



NEWS RELEASE

Strictly embargoed until Monday 11th May at 7:01 pm (EDT) and Tuesday 12th May at 12:01 am (BST) / 4:31 pm (IST)

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten health and food systems around the world, the 2020 Global Nutrition Report calls on governments, businesses and civil society to step up efforts to address malnutrition in all its forms.

United Kingdom, 12 May 2020 - The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weakness of food and health systems, disproportionately impacting already vulnerable populations. As inequalities and malnutrition continue to sweep the world, the 2020 Global Nutrition Report stresses that the need to address malnutrition in all its forms by tackling injustices in food and health systems is now more urgent than ever.

Double burden: Most countries in the world must now be equipped to fight both sides of malnutrition at the same time.

Progress is too slow. One in nine people are still hungry or undernourished, while 149 million children under 5 years of age are still affected by stunting globally. Meanwhile, our world has transitioned to one in which more people of all ages are obese than underweight, with one in three people either overweight or obese.

Despite these figures, countries are often unprepared to face the global nutrition crisis. Strong government coordination on nutrition is often lacking; lower income countries tend to prioritise overweight, obesity and diet-related chronic diseases.

Financial commitments also don't match the scale and nature of the issue: increases in domestic resources for nutrition have been marginal at best, and obesity and overweight have been largely ignored in aid allocations.

Gerda Verburg, UN Assistant Secretary General, Scaling Up Nutrition Movement Coordinator and member of the GNR's stakeholder group, said: *"2020 must represent a turning point for nutrition. As we look to reinforce our resilience to global stresses, nutrition must become a key component of any emergency or long-term response. Investing in nutrition, renewing and expanding commitments, and strengthening accountability has now*



become urgent if we want to prepare our systems for future shocks, and avoid a reversal of gain.”

New perspective: redirecting resources to communities and people most affected is the right and the smartest thing to do.

Global and national patterns hide significant inequalities within countries and populations, with vulnerable groups being the most affected. The Report found clear links between levels of malnutrition and population characteristics like location, age, sex, education and wealth, while conflict and other forms of fragility compound the problem.

Differences across communities and at the sub-national level are striking: wasting in children under 5 years of age can be up to nine times higher between communities within countries, four times for stunting, and three times for overweight and obesity¹.

If no action is taken, the effects of the pandemic will only make it harder for vulnerable populations to protect themselves against malnutrition. Malnutrition affects our immune system, leaving us more susceptible to infection, and the socio-economic impact of the pandemic could in turn drive malnutrition globally.

Gaps in food systems: Poor diets are not simply a matter of personal food choices.

The Report calls for a change in food systems. According to the Report, existing agriculture systems still focus on staple grains like rice, wheat and maize, rather than producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods, such as fruits, nuts and vegetables.

Fresh or perishable foods are less accessible and affordable in many parts of the world compared to staple grains. In Burkina Faso, egg calories are 15 times more expensive than calories from staples, whereas they are 1.9 times more expensive in the United States.

Processed foods, especially ultra-processed food, are available, cheap and intensively marketed, with sales high and growing fast in many parts of the world.² In sub-Saharan Africa, the growth of supermarket chains is diminishing the role of informal traders and has affected people’s food choices. These changes demand policy and planning resources to promote desirable nutrition outcomes.

¹ Data mostly from low-income and lower-middle-income countries.

² Processed food sales are still high in high income countries and growing fast in upper-middle and lower-middle income countries, while sales are low in low income countries.



Solutions have started to emerge across the world and are being implemented by a fast-growing number of countries such as India, Nigeria, Peru and Thailand, among others. These include: increased public investment for healthier food products, support for shorter supply chains for fresh-food delivery programmes, use of fiscal instruments such as taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages (now in 73 countries), limiting advertising of junk food, and food reformulation, or the use of front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) to inform consumers and influence industry behaviour adopted by Chile and the UK. However, much more remains to be done.

Venkatesh Mannar, Co-Chair of the Report and Special Adviser on Nutrition to the Tata Cornell Agriculture & Nutrition Initiative, said: *“At a time when COVID-19 has further revealed the gaps in our food systems, we now have a unique opportunity to act in coordination to address them and ensure that healthy and sustainably produced food is the most accessible, affordable and desirable choice for all.”*

Universal Health Coverage: an opportunity to make nutrition care universally available as a basic, live-saving and cost-effective health service.

Malnutrition in all its forms has become the leading cause of poor health and death, and the rapid rise of diet-related chronic diseases is putting an immense strain on health systems. But despite this assessment, nutrition actions only represent a minuscule portion of national health budgets although they can be highly cost-effective or even cost-saving solutions. The recent Transformation of Aspirational Districts initiative in India is one example of successful integration and delivery of equitable nutrition services as part a broader healthcare transformation effort.

In most countries, health checks do not cover diet quality and national surveys rarely comprehensively assess diets and the nutritional status of populations. The distribution of trained nutrition professionals is inequitable, and these experts are not widely accessible. Globally, the median number of nutrition professionals stands at 2.3 per 100,000 people, 0.9 per 100,000 people in Africa, and some countries have none.

Renata Micha, Co-Chair of the Report and Research Associate Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, said: *“Good nutrition is an essential defence strategy to protect populations against epidemics, relieve the burden on our health systems and ultimately save lives. The findings of the 2020 Global Nutrition Report make clear that tackling malnutrition should be at the centre of our global health response.”*

– END –



LAUNCH

The report will be released during an online global launch on Tuesday 12th May at 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm (BST) / 5:30 pm – 6:45 pm (IST) / 8:00 am – 9:15 am (EDT).

[REGISTER HERE TO ATTEND](#)

NOTE TO EDITORS

The Global Nutrition Report (GNR) is the world's leading independent assessment of the state of global nutrition. We provide the best available data, in-depth analysis and expert opinion rooted in evidence to help drive action on nutrition where it is urgently needed.

A multi-stakeholder initiative comprised of global institutions, the GNR is led by experts in the field of nutrition. The GNR was established in 2014 following the first Nutrition for Growth summit, as an accountability mechanism to track progress against global nutrition targets and the commitments made to reach them.

Through a comprehensive report, interactive Country Nutrition Profiles and Nutrition for Growth Commitment Tracking, the GNR sheds light on the burden of malnutrition and highlights progress and working solutions to tackle malnutrition around the world.

We are a unifying voice, designed for and with the communities who can act. By informing the nutrition debate, we inspire action to create a world free from malnutrition in all its forms.

globalnutritionreport.org

MEDIA CONTACT

For media enquiries, including interview requests with authors and experts of the Report, please contact:

Tatiana Audi

+44 7860 520072

tatiana.audi@portland-communications.com

Sarah Sharpe

+44 7795 843103

sarah.sharpe@portland-communications.com

**Regional and country press releases are available in multiple languages for: Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, India, the US, and the UK. Get in touch with contact@globalnutritionreport.org to receive a copy.*