

English summary  
of Fafo-rapport 2019:24

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## Nutrition efforts in Norwegian development cooperation

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The world is facing major challenges in terms of nutrition, with millions of people who are starving or malnourished. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people who suffer from starvation or have no access to food. The UN has estimated that in 2017, a total of 821 million people had insufficient access to food. Children are especially affected by malnutrition: 149 million children under the age of five – 22 per cent of all the world's children – suffer from stunting, and 49 million from wasting. Two billion children and adults suffer from a deficiency of one or more micronutrients. Meanwhile, obesity is a growing problem in all countries. Forty million children under the age of five are overweight, and more than one in eight adults in the world are obese. The result is a rapid increase in non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and certain types of cancer. The burden of these diseases is increasing especially rapidly in low- and medium-income countries.

### ***The consequences of malnutrition***

Malnutrition and unbalanced diets entail major economic, human and environmental consequences: malnutrition is a prominent cause of child mortality and early death among adults, and unhealthy diets are currently the largest risk factor for the global burden of disease. Moreover, today's food systems and diet choices exert a high pressure on the environment, in the form of climate gas emissions and loss of natural resources and biological diversity. Food production accounts for up to 30 per cent of global climate gas emissions and 70 per cent of all freshwater consumption, and occupies approximately 40 per cent of all the world's land mass. Global challenges related to food and nutrition need to be addressed as part of the efforts to achieve sustainable development.

### ***Agenda 2030***

Agenda 2030 establishes a new framework for international collaboration, with sustainable development goals that focus on global challenges and global responsibilities. Sustainable Development Goal no. 2 aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. Further, the goal seeks to ensure that all people have access to safe and nutritious food all year round. An adequate nutritional status is a precondition for many of the sustainable development goals, including eradication of poverty, better health, education and gender equality. The launch of the sustainable development goals also marked the start of the UN Decade of Action

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on Nutrition (2016–2025). During this decade, all UN member states and other actors are encouraged to increase their investments in nutrition and implement measures and programmes to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, and ensure universal access to healthy and sustainable diets. In combination, these provide an extra impetus to take action on nutrition today and in the years to come.

### ***Climate change***

According to the UN, climate change and more extreme weather phenomena, in combination with conflicts, are the main reasons why we have seen an increase in the number of people living with insufficient access to food in recent years. Climate change affects all dimensions of food security as well as other underlying causes of malnutrition related to provision of care for children, health and childhood environment. The consequences of climate change imply reduced variation and nutritional quality of the food which is produced and eaten. Increasing temperatures and drought affect the quantity and quality of water available for food production, energy production and human consumption. Precipitation and temperature play a key role in the outbreak and spread of many diseases. Extreme weather phenomena, such as cyclones and floods, can also directly affect the quality and availability of food. Health services can also be affected if land areas, infrastructure and buildings are damaged.

### ***The first 1000 days***

Children, adolescents and adults in all countries of the world consume too much processed food and too many sugary beverages, and eat too little fruit, vegetables, pulses and whole grains, irrespective of their socioeconomic status. This produces parallel problems of malnutrition and overweight/obesity. The groups that are most exposed to malnutrition include children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. A woman's nutrition before and during pregnancy is crucial for foetal weight and development. The child's birthweight and nutrition during the two first years of life affect the child's development and health both during childhood and later as an adult. The first 1000 days – from conception until the child's second birthday – are crucial for how the child will fare in life. Adequate nutrition helps build a strong immune defence and promotes cognitive and physical development, meaning that more children can achieve their full potential. Adequate nutrition is thus not only a right that the child enjoys; it also benefits society as a whole.

### ***The need for interventions***

To eradicate hunger and combat all forms of malnutrition there is a need for interventions that focus on improving nutrition in individuals while ensuring sustainable social and economic development. Malnutrition can only be met

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through nutritionally specific interventions that target the immediate causes of malnutrition, including better food and nutritional intake, and the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, or through nutritionally sensitive interventions that address the underlying causes of malnutrition, including food security, water and sanitation, social protection and education. Nutritional aspects of health-related interventions and activities produce ample synergy effects. Inclusion of nutrition in interventions that target both early childhood and school-children would have an effect on the development and school performance of children and adolescents.

### ***Nutrition in all parts of the food system***

Concerns for nutrition should also be incorporated into all aspects of a sustainable food system, ranging from fertile soils to improve the quality of crops, through food security and enrichment at the processing stage, safe transport and storage, to preparation and intake of nutritious food in families and by individuals. Measures that target agriculture and strengthen the role of women may be effective ways to ensure better incomes, food security and the quality of diets in vulnerable households and individuals. Agricultural and fishery projects should strengthen their focus on production of nutritious foods. Industrial development should be sustainable and nutritionally sensitive when it comes to processing, transporting and storing food items. Appropriate processing is important to ensure a long shelf-life, more stable access to and less wastage of nutritious foodstuffs such as fruit, vegetables and dairy products. Nutritional information to promote variety in diets may also have a positive effect.

### ***Norway's contribution***

Through an increased focus on nutrition, Norway has an opportunity to help achieve Sustainable Development Goal no. 2, which aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. Adequate nutrition in the population is also crucial for achieving a number of the other Sustainable Development Goals, including eradication of poverty, good health, education, gender equality, economic growth and peace. Norway should support international organisations and processes that engage in nutrition-specific interventions to reduce all forms of malnutrition, as well as organisations and processes that promote nutritional sensitivity through all parts of the food system to ensure better access to varied, healthy and sustainable food for more people.