

Committee on World Food Security second nutrition event on Impact Assessment of Policies to Support Healthy Food Environments and Healthy Diets

26 May 2017, FAO Headquarters

Chair's Summary

1. This event is the second in a series of events to “develop common understanding of issues and lay the basis for informed CFS policy convergence work” on nutrition and food systems, called for by the strategy “*CFS engagement in advancing nutrition*”.
2. It represents a contribution to the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), to the implementation of the Second International Conference on Nutrition’s (ICN2) Framework for Action, and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. The discussion highlighted how impact assessment tools, both ex-ante and ex-post, can provide decision-makers with analysis of the situation and the potential impact of policies on food environments and diets. In this area, decisions should be informed by all the data available, but development is needed at national and international levels to enhance the availability of data and information about food environments and diets among other things. Metrics should match an agreed vision for the food system, which takes into account changing diets and patterns of consumption.
4. In many cases, information can be improved using existing data collection systems. Amongst the lessons presented during the discussion was the importance of monitoring the prices of a wide array of nutritious foods, which would allow to regularly assess their affordability and inform policy, production and program decisions in view of improving access to healthy diets, diets that are diverse and adequate - that meet nutrient needs and are moderate in ultra-processed foods and added sugars, salt and fat. In the case of limited availability of primary data, secondary data can play an important role in shaping and assessing policies. As was shown in the case presented by the representatives of Indonesia and Ghana, Food price monitoring and household expenditure surveys can be good sources of data to estimate costs of healthy, nutritious diets, assess affordability, and propose options for reducing costs of nutritious diets and/or increased purchasing power. Monitoring systems benefit from the development of specific indicators to ensure that food systems provide access to adequate food to meet dietary needs, such as the cost of dietary diversity, of nutrient adequacy, and of recommended diets.
5. The event emphasized that a multi-dimensional approach to policy monitoring, not limited to agriculture and health sectors, is needed to deal effectively with the complexities of decision-making for positive nutrition outcomes. As was manifested in the Mexican case, family and socio-economic contexts, including, for example, access to education or urban conditions of living, need to be understood to tackle the many challenges and constraints towards good nutrition.
6. Favouring the consumption of a healthy diet entails several steps: One needs to ensure that there is knowledge within a population of what foods are key sources of needed nutrients, especially for nutritionally vulnerable groups such as children under two years and pregnant and lactating women. Fortified complementary food can play an important role in addressing the needs of such groups, as Indonesia’s experience highlighted as well as traditional food. Another step is to ensure knowledge is available about the diet of a population in order to nudge the population towards healthier diets. This requires information about dietary consumption, which is more difficult to measure than the consumption of “single nutrients” such as salt.

7. The event emphasized the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach bringing together specialized actors, communities, private sector, civil society and government's different sectors at different administrative levels to design, collect and analyze the necessary information to regularly verify the impact of policies on nutrition and ensure accountability, in addition to the possible adjustments of policies.
8. Key themes and issues raised during the discussion included:
 - a. Nutrition should be explicitly part of discussions of the impacts of different policies.
 - b. Policies should be assessed not only in terms of nutrition impacts but more broadly in terms of human health and environmental impacts as well as effects (intended or unintended) on other sectors. A comprehensive set of diverse indicators may be needed.
 - c. National and international metrics need to be upgraded and updated to reflect the national and international nutrition objectives. It was suggested that metrics should match the CFS vision in "*CFS engagement in advancing nutrition*".
 - d. Sharing experiences and lessons across countries is useful to encourage the inclusion of nutrition objectives into a broad range of policies.
 - e. There is a need to address conflicts of interest when discussing policies in view of good nutrition outcomes. An early dialogue between different sectors and stakeholders can help mitigate this problem.
 - f. In certain cases, impact assessment policies can help address the price volatility of nutritious foods.
 - g. The design of monitoring systems can be done in a flexible way to allow for adjustments and adaptation to the different situations and contexts at the national and the regional levels.
 - h. The Committee on World Food Security offers a platform, in the framework of the Nutrition Decade, to discuss inclusive multisectoral guidance to accompany at global level the transformations of food systems and environment to improve nutrition in countries.
9. The OEWG Chair concluded by thanking UNSCN for its partnership in this event, the moderator of the Forum, Ms. Lynnette Neufeld from GAIN; the author of the background paper, Dr. Anna Herforth; the five panelists, John Nortey, Deputy Director of Research and Information, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana; Aldo Verver Y Vargas Duarte, Deputy Director-General of the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risk, Mexico; Vivi Yulaswati, Director for Poverty Reduction and Social Welfare, Ministry of Planning, Indonesia; Nick Deschuyffeleer, Food Policy Manager, Food and Drink Federation, Belgium; and Ana Paula Bortoletto, Head of the Healthy Diets Program Institute for Consumer Protection, Brazil; and all that intervened in the course of the day as well as the CFS Secretariat, which organized the event.