; **Social Protection systems**; **Education systems**; and **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) systems**.

At the same time, the Panel recognizes that realizing the potential of good nutrition requires action **across** sectors, and makes five priority cross-cutting recommendations:

1. **Enhance nutrition governance, coordination and accountability.** The persistence of malnutrition is a failure of governance. Progress needs to be driven by political leadership that can advocate for investments and policies, enable sectors to act at scale, review progress and hold actors accountable. Stakeholders are encouraged to register commitments in the Global Nutrition Report Nutrition Accountability Framework, and report on them.

2. **Improve policies and increase investments based on global and context-specific evidence.** There are major opportunities to improve policies across sectors based on global evidence and context-specific priorities. There remain tremendous gaps in nutrition investments and there are opportunities to make sectoral allocations work better for nutrition, and a need to continue to grow investments in nutrition. Given the devastating consequences of the climate crisis on nutrition, it is particularly important to position nutrition financing and policies as one of the best ways to fight the impacts of climate change.

3. **Invest in human resources for nutrition.** Nutrition investment plans should also specifically consider the expertise required within each system to design policies and investments and implement programs that will have nutrition impacts. This includes investing in appropriate training programs and ensuring that positions are created and filled.

4. **Invest in data and evidence that will improve design and performance and continue to improve the knowledge base of what works.** The design of nutrition programs and policies should be based on solid assessments and underpinned with information systems that drive improved performance. Investment in implementation research should address bottlenecks to delivering programs at scale. It is important to continue investments to further improve the evidence base on the highest-impact solutions in the various sectors.

5. **Focus on equity, including breaking gender barriers to access good nutrition.** The persistence of malnutrition is most fundamentally a manifestation of inequity. Gender inequities in accessing nutrition services and nutritious food persist in all settings. Policies and programs need to be designed with a robust understanding of who is most at risk, identification of barriers and design and political commitment to addressing these barriers.

# Key Policy Recommendations

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## 1/ Health Systems

- Increase the coverage of cost-effective high impact nutrition interventions through the health system
- Ensure health services' resilience
- Expand and train the health workforce for integrated nutrition services with a particular focus on community health workers
- Ensure access to essential nutrition-related health products
- Integrate monitoring mechanisms within national health information systems
- Provide equitable fundings allocations through costed plans
- Integrate nutrition across all national policies and sectors

## 2/ Agrifood Systems

- Include and enable healthy diets by changing policy makers' perception of the critical importance of healthy diets
- Repurpose fiscal policies to prioritize access to healthy diets
- Generate evidence on food systems transformation
- Address other consumer barriers to healthy eating patterns
- Develop and improve market infrastructure and healthier value chains
- Promote climate-smart agriculture to limit the impact of agriculture on climate change and protect people's health and nutrition
- Contribute to dietary nutrient adequacy through quality fortification and biofortification of locally consumed staples

## 3/ Social Protection Systems

- Expand coverage of adaptive nutrition-sensitive social protection programs that use equity-based targeting to prioritize the most vulnerable populations and focus investments in strengthening high nutrition impact design features
- Invest in financial and institutional efforts to scale up and deploy the power of social protection
- Invest in systems to support monitoring, implementation research and learning on strengthening and scaling up nutrition-sensitive social protection

## 4/ Education Systems

- Transform existing school-based programs into true school nutrition programs with a priority given to communities living in food insecurity
- Ensure girls' education is compulsory

- Generate evidence of successful local procurement of healthy, nutritious foods used in school programs

## 5/ Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) Systems

- Target vulnerable groups with high rates of malnutrition as well as those most affected by climate change
- Invest in infrastructure and transformative WASH at scale
- Connect WASH and health/food/education/social protection sectors with an explicit gender focus

# Health systems

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## Rationale

Malnutrition in all its forms increases the risk of getting ill, staying ill, and dying of illness. Unhealthy diets and malnutrition are responsible for one third of the global burden of disease (2). Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is essential to achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring everyone—especially the vulnerable—can access health services without financial hardship. Nutrition is a critical piece of UHC.

Integrating nutrition actions into health services is vital for better health growth and development outcomes. Nutrition actions need to be visibly resourced and prioritized in maternal and child health services and in noncommunicable disease management services.

## What success looks like

The ambitious goal of “ending all forms of malnutrition by 2030” (SDG2)<sup>1</sup> translates into the achievement of the global nutrition targets set by the World Health Assembly on stunting, wasting, anemia, low birth weight and breastfeeding (3).

Policy changes and investments need to increase the **coverage of nutrition interventions in healthcare**. For example, in 2017, only one third of pregnant women received the required allocation of iron and folic acid supplements and only two thirds of children received vitamin A capsules (4). Financial and access barriers need to be removed, so that everyone, regardless of income or location, receives essential nutrition and health services, leaving no one behind.

A **larger number of health professionals with adequate nutrition training** will be able to reach more beneficiaries and deliver good quality of care. Adequate **financial resources** will need to be invested through costed plans and monitoring mechanisms should be in place to track the efficient coverage of services.

National UHC plans should be part of multisectoral nutrition plans, led by a government authority, and should involve coordinated action by relevant actors in society.

## Priorities for Policy/Investment

### Increase the coverage of quality cost-effective high impact nutrition interventions through the health system

The WHO’s Essential Nutrition Actions (6), a package of essential health services, with a focus on the first 1,000 days and on reaching those most left behind, should be implemented. Priority

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<sup>1</sup> ["Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture — SDG Indicators". unstats.un.org.](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/goal2/)

interventions include nutrition counselling to women regarding healthy diets for themselves and their children; breastfeeding promotion, protection and support in health facilities; the diagnosis of anemia and malnutrition; the provision of nutrition supplements; the prevention and management of wasting in children and of obesity in children and adults.

### Ensure health services' resilience

Health systems must be prepared to effectively respond to emerging needs in climate crises and conflicts, as well as pandemic and other **health emergencies**. **This should include contingency plans that prevent** disruptions of critical nutrition service delivery systems and networks, particularly to protect vulnerable women and children.

### Expand and train the health workforce for integrated nutrition services with a particular focus on community health workers

Increase the number of **health workers**, ensure they are properly trained on the integrated delivery of nutrition interventions across the life-course, and that they receive integrated supportive supervision and mentoring that build their capacity to deliver these interventions.

In 2016, health professionals with nutrition training were estimated to be 2.2/100,000 population (7). We should aim at reaching a global average of 10/100,000 population, which is the level that higher-income countries have. Focus areas could be formally institutionalizing Community Health Workers within the health system, ensuring their appropriate remuneration, training and supervising and improving pre-service training to strengthen the general nutrition capacity of the health workforce.

### Ensure access to essential nutrition-related health products

**Nutrition-related health products** should be more available, affordable, accessible, and properly administered through the health system, including through including these in national essential medicines lists. Critical supplies include micronutrient supplements (MMS), protein and energy supplements, Ready-to-Use therapeutic foods.

### Integrate monitoring mechanisms within national health information systems.

These mechanisms should include indicators to **track the coverage and quality of essential nutrition actions** and provide early warning of nutrition emergencies and develop capacity to use this information for decision-making.

### Provide equitable funding allocations through costed plans

Account for the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of nutrition interventions; use allocative efficiency analyses across key interventions and geographical areas; consider cost-sharing with other interventions and public-private partnerships; and continuously track spending linked to performance monitoring and evaluation. **Support countries to strategically allocate domestic resources** to delivering integrated essential nutrition actions in national health plans as smart

investments that can drive impacts. Budget allocations to health promotion may be used for nutrition actions. Investments in nutrition actions would reduce morbidity and mortality and reduce people's out-of-pocket expenditures.

### Integrate nutrition across all national policies and sectors

Ensure that **national multi-sectoral policy plans** apply the principle of 'health in all policies', to embed nutrition through all areas of policies. Furthermore, integrate nutrition in national UHC plans; include nutrition policies in the food system, social protection, education, and trade that protect to promote good nutrition across the board.

# Agrifood Systems

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## Rationale

For many years and in the face of major challenges and ongoing transitions, agrifood systems have kept most people (8) from the worst deprivations of hunger (9). Yet healthy diets remain elusive in most world populations, and for an estimated 2.8 billion, they are unaffordable (10). In no country in the world have agrifood systems been shaped in ways that enable healthy diets for all, favor planetary welfare, or widespread prosperity (11). The purpose of a system has been described as what it does, and across the world, agrifood systems are driving epidemic proportions of premature death and disability (12), harming the environment, and allowing abundant inequity.

With system drivers and outcomes (e.g. climate, demographics, globalization, political landscapes) ever-shifting; and with environmental, wellness, and equity concerns rising, the urgent purpose of our agrifood systems – what they must do – is changing. It is no longer a question of whether agrifood systems must be transformed, but rather of how.

## What success looks like

For agrifood systems to nourish<sup>2</sup> all people (13), protect and restore the environment, support fair livelihoods, and preserve and build on food culture while enabling rather than eroding universal aspirations, they must transform in new and accelerated ways. The task is a large one, and the benefits of action and costs of inaction (see e.g. Figure A) justify greater attention from governments, civil society, the private sector, consumers, and all related sectors and actors. When the individual, health sector and societal costs of premature death and disability from obesity-related non-communicable diseases and from malnutrition in all its forms are added together, the figures are breathtaking.

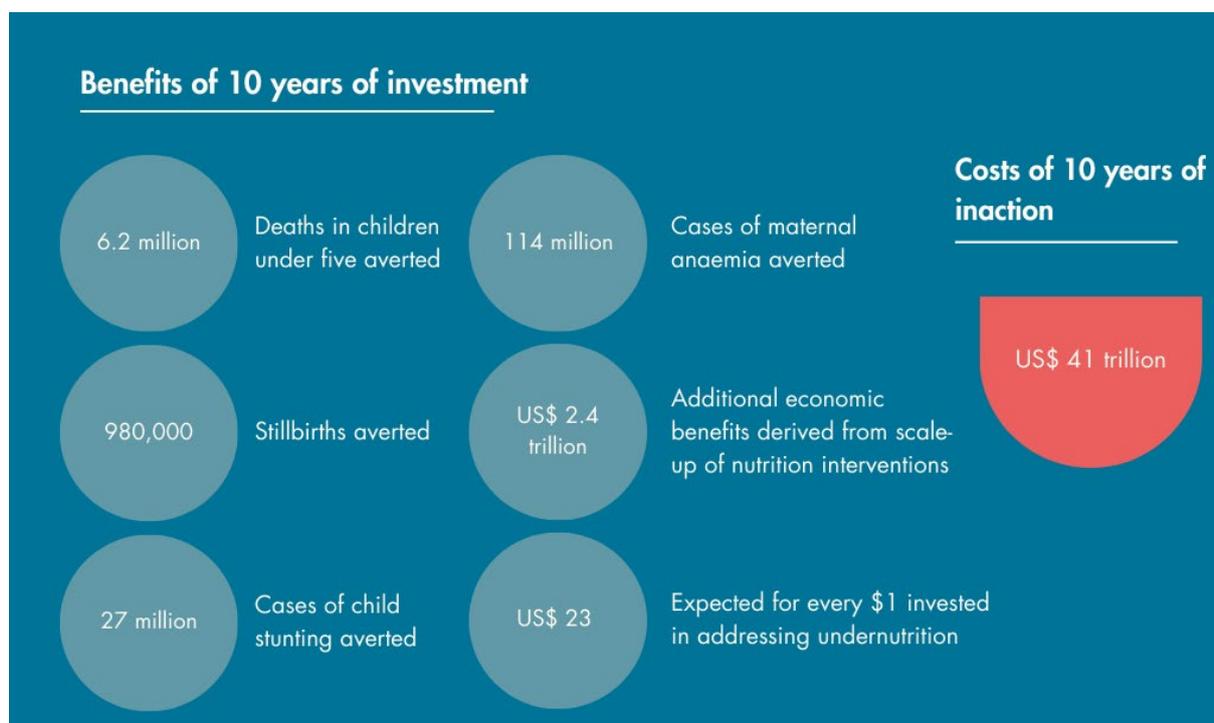
Insufficient knowledge, capacity and have held back country progress in the past. But systemic change has been achieved in other areas through combinations of better data and evidence, public awareness and advocacy, consumer demand, industry innovation, government regulation, and cultural change (9).

The below recommendations focus on **enabling access to healthy diets for all** as central to agrifood systems transformation. While healthy diets alone cannot address malnutrition in all its forms, preventing and controlling all forms of malnutrition cannot be achieved without healthy diets.

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<sup>2</sup> To *nourish all people*, agrifood systems must ensure equitable access (available and affordable) of contextually relevant nutritious food enables consumers to choose healthy diets, i.e., those that are adequate in nutrients, diverse in foods, balanced in energy, moderate in unhealthy foods/ nutrients (13).

Figure A: Investing in undernutrition alone: A decade of economic and societal benefits



Source: The World Bank (1)

## Priorities for policy and investment

Priority actions must focus on areas where structural issues limit progress and result in severe, continual and/or recurring barriers to access to healthy diets. These conditions exist in rural areas of most low-income countries, most of which are in Africa, and deeply affect the urban poor in many parts of the world. In the past, supply-side programming (e.g. boosting production with technical, in-kind, or financial support) has often taken center-stage, but creating demand for healthy diets from sustainable agrifood systems through shifting personal and collective food choice behaviors is equally crucial. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated actions within a whole-of-system approach<sup>3</sup>, adapted to the reality of national and local contexts, prioritizing the following:

### Transform agrifood policies to enable healthy diets

*“...no country has implemented a full range of updated, comprehensive, and evidence informed strategies to encourage a healthier and more equitable food system... a coordinated national food and nutrition policy strategy should be a priority for all governments.” (9)*

Although the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit has taken this agenda forward, this 2018 statement remains critically relevant. Enabling healthy diets is not yet central to the agrifood systems

<sup>3</sup> This includes, but is not limited to health systems, water and sanitation, education and social protection.

transformation agenda in all countries. National pathways for agrifood systems transformation that explicitly include enabling healthy diets for all, need urgent operationalizing by multiple sectors and ministries. Activities should be coherent, interpreted at sub-national levels, sustainably budgeted, monitored and evaluated (14). Donors must support national processes and partnerships, as well as transnational ones (e.g. the post-Malabo agenda of the African Union (15)).

### Repurpose fiscal policies to prioritize access to healthy diets

Governments must create incentives and remove disincentives for the production of diverse, contextually relevant nutritious foods; and remove incentives that enable unhealthy foods. A rebalance of agricultural subsidies to support healthy diets from sustainable agrifood systems is needed, as are changes in trade policies (16). Taxes and subsidies must be used to rebalance the affordability of unhealthy foods (e.g. ultra-processed, high in fat, sugar, salt) in favor of healthy foods (e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables, beans and legumes, diverse nutritious staple foods, nutritious animal source foods in some contexts). Consumer choices and access (see recommendation on Addressing consumer barriers) might also be improved through policies to improve transparency and remove price distortions. National food based dietary guidelines are a key resource to inform fiscal policy repurposing. These contextual descriptions of healthy dietary patterns should be compared to the current food supply, and thus identify the food types that require the most urgent action to enable access to healthy diets for all.

### Generate evidence on food systems transformations

Investment in research to support systemic change in food systems is needed, where too little has been tried and evaluated (17). This research must include at minimum: widening the narrow commodity focus including contextually appropriate neglected and underused crops; shifting incentives to climate-smart agricultural technologies; adjusting or supporting agricultural R&D budgets to investigate sustainable approaches to intensification.

### Address other consumer barriers to healthy eating patterns

Beyond access barriers, food environments are full of features that encourage unhealthy eating patterns (18). Healthy food must compete not only on price and availability, but on taste, desirability, and convenience, often in commercially pressured environments. Restrictions (e.g. on advertising/marketing), labelling mandates and regulations can help, as can unlocking consumer action for agrifood systems transformation. Food culture must be nurtured while knowledge, tools, and resources are developed to accelerate impact across society. Social protection including school food and nutrition programs (see recommendations on education) or other public procurement programs have a particular role to play in promoting the consumption of healthier foods, especially for the most vulnerable ones (19).

## Develop and improve market infrastructure and healthier value chains

In low-income countries, and particularly across Africa, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from farms to small-scale processing and distributors are central to agrifood systems, particularly in rural areas and serving lower-income urban populations. In addition, multinational and large national food business in all countries produce, trade, process, and market a large quantity of foods.

Therefore, **improving markets and infrastructure for nutrition** must be a particular emphasis for action, including the development and strengthening of market infrastructure to link producers to consumers. Across rural Africa, and many low-income countries in other regions, rural roads, ports, transport systems, market facilities and cold chains remain a major barrier for moving perishable food from field to market and consumer. Investments to change this are vital not only to enable healthy diets but to favor rural prosperity and equity. Rural roads for example, are credited with improving consumption diversity as well as the functioning of social protection programs.

**Reducing food loss and waste** while maintaining or improving food safety not only helps the bottom line of those in the food industry, but contributes to landfill, carbon, and water goals. Innovation can play a key role here in reducing trade-offs between waste reduction and environmental impacts in areas such as plastics and fossil fuel use (20).

## Promote climate-smart agriculture to limit the impact of agriculture on climate change and protect people's health and nutrition

Climate-smart agriculture should guide actions and planning to transform agrifood systems towards green and climate resilient practices such as planting and conservation of trees and forests, rehabilitation of degraded lands, and use of climate-smart agricultural practices and crops. Those practices need to be promoted to improve soil fertility, reduce the need for and use of chemical inputs, thus reducing the risk of contaminating soils, water bodies and underground water tables and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions and thus the carbon footprint of agriculture while increasing the resilience to climate shocks.

## Contribute to dietary nutrient adequacy through quality fortification and biofortification of locally consumed staples

By enriching widely consumed food vehicles with vitamins and minerals, **large-scale food fortification and biofortification** can contribute to dietary nutrient adequacy without requiring changes in consumer behavior or significant costs to consumers, producers or processors (21). Beyond legislation, this requires technical support, regulation and monitoring and enforcement from government to ensure quality and compliance. The importance of fortification will only grow as climate change and environmental degradation may reduce micronutrient quality from some food crops (22,23).

# Social Protection Systems

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## Rationale

Social protection programs can play an important role in improving nutrition outcomes, particularly for the poorest households through increased income, reduction in food insecurity, poverty and inequality. Social protection policies and programs that aim to alleviate poverty or its adverse effects can improve dietary diversity, consumption of animal-source foods, and other indicators, ultimately improving nutritional status outcomes including child linear growth, stunting, anemia, and other measures (24,25).

Social protection programs are most effective for nutrition outcomes when they are well targeted and when their delivery mechanism integrates nutrition interventions. Adaptive social protection systems can buffer the most vulnerable households against shocks that may jeopardize their nutrition security, such as conflicts, economic crises, and natural disasters (26). Social protection systems can also be instrumental in addressing gender inequality and gender-specific vulnerabilities and women's empowerment, for example by addressing nutrition issues across the life-course. **However, significant gaps remain in the implementation of specific actions to address such vulnerabilities** (27).

Evidence for the impact of nutrition-sensitive social protection programs is strongest for maternal and child undernutrition outcomes. In addition, there is strong evidence from national and subnational case studies that efforts to combine social protection policies and programs support improvements in large-scale reductions in stunting. School meal programs that aim to support children from poor families to attend school are often part of national social protection frameworks and can offer opportunities to strengthen nutrition impacts if they are adequately designed and are nutrition sensitive. In some settings, however, safety-net programs have contributed to increased overweight or obesity, despite offering the opportunity to improve healthy diets. Coupling social protection efforts in a multisectoral frame is therefore crucial to success in addressing all forms of malnutrition.

## What success looks like

In many countries, social protection initiatives face substantial challenges that constrain their impact on nutrition outcomes, including lack of financing, low implementation capacity, and overloading with complementary components that may divert focus from the primary aim of alleviating poverty and vulnerability (28). Improving nutrition outcomes through social protection will require coordinated action to exploit synergies between national multisectoral social protection and nutrition policy priorities (29).

Successful efforts need strong political recognition of the tremendous potential of nutrition-sensitive social protection to improve equity in nutrition outcomes and identification of the key design features that can impact various outcomes.

Investments in key design features to deliver high-impact nutrition-sensitive social protection programs should target high-impact population groups: families in the first 1000 days, adolescents and young women, and women as primary recipients of assistance. Furthermore, it should include high-quality behavior change and nutrition features such as special foods and nutrition services.

Investments in new forms of adaptive nutrition-sensitive social protection need to align with protections linked to climate and other economic shocks and monitor and track the impacts of nutrition-sensitive social protection on all forms of malnutrition.

## Priorities for Policy/Investment

### Expand coverage of adaptive nutrition-sensitive social protection programs and focus investments in strengthening high nutrition impact design features

Coverage of nutrition-sensitive social protection programs should both protect populations in times of crises and protect nutrition outcomes equitably. This focus should include effective (1) reach to women; (2) bundling with nutrition actions; (3) equity-based targeting to prioritize the most vulnerable populations; (4) linking nutrition programs to other services to strengthen their nutrition-sensitivity; (5) scaling up cash-based programs, where contextually appropriate, can enhance families' access to nutritious foods and services.

### Invest in financial and institutional efforts to scale-up and deploy the power of social protection

These efforts could include securing sustainable government-led financing for the implementation of social protection programs. Sustainable funding should be allocated to other sectoral programs that help strengthen nutrition-sensitivity of social protection programs (e.g. nutrition interventions into health services). High-level government coordination units should be established and supported to enhance multisectoral programs. The development of legal frameworks to guide the implementation of nutrition-sensitive social protection programs could deploy the full potential of social protection to enhance nutrition outcomes.

### Invest in systems to support monitoring, implementation research and learning on strengthening and scaling up nutrition-sensitive social protection

Monitoring mechanisms are essential to assess the coverage and reach of social protection initiatives. Implementation research should be prioritized, to identify design features that improve equity and

maximize the nutrition impact of social protection systems. Impact evaluations of innovative approaches are needed to strengthen the impact on nutrition in a changing context.

## Education Systems

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### Rationale

Nutrition and education links are bidirectional, with good nutrition improving learning performance and education outcomes, while education is conducive to good nutrition practices. School feeding programs are often not designed to optimize nutrition outcomes but if they become more nutrition-sensitive, by providing nutritious and micronutrient-dense meals, they have the potential to generate significant benefits. However, they require adequate allocation of resources and political will to be implemented successfully and to trigger significant nutritional outcomes. Indeed, adequate nutrition enhances optimal development and growth but also better learning capacity. On the contrary, poor diets have a direct impact on children's school performance and health therefore affecting their future productivity.

Schools are an important setting for health and nutrition interventions and play a key role in the overall wellness, nutrition, protection and learning potential of children and adolescents. These programs can also help break the intergenerational cycles of poor health, social inequities and gender disparities as girls and women, in some countries, continue to face barriers to access to education (30). School-based food, nutrition and health interventions may have a positive impact on the school community, the school curriculum, the school food and nutrition environment, and school nutrition and health services (31). Moreover, maternal education is one of the most important determinants of children's nutritional status (32). More educated mothers are more likely to implement healthy eating practices, seek timely healthcare, have higher financial resources, and be more empowered to make adequate decisions regarding health and food. Nutrition education in general empowers individuals to make informed food choices, to adopt healthy lifestyles and to prevent all forms of malnutrition. It is needed in all settings.

### Priorities for policy/investment

Transform existing school-based programs into true school nutrition programs with a priority given to communities living in food insecurity

School nutrition programs should include at least one healthy snack or meal in primary and secondary schools, particularly in communities living in food insecurity, ensuring that they are aligned with health guidelines and daily nutritional requirements (33). By providing healthy food, school feeding programs can improve both undernutrition and obesity, but also micronutrient deficiencies that affect students. National guidelines should encompass strong regulations of the

school food environment (e.g. strict rules for food vendors or shops in the school precincts or close to schools).

School feeding programs have also been shown to improve school attendance and reduce dropout rates (e.g. increase in enrolment by an average of 9%) (34). By using local food production, school feeding programs may also stabilize local markets, strengthen local agrifood systems and support local farmers, therefore ensuring food security at the community level. These programs should also integrate context-tailored nutrition education into school curricula.

### Ensure girls' education is mandatory

Mandatory education for girls can be achievable through legislation, financial support, opportunities for girls in schools and other relevant means. It is the only way for adolescent girls to benefit from school nutrition programs' outcomes that will give them the tools for improving their nutritional status, the one of their future children, and to make informed food choices.

### Generate the evidence of successful local procurement of healthy, nutritious foods used in school programs

Promising evidence suggests the benefits of using local foods in school meals (e.g. improved nutritional quality of students' diets and economic benefit for local farmers). However, the research in this area remains limited. Additional funds should be allocated to research to better understand and quantify these potential impacts, in order to close the existing evidence gap.

# Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) systems

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Safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (captured by the acronym WASH) are crucial to human health and well-being. Safe WASH for all is not only a prerequisite to health and a fundamental human right, but contributes to livelihoods, school attendance, human dignity and helps to create resilient communities living in healthy environments, especially in the context of climate change (35).

## Rationale

**WASH interventions are critical to improve nutrition and reduce infections:** WASH interventions and facilities are critical components of improving nutrition, particularly in vulnerable populations. Clean water, an important global resource, is essential for safe food preparation and reducing the risk of waterborne diseases, which can cause malnutrition by impairing nutrient absorption and causing dehydration. Poor sanitation and hygiene practices, such as inadequate handwashing, can lead to the transmission of intestinal pathogens, exacerbating illnesses like diarrhea. These conditions, in turn, affect a person's ability to consume and retain nutrients, contributing to undernutrition and stunted growth, especially in children and often disproportionately affecting girls and women.

**WASH strategies support food security and overall health:** In addition to improving health outcomes, WASH interventions can play a direct role in supporting food security, especially food safety and dietary diversity. Water security and food security co-occur, and clean water is essential for growing crops and livestock (35). Furthermore, proper sanitation systems reduce environmental contamination, lowering the risk of food and water contamination that can affect entire communities including reductions in child stunting (36) and infant mortality (37). By integrating WASH into nutrition programs, the cycle of malnutrition caused by poor hygiene and unsafe water can be broken, leading to improved overall health, nutrition and wellbeing across the life course (38).

**WASH is an investment, not a net cost:** Evidence shows that not only poor WASH status contributes to poor human capital, but WASH programs are a key investment with up to fourfold rates of return (39).

## Priorities for policies and investment

### Target vulnerable groups with high rates of malnutrition as well as those most affected by climate change

WASH interventions should be specifically targeted to communities with high prevalences of malnutrition in addition to at-risk and marginalized populations, for example those with high levels of exposure to heat stress such as agriculture and outdoor workers. Adequate hydration is critical to the mitigation of heat stress – for all people, and pregnant women in particular.

### Invest in infrastructure, and transformative WASH at scale

Water is a fundamental human right and essential to promoting equitable maternal and child nutrition (1). WASH interventions and facilities impact health, nutrition and human development in multiple ways. WASH strategies require government ownership and stewardship, including regional collaborations.

### Connect WASH and health/food/education/social protection sectors with an explicit gender focus

Access to clean/safe water and sanitation has multiplicative effects across various sectors and can reduce school dropouts among adolescent girls in LMICs, childhood learning and developmental outcomes with reduced school absenteeism and reduction in gender-based violence in some settings.

## Call to action

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The urgency for action on malnutrition cannot be overstated. This policy brief highlights that through targeted, evidence-based investments and strategic policy shifts, significant progress can be achieved in addressing malnutrition.

The outlined recommendations provide a path forward for stakeholders, demonstrating that these investments not only improve nutrition outcomes but also catalyze broader benefits, including economic growth and resilience. Nutrition must therefore be elevated as a top priority on the political and development agenda at all levels.

Stakeholders across governments, donors, civil society, and the private sector hold the power to drive forward tangible commitments and sustained action within and across their respective sectors. This expert Panel remains committed to supporting and guiding improved nutrition globally and calls upon all stakeholders to seize the opportunity of the upcoming 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit.

# Objective of the Expert Panel

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Over the past months, the Paris Peace Forum brought together high-level experts through an Independent Expert Panel on Nutrition. The Panel aimed to identify and prioritize actions to improve global nutrition, and to contribute to broad mobilization among stakeholders ahead of the upcoming Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in Paris, scheduled for 27-28 March 2025. The Independent Expert Panel on Nutrition, chaired by Mr. Shawn Baker, seeks to raise political awareness of the critical issue of malnutrition and actively contribute to the 2025 Paris N4G Summit agenda.

The Panel's work is guided by the scientific evidence available and by internationally agreed goals such as the Global Nutrition Targets, to facilitate the execution of actions needed to combat malnutrition effectively on a global scale. The Panel jointly addressed the issues of undernutrition, overweight/obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies, acknowledging the triple burden faced in many contexts.

Numerous key activities advance the work in the fight against malnutrition. The Independent Expert Panel recognizes ongoing efforts and aims to contribute to this work through these recommendations and beyond.

These recommendations are the result of months of intensive discussion aimed at identifying priorities across sectors, applicable to multiple sectors, in multiple settings. The recommendations aim to move beyond fragmented approaches and foster more integrated, collaborative approaches. The recommendations are not fully comprehensive but aim to address current priorities and serve as a starting point for further discussion among stakeholders at different levels.

The participants of the Independent Expert Panel have contributed to the recommendations on an individual basis and these recommendations are not a reflection of their respective organization. The recommendations presented are applicable to multiple sectors in multiple contexts and need implementation based on context-specificity.

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## List of members

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Chair: Shawn Baker, Chief Program Officer, Helen Keller Intl

### International Organizations:

- Victor Aguayo, Director of Nutrition and Child Development, UNICEF
- Francesco Branca, Director, Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, WHO
- Afshan Khan, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement
- Lynnette Neufeld, Director, Food and Nutrition Division, FAO
- Abigail Perry, Director of Nutrition, World Food Programme
- Meera Shekar, Global Lead, Health, Nutrition & Population, World Bank
- Kyoko Shibata Okamura, Senior Nutrition Specialist, World Bank

### Civil society:

- Greg S. Garrett, Executive Director, Access to Nutrition Initiative
- Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
- Dr. Mercy Mwangangi, Director, Health Systems Strengthening, Amref Health Africa
- Rahul Rawat, Deputy Director, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Nutrition and Health, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

### Researchers:

- Zulfiqar Bhutta, Founding Director, Institute for Global Health and Development, Aga Khan University and University of Toronto
- André Briend, Nutritionist (formerly at IRD and WHO)
- Namukolo Covic, Director General's Representative to Ethiopia, International Livestock Research Institute (IRLI), and Regional Director, East and Southern Africa, CGIAR
- Hélène Delisle, Emeritus Professor at the University of Montreal, President of the Scientific Council of Action contre la Faim
- Shibani Ghosh, Research Associate Professor, Food and Nutrition Programs and Policy Division, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, Global Nutrition Report Independent Expert Group Co-Chair
- Elizabeth Kimani, (Head of Unit, Maternal and Child Wellbeing, APHRC)
- Nancy Krebs, Professor, Pediatrics-Nutrition, University of Colorado
- Anna Lartey, Professor of Nutrition, University of Ghana
- Purnima Menon, Senior Director for Food and Nutrition, IFPRI
- Bhavani Shankar, Professorial Research Fellow in Food Systems, Nutrition and Sustainability, Institute for Sustainable Food, University of Sheffield
- Emorn Udomkesmalee, Senior Advisor, Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol University
- Giacomo Zanello, Professor, University of Reading, Global Nutrition Report Independent Expert Group Co-Chair