



**Global Panel**  
on Agriculture  
and Food Systems  
for Nutrition

# NUTRITION FOR GROWTH II FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION:

## Recommendations to Improve Nutrition through Agriculture and Food Systems

The second Nutrition for Growth Summit offers a key opportunity for world leaders to review action against their commitments to nutrition and articulate new ambitions for ending all forms of malnutrition. In this policy brief, the Global Panel provides ten key recommendations that can guide actions to achieve healthier diets and improved nutrition through agriculture and food systems. The Global Panel supports the adoption of strong mechanisms of accountability to track commitments and demonstrate impact, as well as increased investment in nutrition.

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## ABOUT THE GLOBAL PANEL ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS FOR NUTRITION:

The Global Panel is an independent group of influential experts with a commitment to tackling global challenges in food and nutrition security. It works to ensure that agriculture and food systems support access to nutritious foods at every stage of life.



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# Summary

The past few years have seen a dramatic improvement in how nutrition is prioritised and funded. Food, nutrition and health now have much greater visibility in international development agendas. Signatories to the first Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4GI), held in London in 2013, committed their political will and financial resources to work in partnership to accelerate progress towards achieving the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets by 2025. Other commitments have been made by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, the second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) Rome Declaration on Nutrition, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The recent decision of the UN General Assembly to endorse the ICN2 Framework of Action and declare the 2016-2025 UN Decade of Action on Nutrition is a major step towards mobilising action around reducing hunger and improving nutrition.

The second Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4GII) will allow for world leaders to review action against their commitments to nutrition and articulate new ambitions for ending all forms of malnutrition. Rhetoric now needs to be turned into tangible actions on the ground, with greater emphasis on transparency and accountability.

To assist in the realisation of N4GI and other political commitments, the Global Panel has set out critical information and advice for policymakers in low- and middle-income countries to help them invest in effective and actionable policies to reduce malnutrition in all its forms. Supported by a growing body of evidence, this portfolio of actions represents a multi-sectoral approach for improving agriculture and food systems for nutrition. The ten recommendations below provide governments with an evidence-based programme of action to achieve their nutrition commitments to N4GII and other initiatives.

Against the background of N4GII, the Global Panel calls on policymakers to:

1. **Actively support expanded production of diverse, safe, nutritious foods.**
2. **Prioritise research efforts to increase productivity of nutrient-rich foods, ensuring that they are affordable to those most in need.**
3. **Manage food price volatility.**
4. **Improve infrastructure for the handling, storage and marketing of perishable foods.**
5. **Prioritise fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks for food safety and quality.**
6. **Promote public-private collaboration for improved nutrition.**
7. **Make school meal programmes healthy.**
8. **Integrate food and nutrition education.**
9. **Protect food intake of vulnerable consumers.**
10. **Generate the data needed to get the job done.**

“Central governments should scale up their efforts and use their cabinets to ensure that ministries prioritise nutrition in their policies.”

**John Kufuor, Former President of Ghana and Co-Chair of the Global Panel**





## Introduction

In 2013, the governments of the United Kingdom and Brazil, in partnership with the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), co-hosted the N4GI Summit to address hunger and undernutrition. That Summit brought together more than 90 stakeholders, including business leaders, scientists, governments and civil society. Many of the participants, who were already working together as part of the SUN Movement, endorsed the Nutrition for Growth Compact. The Compact committed signatories to scaling up their political commitments, increasing investments in nutrition, and taking action towards three goals to be accomplished by 2020:

- ensuring that at least 500 million pregnant women and children under two are reached with effective nutrition interventions;
- reducing the number of children under five who are stunted by at least 20 million; and
- saving the lives of at least 1.7 million children under five by preventing stunting, increasing breastfeeding, and increasing coverage of treatments for severe acute malnutrition.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Another product of the N4GI event was the creation of the independent 'Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition'. Formed in 2014, the Global Panel provided an opportunity to advocate for the Summit's goal of "putting good nutrition at the centre of the development agenda."<sup>1</sup> The Global Panel distils evidence to help promote actionable policies and its work has shown that malnutrition must be addressed by adopting a food system lens that acts along the entire food chain, from production to consumption.

The N4GI goals echoed and reinforced the WHA Global Nutrition Targets for 2025. The 2025 targets are also built into the ICN2 Framework of Action and the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, a collective commitment made in 2014. The ICN2 framework has also recently been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly through the proclamation of the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025).<sup>4</sup>

In 2013, donors pledged \$4.15 billion for nutrition-specific programmes and \$19 billion for nutrition-sensitive programmes.<sup>1,3</sup> Nutrition-specific interventions are those that include actions



“ It is high time to move from commitment to action, and the coming years offer unprecedented potential to eliminate malnutrition and maximise human development ”

**Tom Arnold, Global Panel member and Director General, Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA)**

intended to directly affect the nutritional status of target individuals. Important as they are, nutrition-specific interventions will not be sufficient to address the global malnutrition challenge<sup>5</sup> and nutrition-sensitive interventions will therefore be critical to achieving this goal. Nutrition-sensitive interventions draw on sectors such as agriculture, social protection, health, education and water and sanitation to address the underlying factors that can affect nutritional status, for example poverty and food availability. The annual Global Nutrition Report (which was also an outcome of the N4GI Summit) tracks progress made

against N4GI commitments. With only four years to go until the 2020 goal, actual disbursements against financial commitments made by Compact signatories remain unclear, especially with regard to nutrition-sensitive programming.<sup>6</sup>

Adoption of the SDGs in 2015 has led to even stronger commitments to nutrition-related goals, albeit with an extended deadline of 2030. SDG2 seeks to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition while SDG3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, at all ages. These commitments show how the global community has finally recognised and prioritised improved diets and nutrition. The time is therefore ripe for governments and their development partners to sharpen their commitments and establish mechanisms for promoting joint accountability. In this context, the N4GII event represents a unique opportunity to accelerate and deliver on the world's nutrition agenda. In addition to investing new resources in nutrition-specific interventions, the Global Panel proposes that a more ambitious approach to improving nutrition will involve actions that reshape global food systems.

# Progress on N4GI Pledges

Governments made a number of pledges regarding nutrition-sensitive interventions at N4GI. In terms of food systems, most pledges focused on investment in agriculture to improve livelihoods or diversify food production. This is a key area for investment, but represents only one of the policy domains within food systems where nutrition can be improved. In its technical brief for ICN2, the Global Panel showed the opportunities for policy action across all the domains of the food system (Figure 1) and identified a broad range of potential interventions to achieve this.<sup>7</sup>

Turning N4GI pledges into effective policies relies very much on firm evidence of impact and good examples of success. At N4GI, signatories pledged to improve the generation and dissemination of evidence on effective policy interventions for improved nutrition. Since 2013, a growing body of evidence supports the range of pledges made at N4GI, as well as the recommendations from ICN2, the WHA 2025 targets and, importantly, the SDG2 to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”.<sup>8,9</sup>

The Global Panel has drawn currently available evidence together in a number of critical areas. Agricultural research has a key role to play in improving nutrition, as the Global Panel has shown in its brief on biofortification, which highlights successes in breeding crop varieties enriched in important micronutrients.<sup>10</sup>

Agricultural policymaking since N4GI has focused mostly on improving food security, particularly in light of threats posed by climate change and food price volatility. In separate briefs,

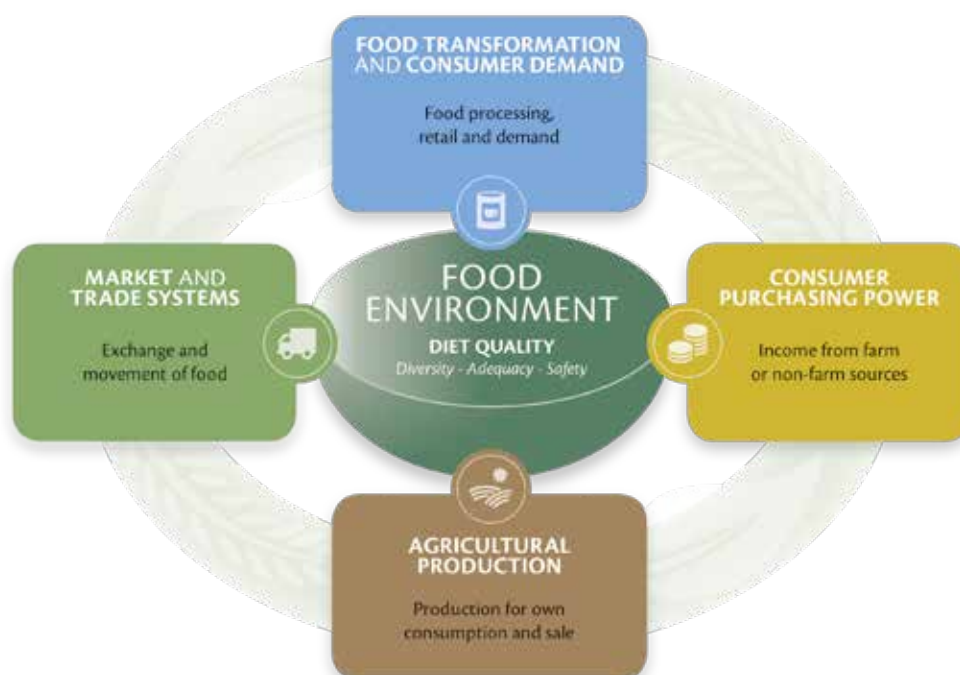
the Global Panel has drawn together the evidence for the nutritional impacts of policies relating to climate smart agriculture<sup>11</sup> and food price volatility,<sup>12</sup> and made specific recommendations for making these agriculture and trade policies more nutrition-enhancing.

Private sector pledges at N4GI also identified the need for ensuring food safety. A Global Panel brief summarises the evidence for the importance of food safety on nutritional outcomes<sup>13</sup>, and made specific recommendations for private and public sector actions to improve safety throughout the food system.

Effective, evidence-based policies for improved nutrition exist in each domain of the food system. Progress will be achieved from creating synergies in policies across domains, and not just from more action within individual policy domains. The Global Panel has stressed that impact is more likely when policies and interventions encompass coordinated actions across the framework. For example, in a policy brief on healthy meals in schools<sup>14</sup>, the Panel has highlighted how local procurement of nutritious foods can be linked to educational interventions that shape future consumer demand for food and dietary behaviours.

A key challenge facing pledges made at N4GI, and future commitments to follow N4GI, is the serious lack of data on local food environments, diets and nutrition, necessary to both design and evaluate interventions. In its review of data gaps and needs,<sup>15</sup> the Global Panel identified recent successes in developing important metrics, and the opportunities for improvements.

**Figure 1: The Global Panel Conceptual Framework**



# From Commitment to Action: Beyond Nutrition for Growth II

The Global Panel proposes ten recommendations (below), which seek to shape a rapidly-changing food system. It is important that action arising from them is well coordinated and not delayed. In coming years, price volatility and conflicts will cause continued uncertainty throughout food systems, with political, economic and nutritional impacts. Urbanisation is rapidly altering dietary patterns and increasing the demand for year-round supplies of nutritious, perishable foods, while globalisation is quickly changing access to processed foods, with complex nutritional implications. Climate change effects may be longer term, but adaptation measures undertaken now will have major effects on nutritional outcomes.

Governments have much to share at N4GII in terms of progress on nutrition-sensitive interventions. Some particular successes are captured in the case studies summarised in this brief. But N4GII is an opportunity to go beyond sharing experiences. One approach to strengthen commitments to improve nutrition through agriculture and food systems is to develop stronger accountability mechanisms at all levels, for instance, through agreed results frameworks or performance scorecards. Developing common formats for comparing and evaluating performance and progress in improving nutrition will be helpful. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Results Framework being developed in Africa exemplifies such an effort to create useful and shared approaches for accountability in nutrition-sensitive interventions.

The Global Panel supports the adoption of strong mechanisms of accountability, to track commitments and demonstrate impact, as well as increased investment for nutrition-sensitive actions. The Global Panel also foresees a significantly broader scope for interventions in food systems, across production, trade, processing, marketing and shaping consumers' choices for healthy foods, if the world is to realise the goal of ending all forms of malnutrition.

## Case Study 1: Accountability mechanism in Rwanda

Tangible nutrition impact requires the development of robust accountability systems. One example is the framework established in 2008 in Rwanda where rates of chronic malnutrition fell from 43% in 2012 to 36.7% in 2015.<sup>16</sup> According to the Rwanda Governance Scorecard for 2014, malnutrition among children under five years was scored 97.2% performance against the 100% target. The scorecard, which highlights human and social development, allows government and donors to hold each other accountable for development results.<sup>17</sup> This accountability framework has supported investment in agricultural development to help accelerate nutrition improvements.

Examples include:

- The promotion of biofortification, in particular iron biofortified beans which have been reported to improve iron status in Rwandan women.<sup>10</sup>
- Fertiliser selection based on soil mapping and micronutrient deficiency in the population also has the potential to address 'hidden hunger'.<sup>18</sup>
- Value chain investment, including the demand of a rapidly growing urban middle class for more varied and nutritious food, presents new market opportunities for farmers.

## Case Study 2: Multi-sectoral action in Brazil

In the past four decades, Brazil has seen considerable success in reducing undernutrition, particularly stunting, which coincided with rapid changes in key social determinants of health and nutrition. The multi-sectoral nature of nutrition and the fundamental role of the food system was reflected in Brazil's national and local institutional frameworks and in complementary development plans.

For example, both the National Council on Food and Nutrition Security and the Inter-ministerial Chamber on Food and Nutrition Security are multi-stakeholder entities.<sup>19</sup> Cross-sectoral framework strategies which include the country's Family Farming Food Procurement Programme, launched as part of Zero Hunger, represent an institutional market strategy that allows states, municipalities and federal facilities to purchase foods from family farms and donate them to social assistance institutions, such as schools, community kitchens and food banks.<sup>7, 12, 14</sup>



## Case Study 3: The Right to Food in India

Recent government data show that nearly all Indian states reported significant declines in stunting between 2006 and 2014. Although it is not possible to directly attribute these findings to nutrition-sensitive policy actions, successful programmes in agriculture and food systems indicate that they played a significant role in reducing malnutrition in India, where the rate of undernourished children is among the highest in the world.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, the government passed the National Food Security Act, designed to “provide for food and nutrition security...by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people”.<sup>20</sup> Although the Act provides only cereals to beneficiaries, some states have included nutritious pulses in their public distribution system. The Act also supports farmers' livelihoods through local purchasing mechanisms.

Across the world, school feeding programmes have been seen as a social safety net and as an educational intervention. In 2001, the Indian Supreme Court Order required the government to provide meals in all primary schools with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein. Many of them are procuring local produce. Currently, almost 100 million children across 265,000 schools have free access to a balanced and nutritious midday meal.<sup>12, 14</sup>



# The Global Panel's Recommendations for Policy Action

Through its technical and policy briefs, the Global Panel has brought together evidence from over 400 sources and synthesised 57 policy recommendations that could guide actions to achieve healthier diets and improved nutrition. It has drawn the following ten key recommendations for how participants in the N4GII process, including policymakers, agricultural specialists, agribusinesses, the food industry, civil society, donors and governments, can make effective commitments to nutrition-sensitive actions which will help to achieve the Nutrition for Growth Compact.

The Global Panel recommends that policymakers:

**1. Actively support expanded production of diverse, safe, nutritious foods.** Staple crops continue to play a critical role in meeting the dietary needs of low-income consumers, but healthy eating and improved nutrition for all consumers requires greater availability of, and access to, a wider range of nutritious foods, from vegetables and fruit to fish and dairy products. Producers in low- and middle-income countries require more information on production and market opportunities, local food processing, input supply services, extension support, and financial services if they are to respond

to nutrition-sensitive policies which promote expanding production of a more diverse range of nutritious, safe food commodities.

**2. Prioritise research efforts to increase productivity of nutrient-rich foods, ensuring that they are affordable to those most in need.** This may include further development of biofortified crops as well as research to increase productivity of animal/fish production systems, indigenous vegetable production, and improved mechanisms for reducing the waste and loss associated with these, often perishable, commodities. While public research investments may be required to lead nutrition-aware research programmes, targeted public support enabling low-income consumers to access nutrient-dense foods (see #9 below) may encourage private sector investments (e.g., in processing and marketing) to respond to the increased demand.

**3. Manage food price volatility.** Public and private investments in efficient food markets and trade systems are fundamental to reducing price volatility. But governments, working with international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), should promote transparent real-time communication of efficient and accessible market



price information systems. This should also include the availability of other market-relevant information, e.g., national actions to manage food reserves, potential impacts of related policies on energy and biofuels, and price changes associated with natural disasters or climate events.

4. **Improve infrastructure for the handling, storage and marketing of perishable foods.** Both public and private investments are essential to the provision of market infrastructure for year-round availability of safe, nutrient-rich foods. This includes physical markets and refrigerated storage facilities, which can improve food safety and maintain quality while reducing post-harvest losses and marketing costs.
5. **Prioritise fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks for food safety and quality.** National policies and regulatory systems (inspection and testing) are essential for setting food safety standards and ensuring their implementation in local markets and, as appropriate, in supporting the safety of foods sold into, or acquired from, international markets. Surveillance must encompass the entire food chain, to ensure effective exclusion of mycotoxins and other foodborne hazards from the food supply. Progressive formalisation of markets should be supported by providing the necessary resources and market incentives to producers and traders.
6. **Promote public-private collaboration for improved nutrition.** While governments are responsible for the development and implementation of policies that promote levels of food availability and access that addresses national nutrition goals, private sector actors (from farmers to processors to marketing agents) respond to these policies as well as to marketplace signals from consumers. Working collaboratively, governments and private sector participants in the food system can take targeted actions to address specific nutrition objectives. These could include, for example, promoting micronutrient fortification of processed commodities likely to be consumed by vulnerable groups or product reformulation to reduce salt/sodium or transfat consumption among the general population.
7. **Make school meal programmes healthy.** School meal menus need to reflect nutritional best practice, incentivised by both national and international dietary guidelines, while offering appealing food to students and helping them to form lifelong healthy eating habits. Where it is cost-effective, procuring food for schools from local farming communities can help to introduce nutrition messages and the production of nutrient-dense foods beyond the schools themselves. Linking healthy school meals with nutrition education, family and school community involvement, school gardening, and technical support can help schools to provide a healthier environment overall.
8. **Integrate food and nutrition education.** While school feeding and gardening programmes can be important action-learning mechanisms, more formal introduction of food and



Photo: Georgina Goodwin, www.hihinternational.org

nutrition into education systems is also likely to be essential, especially as more students live in urban areas distant from the farm. Curricula at all levels of the education system, including pre- and in-service technical training in agriculture, medicine and business, should be reviewed to ensure that food and nutrition education is appropriately embedded to guide later application. Given the emerging epidemic of overweight/obesity, it is clear that greater understanding of how dietary practices can be adopted and promoted for improved health is needed.

9. **Protect food intake of vulnerable consumers.** Social protection programming plays an important role in protecting the nutrition of low-resource consumers during economic downturns, family setbacks, or other crisis conditions. By promoting procurement of nutritious food supplies from local producers, national social protection programmes can also provide production incentives, widening the potential nutrition impacts of these programmes.
10. **Generate the data needed to get the job done.** Priority areas include: i) Improving the quality and quantity of data on actual food intake; ii) measuring diet quality, not just quantity; iii) assessing gender roles in dietary choices with a view to tailoring education, incentives and policies; iv) measuring changes in the food environment in relation to policy and programmatic interventions; v) measuring the healthiness of steps along the food value-chain; and vi) measuring the ability of vulnerable people to access food of sufficient quantity and quality year-round and under varying market/price conditions.

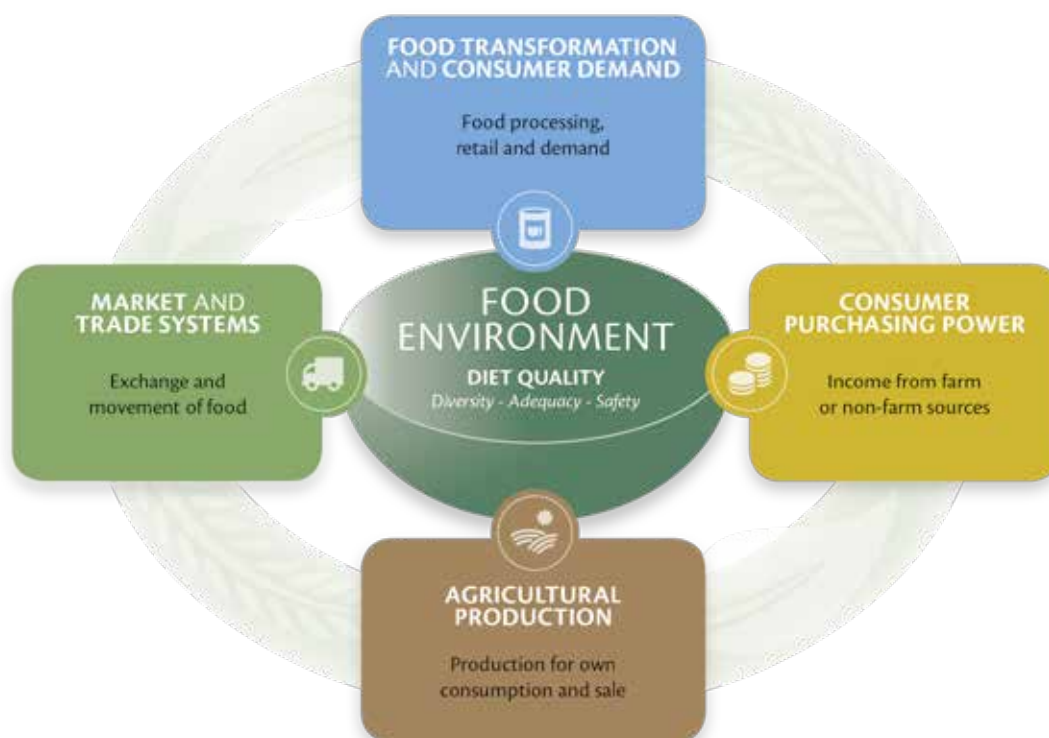
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# How can Agriculture and Food System Policies improve Nutrition?

The multiple burdens on health created today for low- and middle-income countries by food-related nutrition problems include not only persistent undernutrition and stunting, but also widespread vitamin and mineral deficiencies and growing prevalence of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. These different forms of malnutrition limit people's opportunity to live healthy and productive lives, and impede the growth of economies and whole societies.

The food environment from which consumers should be able to create healthy diets is influenced by four domains of economic activity:



In each of these domains, there is a range of policies that can have enormous influence on nutritional outcomes. In the Global Panel's Technical Brief No.1, we explain how these policies can influence nutrition, both positively and negatively. We make an argument for an integrated approach, drawing on policies from across these domains, and the need for more empirical evidence to identify successful approaches.

**Find out more here: [www.glopan.org/technical-brief](http://www.glopan.org/technical-brief)**



*Nutrition for Growth II: from commitment to action* provides ten key policy options within the agricultural production, market and trade systems, food transformation and consumer demand and consumer purchasing power domains to help governments address all forms of malnutrition.



Download *Policy Brief No. 6* here: <http://www.glopan.org/nutrition-for-growth2>

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