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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fifth Session

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 2-4 March 2020

Update of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition

Executive Summary

In April 2019, the 161st Session of FAO Council endorsed a recommendation for the development of an updated Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in nutrition. The updated Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in nutrition will consider: 1) all forms of malnutrition; 2) food systems over and beyond nutrition-sensitive agriculture; and, 3) the current global context building on the outcomes of the Second International Conference on Nutrition, the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and its Framework for Action, and the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition. It will also include a robust implementation plan and accountability framework, and take into account context- or regional-specific considerations.

This document provides a summary of the progress on updating the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in nutrition, and its overall processes.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference may wish to provide guidance on the further development of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in nutrition from the perspective of the region.

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Introduction

1. The 2019 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World¹ documents the ever more complex challenges of malnutrition in the world, alarmingly high levels of both under- and over-nutrition. There are over 820 million individuals suffering chronic hunger, while 2 billion adults are overweight, and 672 million adults are obese.

2. Unhealthy diets are an underlying cause of both under- and over-nutrition. FAO, the leading United Nations (UN) agency for food and agriculture with expertise across the food system, has an extremely important role to play in improving nutrition for all.

3. Recent global developments in both knowledge and practice have highlighted the vital role that functioning food systems play in supporting nutrition by ensuring availability and access to healthy diets. Specifically, in November 2014, the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), co-hosted by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO), adopted the Rome Declaration on Nutrition² and its Framework for Action³. In September 2015, the international community subscribed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at paving a trajectory towards a hunger-free, more equitable and more sustainable world by 2030.⁴ In April 2016, the UN General Assembly endorsed the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action, and proclaimed the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025⁵ whereby FAO and WHO were mandated to co-lead the implementation of the Decade.

4. The Programme Committee, at its 121st session in March 2017, requested an evaluation of the Vision and Strategy of FAO's work in nutrition ("Strategy") to ensure that the work FAO does in support to improved nutrition for all remains relevant and that the Strategy remains fit for purpose.⁶ The evaluation of the Strategy⁷ was finalized in February 2019. It made several recommendations to increase the impact of FAO's work in nutrition.

5. In March 2019, the 126th session of the Programme Committee requested an update of the Strategy and a report on the progress of the update during its 127th session in November 2019.⁸

6. In mid-2019, the Nutrition and Food Systems Division of FAO (ESN), under the supervision and guidance of the Assistant Director-General for Economic and Social Development (ES-ADG), began leading the process of updating the Strategy. The process is inclusive and focused on the work of the entire Organization. It will be characterized by internal and external consultations and iterative drafting throughout 2020.

Review of Progress by the Programme Committee⁹ and the Council¹⁰

7. An annotated outline¹¹ of the proposed updated Strategy was developed and submitted to the Programme Committee in late September 2019, and reviewed at its 127th session held from 4 to 8 November 2019.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5162en/ca5162en.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>

⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.un.org/nutrition/>

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ms543e.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/1184353/>

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/3/mz010en/mz010en.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/3/na582en/na582en.pdf>, pages 11 and 12, item 12

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/3/nb990en/nb990en.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/nb124en/nb124en.pdf>

8. The Programme Committee appreciated the update on the Strategy development process. It supported the focus of the Strategy on addressing all forms of malnutrition taking note of FAO's commitment to this goal. It also welcomed the food systems approach, and requested the Strategy to set out the Organization's comparative advantages in this regard. The Programme Committee also stressed that key recommendations from the evaluation be fully reflected in the updated Strategy. The Programme Committee recommended an inclusive consultation process with the Members during the development of the updated Strategy.

9. The Programme Committee looked forward to reviewing a draft of the Strategy in its entirety at its 129th session (November 2020) and the final version at the 130th session (March 2021), for presentation to and endorsement by the FAO Council (March 2021), if possible in advance of the UN Food Systems Summit.

10. The 163rd session of the FAO Council in December 2019 endorsed the recommendations of the 127th session of the Programme Committee regarding the continued work on the Strategy.

Summary of the Updated Strategy

11. The updated Strategy will comprise the following sections: a) Introduction and Context; b) Vision; c) Approach; d) General Principles; e) Outcomes; f) Means of Implementation; g) Implementation Plan; and h) Accountability Framework.

Introduction and Context

12. The introduction will show how nutrition is vital to achieving FAO corporate objectives in support to countries aiming to achieve their targets for the SDGs. It will emphasize the imperative for FAO to advance its Organization-wide approach to nutrition in order to fulfil its leadership commitment under the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. The context will expound on critical factors influencing the update of the Strategy, including: a) the changing nature of the burden of malnutrition; b) the major structural changes globally that both affect malnutrition, and are influenced by it; c) the development of the SDGs and numerous initiatives and opportunities (e.g. UN Decade of Action on Nutrition) to catalyze advances in nutrition; and d) the increased number of organizations relevant to nutrition.

The vision

13. FAO's vision statement for nutrition will capture the aim that all individuals are able to practice dietary patterns that promote all dimensions of health and wellbeing; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; are culturally acceptable; and have low environmental impact. It will also highlight the food-systems approach to reaching this goal, emphasizing the comparative advantage of FAO in focusing on the food-related aspect of nutrition.

Approach

14. FAO's approach to improving nutrition is to support the implementation of policies, innovations, and actions across food systems at the global, regional, national, and local levels that will enable all individuals to reach FAO's vision for nutrition. It will build on the expertise of FAO in all domains of the food systems – food supply chain, food environment, and consumer behaviour.

General Principles

15. The updated strategy will present how FAO's work in nutrition is to be founded on a set of core principles, including: i) all individuals have a right to adequate food; ii) gender equity and equality must be elevated and adverse gender-related impacts must be avoided; iii) partnerships are critical to end all forms of malnutrition and the leading role of partners in other vital areas, such as health system

strengthening and education, is recognized and supported; and iv) taking a systems approach implies quantifying and balancing the potential trade-offs to make healthy diets safe, available, affordable, acceptable, and appealing for all by weighing the impact of various policies and actions on different aspects of sustainability (environment, society and culture, economy), without compromising the health of individuals.

Outcomes

16. The updated strategy will define a results chain within which a set of outcomes reflecting FAO's mandate and aligning with FAO's results chain model and global goals can be attained.

- a. Outcome 1: Globally, regionally, nationally, and locally there is clarity of vision of attaining diets that promote all dimensions of health and wellbeing; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; are culturally acceptable; have low environmental pressure and impact; and the changes needed to enhance those food systems not delivering this vision.
- b. Outcome 2: Partnerships among multiple stakeholders are forged and strengthened to enhance a common understanding of and commitment to the needed changes in policy and action to achieve healthy diets while supporting economic, social-cultural, and environmental sustainability.
- c. Outcome 3: Global, regional, national, and local partners are fully engaged in identifying the influence and impact their current policies have on the food system and nutrition, and they are engaged with the food systems changes, including innovations, needed to enhance policy coherence and impact.
- d. Outcome 4: Capacity in countries is sufficient and governance structures are working effectively at global, regional, national, and local levels to enable policies, innovations, and actions to be successful.
- e. Outcome 5: Government actors and other stakeholders are implementing the key policies, innovations, and actions needed for positive change.

Means of Implementation

17. The updated Strategy will clearly detail the actions FAO will take to reach these outcomes. These actions will be aligned with FAO's core functions and interact/influence one another and can be enhanced or de-emphasized based on context. These actions are not sequential nor do they function in siloes, but rather in synergy, aligned with other actions by all partners and stakeholders.

- a. FAO will advocate and communicate at national, regional and global levels, in areas related to enhancing access to diets that promote all dimensions of health and wellbeing, specifically diets that are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; are culturally acceptable; and have low environmental impact; and ensuring the changes needed to transform those food systems not reaching this vision.
- b. FAO will collate data, conduct analysis and synthesize evidence on diet, nutrition, and food systems.
- c. FAO will provide a meeting place for Members and partners, including development partners, civil society and the private sector. As a credible neutral agency, FAO will facilitate and broker strengthened dialogue and common understanding of changes needed to ensure food systems achieve healthy diets while supporting all dimensions of sustainability.
- d. FAO will engage countries and partners in policy analysis to identify the impact of existing policies, gaps in policies, and what changes and innovations are needed to enhance coherence and impact across the food system. This action may also include translation and adaptation of international agreements, codes of conduct, etc. into country-specific norms and guidelines.

- e. FAO will support the enhancement of national capacities across the individual, organizational, and policy level to facilitate the development of governance structures and partnerships needed for policy, innovation, and action implementation.
- f. FAO will provide technical assistance within its area of expertise and mandate for action to ensure delivery functions are operating.

Implementation plan

18. An implementation plan will be developed that takes into consideration context- or regional-specific elements.

Accountability Framework.

19. An accountability framework will be developed in alignment with FAO's corporate programming, reporting and accountability mechanisms.

Processes and Timeline

20. Extensive consultations, both internal to FAO and with external partners, began in 2019 and will continue throughout 2020.

21. A Nutrition Strategy Technical Task Team was convened, which included representatives from all relevant technical divisions and departments based at FAO headquarters and representatives from all regional offices and some subregional offices. The first meeting was held on 11 November 2019. The agenda was to review and collate feedback from all participants on the annotated outline of the updated Strategy that was submitted to the Programme Committee. The Nutrition Strategy Technical Task Team will meet regularly in 2020 to consider key components of the Strategy and review drafts of the various sections of the Strategy.

22. By way of this information note, which is being shared with all Regional Conferences, all Regional Conference participants will receive information on the process and direction of the update of the Strategy. This information will be shared following the Regional Conferences' respective meeting schedules¹²:

- a. Asia and the Pacific (17-20 February 2020).
- b. Near East (2-4 March 2020).
- c. Africa (23-27 March 2020).
- d. Latin America and the Caribbean (27-29 April 2020).
- e. Europe (5-7 May 2020).

23. A preliminary draft of the updated Strategy will be shared with the all FAO Technical Committees in 2020. The drafts will be shared following the Technical Committees' respective meeting schedules:

- a. Committee on Fisheries, 13-17 July 2020.
- b. Committee on Forestry, 22-26 June 2020.
- c. Committee on Commodity Problems, 23-25 September 2020.
- d. Committee on Agriculture, 28 September - 2 October 2020.

24. External consultations with key stakeholders, including UN partner organizations, selected academic institutions, donors, non-governmental agencies, and others, will be conducted in 2020.

¹² <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/en/>

25. An informal seminar with Members to present and review a draft of the updated Strategy will be held during the second quarter of 2020 in Rome, Italy. Invitations to the seminar will be extended to all permanent representations to FAO in Rome.

26. A subsequent draft, having taken into consideration inputs from the aforementioned consultations, will be submitted to the Programme Committee for consideration during its 129th session to be held in November 2020.

27. The final Strategy will be submitted to the 130th session of the Programme Committee for endorsement (March 2021), and subsequently presented to the 166th session of the FAO Council for approval (March 2021).

28. As part of this process, the Regional Conference may wish to provide guidance on the further development of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in nutrition from the perspective of the region.