

Eighteenth meeting of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs on COVID-19 and the NCD-related SDGs

Date of meeting: November 13, 2020

Participants: Around 30 participants joined, representing 14 members of the Task Force

Subject: Nourishing the post COVID-19 world.

1. The session was moderated by Stineke Oenema, as coordinator of UNSCN and of the Thematic Working Group on Nutrition. Interventions and presentations (attached) were given by FAO, UNICEF, WFP, IDLO and WHO.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the already serious threat of malnutrition on several dimensions. For instance, food and health systems have been disrupted worsening access to nutritious food and to essential nutrition services, and people have adopted unhealthy dietary patterns. The negative impacts of COVID-19 and malnutrition are not distributed equally across the world and are working to intensify inequalities. **UNSCN provides examples of immediate and long-term actions to address nutrition in the post COVID-19 world, including focusing on double duty actions** (i.e., actions that address both undernutrition and malnutrition).
3. **FAO (Jamie Morrison) provided a briefing around the [UN Food System Summit 2021](#).** Food system transformation has been identified as one of the entry points to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. The expected outcomes of the Food System Summit are: (i) to generate greater alignment across initiatives around food and nutrition; (ii) to elevate the public discourse around food systems; (iii) to develop a set of high-level principles to leverage on food systems to support the SDGs; and (iv) to create a follow up system of the expected outcomes of the Summit.
4. The action tracks identified for the Food System Summit 2021 revolve around the idea that food system transformation must foster healthier dietary patterns, while ensuring that food is produced in a sustainable way and in a way that generates jobs and livelihoods. Along with action tracks, Food System Summit Dialogues offer a purposeful and organized forum for stakeholders to come together to share their role in food systems, consider their impacts on others and find new ways to come together in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. Dialogues are also an opportunity for citizens to engage as stakeholders in the world's food system.
5. Request from World Bank (Miriam Schneidman) for FAO to share more details on the difference between urban and rural areas when it comes to the impact of COVID-19 on food systems and food security. FAO conducted a survey to gain insights from municipalities around the world and their experiences as well as their response measures to COVID-19. Responses were gained from 77 countries showing interesting differences based on regions and the size of cities. Most cities in resource constrained settings did not received additional funding to respond to COVID-19, and the weaknesses in urban settings were apparent where the divide between producers and consumers are greater. [Survey](#), [findings](#) and resulting [policy brief](#) can be accessed here.

6. **UNICEF (Fatmata Fatima Sesay) presented the impact of COVID-19 on breastfeeding and complementary feeding and long-term consequences for the NCD burden.** Breastfeeding at the recommended levels would prevent more than 800 thousand deaths annually and could save the economy \$300 billion USD in healthcare expenditures. In addition, complementary feeding is the critical window to prevent all forms of malnutrition including overweight/obesity. During the COVID-19 pandemic children have been increasingly exposed to foods of low nutritional value. It is crucial that governments, policy makers and partners support breastfeeding and complementary feeding in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. A set of recommended actions include: (i) disseminate accurate information; (ii) monitoring of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and report violations; (iii) strengthen social protection programmes to ensure access to healthy diets; (iv) strengthen capacities of service providers in providing skilled counseling; (v) promote research and monitoring of IYCF practices during COVID-19; and (vi) increase investments in IYCF programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. **WFP (Maree Bouterakos) presented the importance of nutrition in school-aged children and actions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.** The pandemic has impacted children on several dimensions, including reducing food security, as a consequence of disruption of the provision of school meals. Now that schools have started to reopen, WFP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank launched a framework to inform decision-makers to develop national preparedness plans on returning children back to school. WFP has also supported schools in their school feeding programmes by providing take-home rations and vouchers. A recent joint report from UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank, highlighted emerging lessons from country experiences in managing the process of re-opening schools (see presentation attached).
9. **IDLO (Giulia Zevi) provided a presentation on the legal perspective to the response to the food crisis during COVID-19.** A joint IDLO and FAO initiative aimed at contributing to the response to food prices during COVID-19 and, in particular, at increasing understanding around the challenges to access to food in emergency situations. Rule of law and human rights-based approaches are essential to ensure that emergency laws and regulations are aligned with international human rights standards. The idea underpinning the project is to link the right to food to the right to health as two sides of the same coin. The project is being piloted in two countries in the first instance, Honduras and Uganda, where malnutrition has increased significantly in the context of COVID-19.
10. **WHO (Melanie Crown) presented the review of COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans through an NCD lens.** Out of 87 countries analyzed, only 39 included some description of essential health services and only 33 included NCDs. In addition, only 16 countries included malnutrition or breastfeeding in their plans.
11. Question from WHO - FCTC (Guangyuan Liu) in relation to whether tobacco growing has been considered in the discussion on food systems, particularly action track 3 (boost nature positive production). When encouraging farmers to move away from tobacco we should help to guide them towards healthier crops to earn a livelihood. Article 17 of the WHO FCTC states parties

should work together to promote economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers/growers – so governments have a duty to work towards this.

12. An overview of this session, including a full recording and presentation slides, can be found at the following link: <https://www.unscn.org/en/news-events/past-events?idnews=2132>

Other issues:

1. Task Force NCDs and COVID-19 webinars will be scheduled on a demand basis, as and when suitable issues arise. Task Force members are encouraged to reach out to the Task Force Secretariat to indicate and lead on potential topics of interest and discussion.

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