

Guidance for Improving Nutrition-Relevant Policy Development in West Africa



Purpose

This note provides guidance for improving nutrition-relevant policy in West Africa, drawn from a comprehensive policy review of nutrition-relevant policies in 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

To address and prevent malnutrition, institutions and governments are encouraged to implement multisectoral approaches. Against the backdrop of a mounting burden of overweight and obesity and a persistent burden of undernutrition, addressing causes of malnutrition with integrated approaches that create and sustain synergistic, mutually reinforcing policy mechanisms is crucial for amplifying progress.

Through a desk review and in consultation with experts in each country, we identified, coded, and reviewed all nutrition-relevant policies for each West African country. This guidance reflects the best practices as analyzed across the regional policy landscape. Practices were selected because they constitute key steps in the processes of nutrition-relevant policy planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; we did not measure policy impact on nutritional outcomes. These recommendations should serve to guide future development and updates of policies relevant to nutrition. A detailed database is available for download [here](#), and a synthesis report describing findings across the region as well as country policy landscape notes can be found [here](#).

Guidance for nutrition-relevant policies

I. Use available knowledge and data to design solid, evidence-based interventions and inform contextually appropriate national policies:

We recommend an equity-sensitive and inclusive use of knowledge along each step of the policy pathway in future policy design, implementation, evaluation, and coordination.

Through the use of disaggregate data:

- Ensure the use of disaggregated data on immediate, underlying, and basic determinants of malnutrition when designing data-based tailored activities. Employ disaggregated, standard, and comparable policy indicators for monitoring and evaluation of those activities.
- Where this is not possible, map which data are being monitored and which data it would be desirable to monitor better, so that any gaps can be identified, and actions can be developed to gradually fill these gaps.
- Acknowledge disparities to address intra- and inter-generational inequality for improved equity of policies.

Through inclusion of context-relevant interventions shown to be cost-effective:

- Adopt gender-equitable inclusive growth; provide long-term support (e.g., health, education, safety nets); and include empowerment accelerators. Given the high proportion of women's contribution to labor in food security (including agriculture) and their role as caregivers, several policies call for factoring in competing demands on women's time, revealing a need to lighten their workload, tackle occupational and sectoral segregation, and encourage access to more and better jobs for women.
- Reorient policies to acknowledge double-duty actions (DDAs). Recognize the full spectrum of malnutrition issues, including undernutrition and overweight, obesity, and diet-related NCDs.

Through appropriate targeting strategies:

- Target high-risk groups with high-impact interventions (e.g., as per World Health Assembly targets), where there are limited resources and where it is appropriate based on sector. Where relevant, target at the population level outlining why this is the most appropriate strategy for the policy or specific policy components; for example nutrition-sensitive interventions might target the population level for extensive coverage, with expected benefits over people's lives, to tackle malnutrition and health issues at the population level or subnational population level in consideration of disparities.
- Where possible, adopt a life cycle approach in age-based targeting.
- Equity-sensitive targeting may be a more appropriate strategy for some policies or policy components. Whether targeting based on regional disparities, urban vs. rural, type of livelihood and income sources, socioeconomic status, disease burden, or other vulnerabilities, the rationale for non-age-based targeting should be made explicit to inform all key stages of the policy process.
- Whichever targeting strategy is employed by a given policy, spelling out the rationale behind this strategy and the expected impact pathway will benefit the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages that follow the formulation of a national policy document.

2. Increase coherence within and between policies of different sectors to ensure synergistic action to address nutrition challenges:

Improve internal coherence: Ensure alignment between process steps within a policy. This requires direct logical pathways between a policy's situational analysis, stated objectives, planned activities, and chosen indicators. Both the components that are included and those that cannot be included should be clearly defined and differentiated.

Improve external coherence: Seek alignment between objectives and activities of nutrition-relevant policies. Improving coherence between policies within a sector or a group of closely linked sectors and across all nutrition-relevant sectors is key, as supportive policies in one sector can be derailed by policies or practices in others. Achieving coherence entails ensuring and coordinating dialogue across sectors at the planning, monitoring, and review stages of policy, as well as ensuring that each sector implements the outlined activities. Involving many different sectors with their own conflicting and competing political agendas and objectives limits how much can be done to include nutrition. Where discrepancies or incoherence arise, these should be clearly identified regardless of sectoral readiness to immediately address any conflicting priorities or resolve discrepancies in the overall policy landscape. Where achieving fully integrated nutrition-relevant policies is problematic, a pragmatic approach could be co-location, that is, coordinating on the development of sectoral policies.

3. Strengthen accountability for monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of high-quality nutrition interventions that address nutrition problems in countries:

Through institutional accountability: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of actors and institutions involved across jurisdictional levels and throughout the policy process, from strategy and action plan development to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Clear lines of accountability should be specified both within and between relevant government departments to encourage the delivery of targets. Effective mechanisms for transparency and accountability should be developed, replicated, or scaled up.

Through M&E practices: Strengthen both process and impact monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to support effective management of policy components and implementation at scale of effective interventions.

Through social accountability: Make provisions within policies for clear social accountability mechanisms for consultative policy formulation, M&E, and dissemination, as a clear and explicit duty of government officials and service providers.

4. Mainstream nutrition across diverse policy areas:

Contribute to creating and sustaining a conducive environment for nutrition impact through mainstreaming of nutrition within policies across nutrition-relevant sectors. Ideally, policies from different sectors should create a coherent push for nutrition.

Integrate nutrition throughout each step of the policy process: When nutrition is integrated into a sectoral policy, it should be incorporated into the policies' situational analysis, objectives, indicators, and budgets and include key nutrition targets. Potential policy areas for integration include, but are not limited to, agriculture, education, environment, gender, and economic or social interventions.

Outline the scope: Clearly outline the scope of policy documents and sectoral/multisectoral strategies in terms of key nutrition challenges. This will make it possible to map the breadth and depth of planned interventions and identify any gaps that need to be addressed, either in future policies or through programs and projects that can complement existing policies where needed.

5. Harness collaboration and continue to build and invest in strong coordination across sectors through knowledge sharing:

Engage all relevant sectors and partners in consultations at the policy drafting stage for more effective co-creation, better-coordinated implementation, transparent monitoring and evaluation, and data sharing. Placing coordination mechanisms at a high political level will facilitate multisectoral collaboration and policy coherence across sectors, while safeguarding against potential conflicts of interest in the development and implementation of nutrition programs.

Create a platform for knowledge sharing among various sectors/stakeholders to facilitate discussion of their priorities and actions and help identify and eliminate overlap.

Encourage knowledge sharing across contexts and at all levels, so that policy efforts can be taken up by actors at national and subnational levels, depending on circumstances and capacities. Strengthen the use of available data in the policy process and promote knowledge and data sharing across the region.

Make all policy documents publicly accessible throughout the region to encourage complementary input into policy from a wide range of actors and foster nutrition-oriented policy cooperation across sectors and countries.

6. Ensure alignment with the broader nutrition agenda:

Ensure alignment between different agendas, balancing national needs and priorities with the regional and global agendas (e.g., WHA targets).

Include policy accelerators that support internal and external coherence in the development of new policies linking to a unified nutrition agenda (e.g., leadership and capacity building, gender-sensitive social norms change (family and community structures), awareness campaigns, empowerment, enablers of inclusive political participation and access to markets).

Strengthen national policies to address nutrition problems and improve efforts to budget for and finance these policies so that they can be translated into operational actions with clear accountabilities.



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