

**BUILDING SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT
AND FAIR FOOD SYSTEMS TO
IMPROVE FOOD AND NUTRITION
SECURITY FOR ALL
BY 2030**



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**GENERATI • N
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THE BURDEN OF FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION

2 billion people did not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food in 2019¹

28.2 percent of children under five were undernourished in 2019²

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. However, in 2019, 25.9 percent of the world population did not have regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food, and chronic and acute malnutrition were still affecting 190 million children.³ The world is **not on track to achieve the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets** on maternal, infant and young child nutrition by 2025, **nor the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2)** on “Zero Hunger” by 2030. These figures show that food insecurity and malnutrition are huge challenges, which are likely to worsen due to COVID-19.

Poor diets and resulting malnutrition are not simply a matter of personal choice. **Most people cannot access or afford healthy, diverse, quality and nutritious food**, as shown in the 2020 SOFI report. Healthy diets⁴ are unaffordable to 3 billion people worldwide.

Food systems are not always able to deliver healthy and sustainable diets. This is true in food systems that do not support productive livelihoods and diverse production. As the 2020 Global Nutrition Report shows, “existing agriculture systems are largely focused on an overabundance of staple grains like rice wheat and maize, rather than producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods, like fruits, nuts and vegetables”⁵. This is also particularly true in current food systems that rely mainly on industrial agriculture (highly dependent on chemical input, standardized seeds or genetically modified organisms). According to IPES-food, “the pathway offered by industrial agriculture [...], combined with well-functioning trading systems that allow a variety of different foodstuffs to be accessible to consumers in a given place. The diversity of produce delivered by international trade has mainly benefited wealthy consumers in high-income countries, while poor people in low-income countries continue to be unable to afford the diversity available on these markets.”⁶

Many small-scale farmers cannot access healthy and sustainable diets given remote location, low income, and lack of linkages to sources of diverse foods. They do not have the means to face an unfair competition from heavily subsidized (hence cheap on the market) food exports from industrial food systems from the Global North. This obstacle to the development of local food chains threatens the right to food and nutrition of small-scale producers.

¹ The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, 2020, [Link](#)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Composed of foods from diverse groups, that meet nutrient needs, as opposed to calorie needs

⁵ The Global Nutrition Report, 2020, [Link](#)

⁶ “From uniformity to diversity: A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems”, IPES-food, 2016, [Link](#)

COVID-19'S IMPACT ON FRAGILE FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION

COVID-19 could increase the number of undernourished people by an additional 83 to 132 million people⁷

COVID-19 could push 270 million people into acute food insecurity (an increase of 82 percent on pre-pandemic figures)⁸

Each percentage point drop in global GDP is expected to result in an additional 700,000 chronically malnourished (stunted) children⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic came at a time when food security – which drives hunger and malnutrition - was already under strain. Conflicts, natural disasters, climate change, and the arrival of pests and plagues across continents have long preceded COVID-19 but will not disappear in the short term.

The COVID-19 crisis is revealing the cracks in our food systems and is already exacerbating vulnerabilities, especially in food and nutrition security and access to water and sanitation for critical hand and food hygiene. **COVID-19's impact on food supply and demand directly and indirectly affects the four pillars of food security:** the physical availability of food, the economic and physical accessibility of food, its use, and the stability of these three dimensions over time. The physical (closure of markets, disruption of supply chains, etc.) and/or financial inability (loss of income, food prices rising) to access healthy and diverse food has quickly worsened for the most vulnerable populations. According to a first round of data collection from Concern's ongoing qualitative COVID-19 research, respondents consume less diverse diets since the beginning of the pandemic and some started reducing the number of meals they eat in a day. The closure of markets reduces the access of the poorest populations to necessities, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.



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⁷ SOFI report, 2020, [Link](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

It is also feared that COVID-19 government restrictions and diversion of resources are reducing opportunities and capacities to screen for and treat malnutrition, with devastating results for the most vulnerable children.¹⁰ The UN estimates that during the pandemic, “more than 350 million children [...] might not have access to regular school feeding and nutrition services.”¹¹

Nutrition must be prioritised in food systems. The pandemic highlights the necessity to shift to approaches which ensure healthy and sustainably produced food, which is the most accessible, affordable and desirable choice for all. The food security and nutritional status of highly vulnerable populations should be regularly assessed and referral mechanisms between health, nutrition, food security and child protection actors should be strengthened. A stronger linkage to national social protection schemes where they exist is needed and it is paramount to make sure all eligible are actually reached. The crisis shows that **local farmers, small-scale producers and markets should be supported** to ensure the continuity of accessible, safe, affordable, diverse, and healthy food for all and to ensure more localized and fairer supply chains. Resilient food systems are key to resisting shocks and preventing future crises.

Further, COVID-19 has demonstrated the **importance of building resilience of economies and households to economic, health and climate change related shocks** and stresses. During the period from 1998 to 2017, direct economic losses from natural disasters were estimated at almost US \$3 trillion and climate-related and geophysical disasters claimed an estimated 1.3 million lives.¹² Forest resources and biodiversity provide a key way to mitigate the impact of disasters. They have been providing subsistence, safety nets to shocks, resources for seasonal gap-filling and pathways to prosperity. Globally, around 1.6 billion people already live and depend on forest resources.¹³ People struggling with severe acute food insecurity need safety nets to fall back on during and post COVID-19. There is hence a prime opportunity to ensure that COVID-19 interventions strategically invest in more proactive resilience-building, thus better position communities and minimize the loss of lives and livelihoods in the future by using green recovery.



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¹⁰ COVID-19 & Risks to Children’s Health and Nutrition, Policy Brief, World Vision, 2020, [Link](#)

¹¹ Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren, WFP, 2020, [Link](#)

¹² Economic losses, poverty & disasters: 1998-2017 Wallemacq, Pascaline; House, Rowena, 2018, [Link](#)

¹³ World Wild Life, [Link](#)

ROOT CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION

The causes of food and nutrition insecurity are complex and multidimensional, and include conflict and insecurity, natural disasters, lean seasons, climate change (with effects of droughts, floods, higher temperatures, water scarcity, etc.), environmental degradation, economic shocks or other stressors like desert locusts. Inequality also underpins and drives hunger and malnutrition - whether gender inequality, among marginalized populations, or between large-scale and small-scale farmers. Gender inequality we know is a significant driver of food and nutrition insecurity. Often, combinations of factors will strike simultaneously, for example in the Sahel region, where poverty, insecurity, forced displacements, disrupted agriculture and climate crisis worsens food insecurity in many areas of the region.

Focus on conflicts

The 2020 Global Report on Food Crises shows that **conflicts and insecurity were the main drivers of acute food insecurity in 2019**. Conflicts and insecurity can limit the access to food and have negative impacts on the food and nutritional status of populations. Food systems can be disrupted. Food production can be impacted as natural resources (agricultural land, water, forests), infrastructure production means (like seeds, agricultural equipment) and livestock may be damaged and destroyed by the conflicts themselves or directly targeted by belligerents. Limitations of movements can limit the access to land for farmers and to food markets for both farmers and populations and affect trade flows. In parallel, displacement of people due to the conflict or insecurity makes populations more vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition as they have to abandon their livelihoods and assets.

Another challenge are **access constraints** to populations in conflict areas by the international community, which prevent food assistance to reach the most vulnerable populations. Even though the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2417 in May 2018 to condemn the starving of civilians as a method of warfare, it is still used in several conflicts. The resolution also condemns the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations. Yet, in some contexts, counter-terrorism measures and clauses threaten humanitarian principled action and access, and affect agricultural production and local economies.

Conflict and food insecurity reinforce each other in a vicious cycle as food insecurity and malnutrition are not only a result of armed violence but may also be an active driver of conflicts.



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Focus on climate change

Climate change, food production, and nutrition have an impact upon each other. Climate change has a negative effect on the four pillars of food security and as a result the consumption of healthy diets. It also **decreases the nutritional value of food.** Indeed, the nutrient content of crops, especially proteins, iron and zinc, per-capita availability of fruits and vegetables can be affected by climate change.¹⁴ Climate change disrupts local climate conditions, often indicated through changes in available water resources and related water security for the region, and reduces agricultural output. As weather patterns, such as rain, temperature, wind, etc. become more extreme and erratic, agriculture becomes more challenging. Therefore, food systems and agriculture sectors are the first to be affected by climate change, while paradoxically also contributing to it.

The **current industrial food systems are responsible for almost one-third of greenhouse gas emissions**, as highlighted by the 2019 IPCC Report on Land. Degradation of natural land, such as deforestation in order to grow crops, destroys carbon sink and releases CO₂ into the atmosphere, thus further exacerbating the climate crisis. Production methods that rely on the use of chemical inputs lead to the further release of greenhouse gas, water pollution, and undermine biodiversity along the way. Food transformation, packaging, and transport, unavoidable in an industrialized and globalized food system also contribute to CO₂ emissions. Additionally, industrial livestock systems pose hazards to the environment. The huge increase in intensive livestock production has been the most significant cause of the huge loss of biodiversity in recent decades.

Focus on gender inequality

Women play critical roles in food systems. Worldwide, they make up 43 percent of the agricultural labour force¹⁵ and nearly 50 percent of farmers in Eastern and South-eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa¹⁶. Though women are disproportionately responsible for household food preparation (almost 90 percent), they have **limited access to land, education, information, credit, technology, and decision-making forums**. Too often, women are not viewed as equal players in the household and community. They are not consulted on the use of household income or community plans for natural resources, such as allocation of limited water resources across multiple demands for production and domestic use. As a result, their knowledge is not captured, their priorities are not reflected, their needs are not addressed, and their rights are not respected.

Gender inequality is also a strong determinant of women's and girls' nutritional status, influencing their role and the distribution of labour and leading to a disproportionate and unpaid care burden on women and girls. Social norms in some cultures can be harmful to women and girls, and women may not be able to make decisions or influence how household resources are being used. Harmful social and cultural practices, such as child marriage, can affect the health and nutrition of women and girls. Gender inequality in access to and control over resources is not only unjust but can also severely impair women's ability to provide food, care, and health and sanitation services for themselves, leading to a strong impact on nutrition outcomes. Globally, anemia in women is twice that of men and has remained stagnant for years

¹⁴ Review: Climate change impacts on food security- focus on perennial cropping systems and nutritional value, Courtney P. Leisner, 2020, [Link](#)

¹⁵ The role of women in agriculture, FAO, 2011, [Link](#)

¹⁶ Smallholders and family farmers, FAO, 2012, [Link](#)

AGROECOLOGY: A MODEL THAT BUILDS THE RESILIENCE OF PEOPLE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

According to the FAO, “agroecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.”¹⁷

Agroecology **provides local solutions to food insecurity** and allows communities to become more autonomous and self-sufficient, particularly in regions where households rely primarily on their own production. The strong specialization put forward by industrial agriculture led to the development of mono-cultural systems, which allowed yield increase of cereal crops, rich in carbohydrates, but poor in the essential micronutrients needed for better nutrition. On the contrary, agroecology promotes farm crop diversification adapted to local conditions. This helps secure a healthier and more balanced diet. More generally, **production based on agroecology provides safe, nutritious, and locally available food** produced with less or no chemical inputs.

In line with the European Green Deal priorities, agroecological practices contribute to the reduction of the impact of the agricultural sector on the climate crisis by promoting techniques with fewer greenhouse gas emissions. They **increase climate resilience** by diversifying crops and using farmers’ seeds adapted for local conditions and techniques, which preserve biodiversity. Agroecology also preserves the environment through organic fertilization of soils, supports soil restoration and combats desertification for example by using agroforestry.

Local, small-scale food systems are at the heart of this approach. Family farms represent over 90 per cent of all farms globally, and produce 80 percent of the world's food in value terms¹⁸, thus playing a central role in supplying rural, urban and peri-urban consumers with food commodities. Agroecology also supports economic resilience for farmers by decreasing their reliance on expensive external inputs (chemicals, equipment etc).

For example, in Niger, thanks to the widespread adoption of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR)¹⁹ in the 1970s and 1980s, farmers have produced an additional 500,000 tons of cereal per year. As a result, 2.5 million people are more food secure today.²⁰

¹⁷ The 10 elements of agroecology, Guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems, FAO, 2018, [Link](#)

¹⁸ Launch of the UN’s Decade of Family Farming to unleash family farmers’ full potential, FAO, [Link](#)

¹⁹ FMNR is a low-cost land restoration technique used to combat poverty and hunger amongst poor subsistence farmers by increasing food and timber production and resilience to climate extremes. It involves the systematic regrowth and management of trees and shrubs from felled tree stumps, sprouting root systems or seeds.

²⁰ FMNR Hub, The spread of FMNR in Niger, [Link](#)

A CALL TO ACTION

2020 and 2021 are critical years for the EU to build sustainable, resilient, equitable, and fair food systems. The following opportunities will help the EU shift its approach towards food systems that ensure healthy and nutritious food for all.

The next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

The 2021-2027 budget and in particular the newly proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - is pivotal to ensuring that the EU can substantially contribute to meeting the global nutrition targets and to eradicating all forms of malnutrition by 2030, as well as to meet the EU's own commitments on stunting reduction by 2025.

We call on the NDICI rapporteurs and co-rapporteurs of the European Parliament, the EU Member States and the European Commission in the dialogues to:

- Ensure nutrition and food security are priorities in the EU's response and recovery to COVID-19 and in the 2021 budget;
- Ensure that the NDICI increases EU support to build sustainable, fair, and resilient food systems and increase financing for agroecological programmes;
- Prioritize a multisectoral approach to nutrition, not only focusing on transforming all four pillars of our food systems, but also improving the access to basic services (health, education, social protection, water, sanitation and hygiene), as the key delivery mechanisms for malnutrition interventions, and guarantee transformational gender approaches/investments.
- Ensure that food and nutrition security programs, including the response to the COVID-19 hunger crisis, take a gender-responsive approach and address girls' empowerment and the causes and drivers of gender inequality. EU funding and programmes should ensure and support the meaningful participation of women and girls, including women-led and women's rights organizations. Policies and programmes should address unequal access to resources critical for women to realize productive livelihoods and good nutrition for themselves as well as their families;
- Ensure the strengthening of health care systems - as a key method for delivery of malnutrition interventions - is prioritized.

The Farm to Fork Strategy

We welcome the release of the strategy in May 2020 that will guide the EU's action through a long-term food systems perspective and the European Commission's plan to incorporate the Farm to Fork priorities into its programming guidance for 2021-2027. However, more must be done to ensure the green transition and implementation of the strategy beyond Europe.

We call on the European Commission, as well as the DEVE committee of the European Parliament and the CODEV delegates to engage in discussions on the strategy and its implementation and to:

- **Reflect better EU's role in addressing malnutrition in all its forms in and outside the EU through the promotion of nutrition sensitive agriculture;**
- Support the ambitious commitments included in this strategy with **adequate funding efforts;**
- Include **concrete implementation measures** in the action plan, with relevant indicators to monitor;
- **Organize a consultation with civil society** to brainstorm on these specific actions and indicators;
- **Add a gender lens** to make the strategy consistent with the European Commission's new EU Gender Equality Strategy and the Gender Action Plan II, in which the EU commits to integrating a gender perspective into all policy areas;
- Underline the need to **implement the humanitarian-development nexus to nutrition** (in order to address all forms of malnutrition simultaneously and access treatment in all contexts, humanitarian and development alike), backed up by clear guidelines on evidence-based best practice;
- **Transform the EU agriculture towards agroecology** and ensure better consumption models to minimize the impact the climate crisis that has huge consequences on partner countries.

Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa

Reviewing the joint EU-Africa Strategy is indeed crucial to build a true and equal partnership between the two continents. Regarding food security and nutrition, “boosting safe and sustainable agri-food systems” is not enough to reach SDG 2 by 2030. Hunger continues to increase in almost all subregions of the continent and still affects around 250 million people (and 93,7 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa).²¹ Sub-Saharan Africa is the only subregion in the world with a rising number of children affected by chronic malnutrition. A healthy diet is not affordable in three subregions of sub-Saharan Africa (Eastern, Middle and Western Africa). 77 percent or more of the population throughout sub-Saharan Africa cannot afford healthy diets and for example in Western Africa, a healthy diet is 2.2 times more expensive than the average food expenditure.²² In line with the European Green Deal’s priorities, food systems must be completely reshaped to be climate resilient and nutrition-sensitive²³ and the EU must support this transformation inside and outside the Union. This can only be achieved through a strategy that takes a multisectoral approach that strengthens the main instruments for addressing malnutrition, such as healthcare systems and other social programming.

On the partnership for green transition, the EU-Africa strategy should:

- Pinpoint explicitly **agroecology** as the best approach to secure nutritious, safe and high quality food throughout the year and increase climate resilience;
- Put at its heart the **development of local food networks** to guarantee local production and consumption.

On the partnership for sustainable growth and jobs, the EU-Africa strategy should:

- Ensure that **small-scale food producers, farmers and pastoralists are at the heart** of the strategy to ensure a reduction of rural poverty and secure investment into African small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Develop **local food networks** that guarantee local production and consumption and make consumers less vulnerable to fluctuations in food prices;
- **Empower women and youth** in local agriculture as they are the most vulnerable to climate change and food insecurity;

To go further: update the policy frameworks on nutrition and revise the EU Action Plan on Nutrition

In the 2018 Council Conclusions on *Strengthening global food and nutrition security*, the Member States invited the European Commission to conduct “a revision of the 2010 [DEVCO] policy framework on food security and the 2013 [ECHO] policy framework on nutrition”. This **revision is paramount to having a holistic approach on nutrition**²⁴ and gives proper guidance to EU Delegations on nutrition interventions.

The current EU Action Plan on Nutrition (in place until 2025) sets two targets: 1) to support partner countries to reduce the number of stunted children under the age of five by at least 7 million by 2025; and 2) to allocate EUR 3.5 billion to nutrition between 2014 and 2020. We believe that starting the process of a **revision of this document to include the new financial and political commitments of the EU is crucial**: the EU’s financial commitment will end in December 2020 and there is a need to tackle all forms of malnutrition (and not only stunting).

We call on the DEVE committee in the European Parliament and the EU Member States to ask the European Commission to:

- Adopt a **staff working document on ending all forms of malnutrition in all contexts**, embedding a holistic approach to nutrition including food systems;
- **Revise the EU Action Plan on Nutrition** to include the new EU financial and political commitments for 2021-2027, such as the inclusion of a target on wasting;
- Ensure **better linkage between food systems and health systems**.



Conclusion: Food systems and the holistic approach to tackle malnutrition in all its forms

We recognize that building sustainable, fair, and resilient food systems is key but will not be enough to meet nutrition targets. It is necessary to have a holistic and **multisectoral approach to nutrition**. Strengthened education, health, social protection, water, sanitation and hygiene systems and the access to those basic services for all are equally important to ending malnutrition in all its forms and to building back better post-COVID. In this context, we recommend the EU ramps up its spending and ring-fences at least **20 percent of the NDICI for these basic social services**.

The EU must show its continued leadership on nutrition and food security and announce **renewed ambitious political and financial commitments** to end malnutrition in all its forms at the upcoming **Nutrition for Growth Summit in Tokyo in 2021**.



Generation Nutrition is a network of civil society organisations, collaborating to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. Members of Generation Nutrition include Action Against Hunger, Alliance2015, CARE, Global Health Advocates, Save the Children, WaterAid and World Vision.

