

The launch of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform in Central Asia and Caucasus, July 20-21st, 2018

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Executive Report

Background

In November 2014, at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), Member States committed to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms and articulated a common vision for global action.

In September 2015, Member States placed high priority on addressing malnutrition by committing, under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.¹ and under SDG 3 to improve health and reduce NCD burden.

In April 2016, the UN General Assembly, through its Resolution 70/259², reinforced the ICN2 call for action by endorsing the ICN2 outcomes and proclaiming 2016 to 2025 the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition³, providing a unique opportunity for governments, academia, civils society and other stakeholders to work together for the coming ten years toward eradication and prevention of all forms of malnutrition in their countries.

In 2017 Food system For Healthy Diets Symposium in Budapest recommended the Central Asia and Caucasus to develop a regional mechanism to enhance the capacity of key actors engaged in nutrition.

In July 2018 ECOSOC resolution calls UN Task Force and its members to strengthen its capacity to provide technical and policy advice to Governments in order to implement Multisectoral strategies and enhance multi-stakeholder action.⁴

Ashgabat meeting launch of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform in Central Asia and Caucasus

On July 20-21, 2018, multi-sectoral delegations from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan composed of national manager of nutrition

¹ Member States further committed, under targets 2.1 and 2.2, “By 2030, [to] end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round” and “By 2030, [to] end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.”

² http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/259

³ The UN Decade of Action on Nutrition is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), using coordination mechanisms such as the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) and multi-stakeholder platforms such as the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

⁴ <http://undocs.org/E/2018/L.16>

programs, national chiefs of mother and child health department, chief expert of the Department of Sanitary and Hygienic Surveillance, directors of national public Health and Nutrition institutes, food safety organization, experts from ministry of Labour and Social Development, ministry of education, ministry of finance and economics, ministry of agriculture and relevant academicians and development partners (UNICEF, WHO, FAO and WFP) participated in a two-day consultative meeting to discuss and launch the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform. This platform is building on the proceedings and the recommendation of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) and the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2015-2025) to support the countries in the region to develop needed capacity in nutrition governance to address the double burden of malnutrition.

Member states:

- Recognized that still over 11% of the children in Central Asia and Caucasus are stunted and number of overweight children under five has increased from 1.6 to 3.2 million from 2000 to 2017 (over 100% increase). Micronutrient deficiencies are still contributing significantly to loss of human and cognitive capacity, resulting in preventable conditions such as low learning capacities in school due to Iron Deficiency and higher risks of NCDs. They recognized that the only 3 out of 10 children are exclusively breast fed during their first 6 months of life, which can contribute to higher risks of chronic malnutrition but also obesity in childhood and future life. Low quality diet has been spotted as the number one risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as Cardio Vascular diseases, obesity and diabetes. Considering the early development of dietary patterns in children, the early action in life cycle seems critical.
- Recognized the huge return in investment on nutrition (16 USD return for every dollar invested) and also recognized the loss due to the cost of double burden of malnutrition (i.e., undernutrition and obesity) in the context of NCDs.
- Discussed and recognized the complicated double burden of malnutrition which demands a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and scaled-up approach in nutrition governance and capacities.
- Recognized the gaps in the nutrition workforce capacities in the region. Nutrition science is not a discipline defined well or present at preventive primary health care (PHC) level nor at the therapeutic sector, nor in existing academic education and research sector. In most countries, not only the opportunity of economic growth and development is not utilized best to further accelerate the efforts in improving the nutritional status of children but due to fast urbanization, it has resulted in emergence of the double burden of malnutrition as a more complicated problem to be addressed.
- Agreed that raising the profile of nutrition in the national development plans of the governments in the context of double burden of malnutrition, as expressed SDGs 2 and 3, is fundamental to achieving all the other SDGs.
- Recognized the need to sharpen the approach towards childhood nutrition to effectively and timely address the double burden of malnutrition.



- Agreed that the establishment of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform for Central Asia is a strategic approach to support participating countries in closing the capacity gaps in food and nutrition system and governance.
- Agreed on the mechanism and modalities of the work of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform. It was agreed by member states that a light coordinating body (“secretariat”) will be established and chaired by the member states on rotational basis. For the first round the Kazakhstan delegation expressed interest to chair the secretariat and make an official communication after the meeting. Turkmenistan also indicated its interest to chair the secretariat in the second round.
- Defined a number of region-wide priority areas where enhanced capacity in nutrition governance will enable government institutions to effectively address the double burden of malnutrition. Member states drafted headlines of a two-year plan of action for the Platform.
- Upon agreeing on a meeting statement, highlighting the above, the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform was launched.
- Member states recognized that they will cascade and apply achievements of the platform to improve the nutrition and food security status of the most vulnerable in their countries in the context of double burden of malnutrition.

UN agencies (UNICEF, WHO, FAO and WFP):

- Acknowledged that economic growth and rising incomes have drastically reduced hunger and severe forms of undernutrition in Central Asia and Caucasus. However, rising urbanization, insufficient focus of food systems on diversity and nutritional content of diet and changes in lifestyles have led to nutrition transition and changes in dietary patterns with more people facing diet and nutrition related problems / health impacts starting from their childhood.
- Committed to support member states towards meeting the global targets on nutrition adopted in the SDGs, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2025, and the Noncommunicable Diseases Global Monitoring Framework. UN agencies expressed their commitment to support the establishment and functioning of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform for Central Asia and Caucasus.

All delegates agreed that the scope of Platform’s work would focus on developing the capacity of the building blocks of the food and nutrition sector in the region in a coordinated manner. The priority pillars of this capacity development would aim to:

- Build the leadership and governance capacity in food and nutrition sector in the region.
- Strengthen regional policy advocacy for improved financing for nutrition results by promoting and utilizing investment case studies on nutrition and sustainable development.
- Defining and positioning nutrition services in PHC system including the recommended needed workforce to achieve results in prevention of double-burden of malnutrition



- Enhance the capacity of the nutrition workforce with the right set of knowledge, skills and competencies for nutrition and food policy and programming.
- Reinforce the multidisciplinary (i.e, health, agriculture, education, social protection and finance) approach in programming to address the double burden of the malnutrition as a major risk factor to preventable NCDs.
- Collaborate region-wide to generate applied evidence and share lessons learned and replicable good practices on evidence-informed policy making and scaling-up nutrition programme implementation.
- Improved information systems, research infrastructure in nutrition and systematic knowledge and experience exchange across the region and with neighbouring regions

The headlines of a two-year plan of action (2019-2020)

- Target the ministries of finance and parliamentarian and to sensitize them on the critical impact of investment on nutrition on achievement of all SDGs and reduction of the cost implication of the double burden of malnutrition and NCDs on human and cognitive capital
- To raise the skill, knowledge and competency capacity of the mid and high level managers involved in food and nutrition systems, on sustainable food and nutrition policy and programming, with a focus on preventive and multidisciplinary approach. This will be done through below phases:
 - Reviewing the situation and map the competency capacity gaps in the nutrition workforce both at preventive PHC and therapeutic sectors in the region and to design and implement regional initiatives to enhance the missing capacity
 - short-midterm strategies such as developing and operationalizing short term executive and applied in-service courses
 - Long term strategies;
 - To develop regional recommendations on the minimum essential workforce structure in the context of double-burden in the region
 - to establish an international/ regional faculty of nutrition (for under-graduate nutrition training program and/ or specialty studies for MPH and medical students) in a host country in the region to enhance the capacity of nutrition workforce
- To develop regional e-database on the food and dietary specification (such as food compositions guides and food based dietary guidelines) for policy and programming
- To establish a digital platform to share the resources, news, plans and the achievements of the platforms and the countries in the region
- To systematically support the experience exchange of countries on implementing interdisciplinary models to address the double burden of malnutrition, prevention of child and school age obesity through PHC and school based intervention



The way forward

- Member states and UN agencies agreed that the executive report and recommendation of the meeting will be officially communicated to member states through a joint letter of the 4 supporting UN agencies (UNICEF, WHO, FAO and WFP).
- The member states were proposed to debrief the national policy makers on the discussions made during the launch of platform and to identify the best entry points and priorities for capacity development in food and nutrition systems and governance in the country. Two countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) with active Scale Up Nutrition (SUN) will use the existing channels for SUN to benefit from the platform's capacity development initiatives.
- Member states recommended that actions to be undertaken during the 6 months after the launch of the Platform. Where and when relevant and feasible, UN agencies offices (UNICEF, WHO, FAO and WFP) at country level will join to support. These actions are to:
 1. Debrief the senior management in their respective country on the outcomes of the meeting in Ashgabat.
 2. Take stock of their country's current positioning and prioritization of child nutrition in national development plans of their countries.
 3. Identify any potential opportunity for developing their country's capacity in nutrition governance and in systems to support nutrition programmes.
 4. To discover and identify doable options to further enhance the inter-sectoral work on nutrition in the country to achieve better results for double burden of malnutrition
 5. To take stock of the status of their country's national nutrition strategy that addresses the double burden of nutrition, noting whether there is one in place, if it is budgeted and operationalized.
 6. Identify actions needed to strengthen and operationalize the national nutrition strategies.
 7. Take stock of the situation of financing for nutrition governance and identify areas where capacity building and advocacy can result in stronger attention and investment by ministries of finance and by parliamentarians to achieve improved nutrition outcomes for children.
 8. Identify appropriate forums at national level to cascade and translate the benefits of the regional platform efforts to develop the national nutrition capacity.
 9. Identify opportunities and support required at national level to develop the capacity of the nutrition workforce (at both levels of preventive PHC and therapeutic sector.



10. To be ready to brief back the regional platform on the above-mentioned areas in the upcoming meeting of platform before March 2019

- It was agreed that the next meeting of the platform will be undertaken before March 2019, where the member states will brief the Platform on actions undertaken and results.
- Capacity building training on food and nutrition policy making and programming will be offered to the key mid and high level managers from different sectors (Health, nutrition, agriculture, social welfare, economic and finance and academicians) through a joint support of UN agencies.
- The Kazakhstan delegation showed interest to chair the first round of the regional secretariat, this proposal will be reviewed and further discussed with the government of Kazakhstan and the result will be officially communicated to the all involved countries.