

Terms of Reference Thematic Working Group Nutrition and Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)

1. The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Nutrition was established and these Terms of Reference were agreed at the Eighth Task Force Meeting, 21-23 February 2017, Geneva.

Background and context

2. Members of the UN Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of noncommunicable diseases (UNIATF on NCDs) agreed the following action points during the Seventh UNIATF meeting that took place in October 2016 in Geneva:

- **A6.** *A thematic group on nutrition be established and this be the UNSCN Secretariat as the convener. Nutrition to become a standing agenda item on Task Force Meetings. Membership to consist of UNSCN Members, but with an invitation for other Members of the Task Force to join. The nutrition thematic working group to report back to future Task Force Meetings. (Task Force and UNSCN secretariats).*
- **A7.** *The UNSCN to articulate the work plan of the thematic group on nutrition and for this to be part of the future Task Force work plans (Task Force and UNSCN secretariats).*

3. The decision above reflects the increased attention given to nutrition to accelerate action in reducing all forms of malnutrition and diet-related NCDs, following the proclamation of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), as well as the larger scope of the UNIATF as agreed by an ECOSOC resolution (E/2016/5) in June 2016.

Addendum: in February 2020, UNSCN and the UN Network for the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement merged to become UN-Nutrition. These Terms of Reference are updated to recognize this change.

4. The UN-Nutrition Secretariat has taken the place of its predecessor, the UNSCN Secretariat, as the convener of the TWG. UN-Nutrition is an interagency coordination mechanism for nutrition at global level, and a collaboration platform at country level. UN-Nutrition is governed by a Steering Committee made up of UN agencies and accountable to Member States via ECOSOC through the UN-Nutrition Chair. UN-Nutrition will maintain the functions of UNSCN within the UNIATF, as stipulated in section 2, above.

5. Malnutrition and unhealthy diets are, by far, the largest risk factors responsible for the global burden of disease. Still more in-depth understanding is needed on how to integrate nutrition into various systems—such as the health, food, education and trade systems—to maximize the gains for better nutrition and minimize the risk factors for diseases. By bringing the NCD and nutrition communities together, the TWG would provide a forum for discussion, dialogue and coordination among concerned UN agencies. The TWG would improve policy coherence by developing better knowledge and understanding of roles of different agencies and sectors to reduce malnutrition and diet-related risk factors for NCDs. TWG would build on the comparative advantage and strength of the individual UN member agencies, programmes and funds and would identify areas for joint policy formulation and action. As such the

synergies of the work of the several members towards the common objectives will be maximised, including facilitating dialogue to tackle complex issues where there appear to be conflicting interests¹.

The TWG will be mainly active at global (policy) level but will contribute to the overall UNIATF country support to develop policies and programmes for the prevention and control of NCDs, bringing a specific focus on diet and nutrition related risk factors for the onset of NCD's. This can include the organisation of joint country missions or workshops. The UNIATF TWG on nutrition and NCDs working group will not implement country programmes as such – that remains the domain of some of the member agencies. By functioning as a collaboration platform at the country level, UN-Nutrition can support the TWG, and wider UNIATF initiatives, in line with UN-Nutrition's and UNIATF's terms of reference, by: (i) liaising with relevant UN Country Team actors to strengthen UNIATF action on NCD prevention and control, by providing nutrition-specific technical assistance and resources; (ii) coordinating nutrition-related joint activities at the country level, ensuring that NCD prevention and control is a fundamental topic of the dialogue; and (iii) advocating for greater country action on NCD prevention and control, as part of the effort to achieve the targets of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025).

6. The working group will contribute to the implementation of the WHO Global NCD Action Plan, 2013-2030, and achievement of the nutrition and NCD related Sustainable Development Goals. The TWG will work according to the principles established in the NCD work plan: Life-course approach; Empowerment of people and communities; Evidence-based strategies; Universal health coverage; Management of real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest; Human rights approach; Equity-based approach; National action and international cooperation and solidarity and; Multisectoral action.

Areas of focus

7. Considering the persistent presence of underlying factors, including social determinants and the intersectoral nature of nutrition, the UN Human Rights framework should guide the thinking about policy changes and interventions. The Human Rights framework stimulates thought across sectors – rights are indivisible – and it includes underlying factors in its analysis, thus contributing to sustainable improvement in which no one is left behind.

8. Taking the NCD action plan and its objectives as a starting point, the TWG will be active in advocacy, capacity building and governance, and the reduction of risk factors for NCDs. These activities will focus mainly on the improvement of the health and food environment, the space in which consumers make their (dietary and lifestyle) choices and in which a range of food is being offered. The link with the agricultural sector is essential in this aspect. Potential areas of attention are: stimulation of production and processing of foods for healthier diets (less trans fats, sugars and salt); stimulation of healthier consumer choices (address marketing issues by, for example, front of pack labelling or a ban on inappropriate marketing to children) and the underlying problems that are currently barriers for improvement of the situation. The integration of nutrition in health systems (as part of universal health coverage) is also an important point of attention.

¹ UNIATF, UNSCN and WHO. October 2016. Background paper: A proposal to better integrate nutrition into the work of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Disease

Objectives and activities

9. The objectives and activities of the Thematic Working Group are as follows:
- i. **Improved awareness and understanding of the Right to Food and underlying factors of several forms of malnutrition and diet-related NCDs and their policy implications.**
 - a. Liaise with relevant experts and academia: e.g. World Obesity, the Lancet Obesity Commission, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and universities conducting research in the area of human rights and diet-related NCDs;
 - b. Organisation of seminars and meetings related to nutrition and NCDs;
 - c. Organisation of briefings and sharing of information during UNIATF meetings.
 - ii. **Improved policy coherence among UN Agencies, Programmes, Funds and related intergovernmental organizations to ensure effective development and implementation.**
 - a. Develop guidelines in collaboration with countries (and UNDAF/UNSDCF and UNDG) for ensuring such policy coherence at the country level and on how to address complex issues where there are competing interests;
 - b. Share lessons learnt about multisectoral (and multi-stakeholder) initiatives in addressing malnutrition in all its forms;
 - c. Prepare NCD nutrition fact sheets and discussion papers;
 - d. Explore the options of trade and nutrition missions, bringing together the nutrition, NCD and trade communities to work towards improved coherence and better nutrition outcomes;
 - e. Facilitate dialogue in case of conflicting interests among several actors.
 - iii. **Increase coordination of policy and programme actions related to nutrition and diet-related NCDs.**
 - a. Briefings and information exchange on relevant work related to nutrition and NCDs among member agencies during UNIATF meetings;
 - b. Progress updates by FAO/WHO on relevant activities being implemented in the context of ICN2 follow-up and the Decade of Action for Nutrition;
 - c. Progress updates by WHO on the implementation of ECHO Implementation Plan related to nutrition and diet-related NCDs.
 - iv. **Support countries and regions develop and implement national and regional NCD strategies and action plans, as part of a healthy environment and integrated health systems.**
 - a. Integration of nutrition into the joint work of the UNIATF country task teams;
 - b. Integration of nutrition in plans of regional NCD groups (e.g. Africa and Latin America);
 - c. Integration of Nutrition in UNIATF joint missions;
 - d. Integration of nutrition components in WHO-UNDP investment cases.

Coordination and ways of working

10. Meetings will be mostly through telephone or videolink. Where Members are together for other events including Task Force meetings there will be the opportunity for face to face meetings.

11. The UN-Nutrition Secretariat will coordinate the mobilisation of UN-Nutrition and UNIATF members who have indicated specific interest in the area of nutrition and NCDs. UN-Nutrition will be in a position to fund (part of) the TWG activities e.g. holding of meetings and publishing relevant reports and documents addressing nutrition and NCDs. The Executive Secretary of the UN-Nutrition Secretariat will be the convener of the TWG.

Members of the Thematic Working Group on Nutrition

12. Any member of the Task Force is eligible to join the Nutrition TWG by simple expression of interest.

13. Current members of the TWG are the following: FAO, IAEA, IDLO, IFAD, OCHA, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNDESA, UNESCO, UNHCR, WFP and WHO.

Terms of Reference agreed 23 February 2017
Terms of Reference updated and agreed on December 2022