INTRODUCTION

GOOD NUTRITION SIGNALS THE REALIZATION OF PEOPLE’S RIGHTS TO FOOD AND HEALTH. IT REFLECTS A NARROWING OF THE INEQUALITIES IN OUR WORLD.

Without good nutrition, human beings cannot achieve their full potential. When nutrition status improves, it helps break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, generates broad-based economic growth, and leads to a host of positive consequences for individuals, families, communities, and countries. Good nutrition provides both a foundation for human development and the scaffolding needed to ensure it reaches its full potential. Good nutrition, in short, is an essential driver of sustainable development.

The opposite of good nutrition—“bad” nutrition—takes many forms: children and adults who are skin and bone, children who do not grow properly, people who suffer because their diets lack nutrients or are unhealthy, people who are obese or suffer from diet-related noncommunicable disease such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. These multiple forms of malnutrition have common causes: poor-quality diets, weak care of mother and child, insufficient access to health services, and unsanitary, unhealthy environments.
Malnutrition is a problem of staggering size worldwide—large enough to threaten the world’s sustainable development ambitions for the post-2015 period. Malnutrition affects all countries and almost one in three people on the planet (see Panel 1.1). Nearly half of all countries are dealing with more than one type of malnutrition at the same time (IFPRI 2014a). And the threat is growing. Although some forms of malnutrition, such as stunting, are showing slow and uneven declines, other forms, such as anemia in women of reproductive age, are stagnant. And still others, such as overweight and obesity, are increasing.

The resolve to act to reduce malnutrition is high. Our understanding of how to lower the number of malnourished people—albeit not perfect—has never been greater. We know that combating malnutrition in all of its complexity will require a combination of actions designed to (1) strengthen the political environment in ways that enable malnutrition reduction, (2) ensure that all sectors that affect nutrition contribute as much as they can to improving people’s nutrition status, and (3) expand targeted nutrition interventions to cover all the people who need them. These actions, of course, will take different forms in different countries.

Momentum for improving nutrition is growing stronger, both globally and in individual countries (see Panel 1.2 for developments in the past year). The challenge now is not only to lock in existing commitments to reducing malnutrition in all its forms, but also to multiply them exponentially and convert them into faster progress. The time is right to rise to this challenge.

**NUTRITION IS A POWERFUL DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

This report is being issued just as the member states of the United Nations are deciding on a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will shape development priorities and spending for the next 15 years. At the time of writing, the proposed SDGs, likely to be adopted in September 2015, consist of 17 goals and 169 targets (126 outcome targets and 43 implementation targets) (Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals 2015). These goals are expansive in the development outcomes they cover, including health, environment, gender, education, and poverty. The second SDG—“end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”—concerns nutrition and includes an ambitious target of ending malnutrition in all its forms.
by 2030. Yet overall, nutrition is inadequately represented. This is the only target out of 169 in which nutrition is mentioned. None of the three implementation targets for the second SDG—the "how" of meeting the outcome targets—mentions nutrition actions. Obesity is not mentioned once in the entire draft document.

Yet nutrition clearly has a role to play in achieving sustainable development across the goals. Good nutrition makes vital contributions to goals related to, for example, poverty, health, education, gender, work, growth, inequality, and climate change (Table 1.1). In addition, there is growing and consistent evidence that improving nutrition practices and outcomes can generate large economic returns (Panel 1.3).

This compelling evidence creates an imperative to embed nutrition more broadly in the process of implementing the SDGs. One remaining opportunity to influence the process is through the indicators that will be used to measure progress. The United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition has proposed a set of eight nutrition indicators for

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**TABLE 1.1** How improving nutrition can contribute to the SDGs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)</th>
<th>Relevance of nutrition to the SDG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End poverty in all its forms everywhere</td>
<td>Nutrition is proven to reduce intergenerational poverty and enhance labor force performance, income earning, and wage rates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture</td>
<td>Target 2b is &quot;by 2030, end all forms of malnutrition.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</td>
<td>The proposed SDG indicator set includes links to two World Health Assembly (WHA) global nutrition targets. Nutrition status boosts adult productivity in agricultural work. Better female nutrition status empowers women in agriculture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities</td>
<td>A focus on the period before and the first part of 1,000 days reduces risk of low birth weight and improves women’s nutrition status. Micronutrient malnutrition and maternal history of being stunted in childhood are linked to maternal mortality and low birth weight. Forty-five percent of deaths of children under 5 are linked to undernutrition. Stunting is linked to the onset of noncommunicable diseases later in life and to lower adult productivity. Reducing overweight and obesity contributes to lower prevalence of noncommunicable diseases. Infectious diseases (diarrhea, malaria, acute respiratory infections, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS) are linked to nutrition-related morbidity and mortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</td>
<td>Education is linked to early childhood development, for which nutrition is of vital importance. Nutrition status in first 1,000 days is linked to school grade completion and achievement, particularly in adolescent girls. Improving the nutrition status of girls, adolescents, and women increases their ability to perform well at school and to become empowered in the workforce and the wider society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</td>
<td>Water, sanitation, and hygiene are critical determinants of nutrition. Cost of undernutrition is at least 8–11 percent of GNP. Preventing stunting among children increases their earned income as adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all</td>
<td>Stunting rates by wealth quintile demonstrate how current inequality perpetuates future inequality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce inequality within and among countries</td>
<td>Diet types affect greenhouse gas emissions and the wider environmental footprint related to food production, processing, and distribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</td>
<td></td>
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Source: Authors and United Nations (2015a).
Note: The SDGs shown here are those in the United Nations Open Working Group’s zero draft.
ACTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO ADVANCE NUTRITION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The SDGs, and these proposed indicators have the broad support of many civil society groups (UNSCN 2015). These include the indicators for the six nutrition targets already unanimously agreed to by the member states of the World Health Assembly in 2012:

1. prevalence of stunting (low height-for-age) in children under 5 years of age;
2. prevalence of wasting (low weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age;
3. percentage of infants less than 6 months of age who are exclusively breastfed;
4. percentage of women of reproductive age (15–49 years of age) with anemia;
5. prevalence of overweight (high weight-for-height) in children under 5 years of age; and
6. percentage of infants born with low birth weight (< 2,500 grams).

The seventh proposed indicator is for dietary diversity (the percentage of women, 15–49 years of age, who consume at least 5 out of 10 defined food groups), which is a validated indicator of nutrient adequacy (FANTA III 2014). The eighth is the percentage of the national budget allocated to nutrition. The inclusion of these indicators would help hold countries and other stakeholders accountable to take action to address malnutrition in all its forms. Yet the most recent draft of indicators included only child stunting and wasting (Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals 2015).

The evidence shows that sustainable development, broadly speaking, leads to better-nourished people. At a global level, the evidence is clear: improvements in development outcomes such as female school enrollment, access to improved water and sanitation, and improved food supply are strong drivers of declines in stunting (Smith and Haddad 2015). At a national level, countries and states that have done especially well in tackling malnutrition have done so through combinations of progress in scaling up nutrition interventions and progress in development indicators: Viet Nam (O’Donnell et al. 2009), Brazil (Monteiro et al. 2009), Bangladesh (Headey et al. 2015), Nepal (Headey and Hoddinott 2014), and the state of Maharashtra in India (Haddad et al. 2014). Experiences in Colombia and Tanzania, described in panels later in this report, also suggest that a wide range of factors are associated with improvements in nutrition status.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HELPS FIGHT MALNUTRITION IN ALL ITS FORMS

But international development fashion come and go. Locking in existing commitments to improving nutrition, and then multiplying these commitments, will require nutrition to be firmly embedded in the set of indicators used to measure progress against the Sustainable Development Goals. It will require that a wider range of sectors engage in nutrition improvement and that those who invest in improving nutrition status become more accountable to citizens for the delivery and impact of their investments.

The momentum for nutrition is strengthening. Consider the following developments:

- At the Second International Conference on Nutrition in November 2014, UN member states recommitted to work to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, with a focus on enhancing food systems. They agreed on a comprehensive 60-point Framework for Action.
- Official development assistance for nutrition-specific interventions almost doubled between 2012 and 2013.
- Accountability in nutrition is being strengthened: member countries of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement are documenting their budgetary allocations on nutrition. New donor scorecards are being published by ACTION. A new round of Access to Nutrition Index (ATNI) scores is being prepared. Research and civil society groups such as the International Network for Food and Obesity/Noncommunicable Diseases Research, Monitoring, and Action Support (INFORMAS) and World Cancer Research Fund International are actively monitoring government policies to address obesity. And WHO and several leading nutrition donors are prioritizing gaps in data and related capacities with a view to filling them by.

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PANEL 1.2 MOMENTUM FOR IMPROVING NUTRITION IS GROWING

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This evidence suggests we have many opportunities for improving nutrition status and that we must look to a wide set of stakeholders in nutrition to implement what we know works (Taylor et al. 2013). We must also look more widely to address malnutrition problems that show little overall signs of progress, such as wasting in children under age 5, anemia in women ages 15–49, and adult overweight and obesity.

On obesity, a series of articles published in The Lancet in 2015 reframes it by emphasizing the reciprocity of the environments around people and the choices they make (Lancet 2015). The WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity is working to identify the broad set of approaches likely to be most effective in tackling childhood and adolescent obesity, and it is hoped that this work will help accelerate progress (WHO 2015a).

A FOCUS ON CLIMATE, FOOD SYSTEMS, AND BUSINESS

Based on this evidence, this Global Nutrition Report seeks to expand the circle of commitment and investment in nutrition. In particular we focus on climate change, food systems, and business—all areas in which the actions of decisionmakers affect malnutrition.

The relationship with climate is emphasized because of the intimate links between disease, food, and climate—and because it is hoped that a new international climate change agreement, covering all countries, will be announced at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in late 2015. Such an agreement would present opportunities for those in nutrition and climate to establish closer working relationships and to advance their overlapping agendas.

The attention to food systems is driven by the prominence given to this issue by the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) and its salience for malnutrition in all its forms, including obesity.

The focus on business arises because accountability deficits are often cited as holding back potentially productive engagements between public and private actors with a common goal of improving nutrition. The Global Nutrition Report...
Report, with its role in promoting accountability, may have something to contribute to breaking this roadblock.

But what do we want these actors in climate change, food systems, and business to do? For climate policy-makers, the report suggests paying more attention to diet patterns as a driver of emissions. It highlights recent research that finds that some diets are associated with both better health and lower greenhouse gas emissions. The report helps national food system leaders analyze their own system for sensitivity to health and sustainability, presents a menu of initiatives and policies that show promise in driving the healthiness of a food system, and proposes a set of dashboard indicators to monitor food system performance and to hold it accountable for improvements in nutrition status. For businesses, the report highlights often-overlooked opportunities for action, dimensions of conduct where big businesses need to improve their performance for nutrition, and ways for all stakeholders considering public-private engagements to strengthen accountability.

What are the incentives for actors in these domains to invest in nutrition-improving actions? At a general level, more sustainable development facilitated by investments in nutrition is good for all actors. As nutrition improves, businesses can meet the needs of a wealthier set of consumers and work with a healthier set of employees. Food systems that promote health are likely to be more diverse and hence more resilient to external shocks, and if they do not challenge human and planetary health, they are likely to be more enduring.

About this report

The Global Nutrition Report is an annual report that assesses progress in improving nutrition outcomes and identifies actions to accelerate progress and strengthen accountability in nutrition. It was called for at the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, held in London in 2013 and hosted by the Governments of Brazil and the United Kingdom and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF). The call came on the basis that strong accountability enhances the enabling political environment for nutrition action by giving all stakeholders—existing and new—more confidence that their actions will have an impact, that bottlenecks to progress will be identified and overcome, and that successes will spread inspiration. The Global Nutrition Report series is thus designed to be an intervention in the ongoing discourses in and governance of global nutrition.

More sustainable development facilitated by investments in nutrition is good for all actors.

The first Global Nutrition Report was published in November 2014 and launched at the ICN2 meetings in Rome as well as at a series of 15 additional roundtables around the world. It focused on setting the baseline for global nutrition status: where are nutrition stakeholders making good progress in outcomes, actions, and account-
ability, and where can more be done? It measured progress at the country level against the six global nutrition targets adopted by the members of the WHA in 2012: stunting, wasting, and overweight in children under age 5; low birth weight; anemia in women of reproductive age; and exclusive breastfeeding. Panel 1.4 summarizes some key facts reported from 2014.

This report continues the monitoring and accountability processes established in the first report, but it also includes a number of new features. Some of these were promised in the 2014 report,¹ and some were added in response to consultations held in late 2014 and early 2015. These new features include the following:

• new analyses of concurrent stunting and wasting data from five countries (Chapter 2),

• more nuanced ways of tracking and presenting whether countries are on or off course to meet global nutrition targets (Chapter 2),

• an analysis of the quality of N4G commitments (Chapter 3),

• a greater focus on obesity and noncommunicable diseases throughout, and particularly in Chapters 2 and 4,

• more detailed data from countries and donors on financial allocations to nutrition (Chapter 5), and

• a focus on a wider set of actors that can be engaged to accelerate malnutrition reduction (Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9).

In the chapters that follow, we begin by assessing progress in four nutrition domains: nutrition status compared with global targets; the commitments made at the N4G summit (“N4G commitments”); actions to address malnutrition in all its forms; and the scaling up of nutrition finances and capacity. Next, we identify important opportunities, actions, and metrics to advance nutrition through climate policy, food systems, and business. We also recommend ways of making these domains more accountable for improving nutrition. We then highlight priorities for building stronger accountability in nutrition, drawing on lessons from other fields, identifying key gaps in data and capacity, and describing innovative ways of filling these gaps. Finally, we summarize our conclusions and put forward calls to action for different stakeholders.²