

## A new nutrition manifesto for a new nutrition reality



Malnutrition is a global challenge that all countries need to address. Despite some progress, the world is not on track to meet globally agreed goals and targets for nutrition.<sup>1</sup> While more than 149 million children have stunted growth, childhood overweight and obesity are increasing almost everywhere,<sup>2</sup> and suboptimal diets are responsible for one in five (22%) adult deaths globally.<sup>3</sup> *The Lancet's Series on the Double Burden of Malnutrition*<sup>4-7</sup> highlights this new nutrition reality: we can no longer characterise countries as low-income and undernourished or high-income and only concerned with obesity.

Good nutrition is fundamental to human health and for achieving sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enshrine the dual targets of ending malnutrition in all its forms and ensuring access to nutritious food for all people by 2030 as major global priorities.<sup>8</sup> These goals reinforce human rights to adequate food, nutrition, and health,<sup>9,10</sup> and build on the growing momentum for ending hunger and malnutrition.<sup>11,12</sup> Going forward, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025) seeks to accelerate action to achieve these goals.

Malnutrition has an important common denominator: food systems that fail to provide all people with healthy, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets. The economic, social, and environmental costs of inaction will hinder the growth and development of individuals and societies for decades to come.<sup>4-7,13,14</sup> As this new Series shows, the

complex interconnected biological and social pathways of all forms of malnutrition are difficult to disrupt through siloed interventions and require societal shifts that can be scaled up and sustained over decades.<sup>4-7</sup>

Prevention of malnutrition, especially in the first 1000 days, has lifelong health and economic benefits.<sup>15</sup> For food systems to deliver healthy, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets for all, we must address the underlying drivers that incentivise endless market and consumption growth over human and planetary health.<sup>16,17</sup> Meaningful change will require action across food systems—from production and processing, through trade and distribution, pricing, marketing, and labelling, to consumption and waste—driven from the bottom up by communities, cities, regions, and nations. All relevant policies and investments must be radically re-examined.

Silos must be broken down. Magic bullets do not exist. The message of a 2013 *Lancet* Comment that only collective action will end undernutrition remains true today.<sup>18</sup> But given the political economy of food, the commodification of food systems, and growing patterns of inequality worldwide, a broader response is now required. New stakeholders need to join existing ones to power a food system revolution if ending all forms of malnutrition is the goal (table).<sup>14</sup> Among these stakeholders are advocates for planetary health; faith-based leaders; innovators and investors who are financing fair and green companies; and city mayors

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Stakeholder groups	Role and responsibility
Governments	Prioritise solving the problem; regulate to set standards and their enforcement; implement policies that are equitable, inclusive, and financed; collect and use data to inform action; and mobilise public investments
UN	Convene and connect actors; demonstrate cost-effective solutions; monitor implementation of commitments and achievement of targets
Civil society	Advocate, organise, mobilise people; monitor commitments; and create a generation of activists
Academia	Generate a diverse evidence base; build capacity and conduct research to solve problems, create sustainable solutions, and promote interdisciplinary systems thinking and research
Media	Inform public opinion, tell stories, create debate; facilitate demand for public accountability; focus on structural drivers not individuals and avoid stigma
Philanthropy and multi/bilaterals	Foster innovation; embrace complexity; fund systems-based problem solving; and convene stakeholders
Private sector	Commit to responsible business by production and distribution of affordable nutritious foods; prioritise population health and wellness agenda over profits; consent to appropriate conduct by removal of undue influence on relevant policy and research; and abide by national and international marketing and other codes and regulations
Regional economic platforms	Reshape trade and investment policies in line with public health policies and protect policy space for nutrition

**Table: Roles and responsibilities of stakeholder groups who must create the systemic changes needed to end malnutrition**

with responsibility for enabling access to nutritious and affordable food for the world's increasingly urbanised populations. There is a role for food producers. Farmers are increasingly affected by extreme weather events and small and medium enterprises are central to efforts to achieve environmental sustainability and more inclusive growth. Consumer associations also have a role in demanding transparency and accountability. Needless to say, the meaningful engagement of children, adolescents, and young people is vital.

Although new strategic partnerships are essential, we must recognise the damage and mistrust that result from incompatible partnerships with stakeholders whose behaviour runs counter to human or planetary health.<sup>16</sup> The food industry has an important role in implementing and delivering change. However, companies cannot be allowed to influence and interfere in public policy making or bias the science that underpins this process.<sup>17</sup> While constructive dialogue is necessary, a default seat at the table for private-sector representatives should not be assumed and policy development processes need to be firewalled from vested interests.

This multistakeholder effort to end malnutrition must prioritise the engagement, inclusion, and empowerment of rights-holders, such as women, smallholder farmers, young people, and marginalised groups. Any policy action or governance arrangement must begin with the question: whom does our food system ultimately serve, and for what purpose?

More than 60 countries have joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, committing to accountable actions and measured results. The SDGs, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025), and the 2020 Nutrition for Growth Summit in Japan offer further opportunities for stakeholders to expand their commitments. Sustained accountability is crucial to ensure these commitments are translated into actions that deliver good nutrition for all, everywhere. Empty promises fail populations and risk delaying progress.

The new nutrition reality calls for a broadened community of nutrition stakeholders who occupy common ground, speak a shared language, work in mutually reinforcing and interconnected ways, and act on a global scale. Such work can draw inspiration from the contributions of grassroots actors as well as non-state actors, and can be guided by existing goals, targets, frameworks, and action plans.<sup>9,12,19,20</sup>

In this nutrition decade, a new global nutrition movement is emerging that needs to take the lead in demanding food systems change locally, regionally, and globally. It is within our collective power; we owe it to our children and future generations.

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