HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER

WHO, in collaboration with international agencies and development partners and with the support of donors, can strengthen and sustain partnerships and networks to:

- Support countries in implementing the Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition, with six global targets by 2025 to reduce stunting, wasting, anaemia in women and low birth weight, to increase exclusive breastfeeding, and stop the increase in childhood overweight.

- Put into action the resolution endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in September 2012 to achieve the six Comprehensive Implementation Plan targets through:
  - Placing nutrition policies higher on government development agendas.
  - Scaling up nutrition programmes and addressing inequities.
  - Financing long-term intersectoral plans to improve nutrition as an investment in the economic productivity of countries.
  - Generate solid data, evidence and effective information systems on food and nutrition.
  - Regularly monitoring and evaluating the impact of nutrition programmes.

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Division of Building Healthy Communities and Populations

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ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Improved nutrition starts before birth, even before conception: a mother’s poor nutritional status leads to a low birth weight (LBW). One third of countries in the Western Pacific Region have LBW rates higher than 10%, which is 4 times higher than normal.
- A double burden of malnutrition affect women and children: low quality diets and infections lead not only to micronutrient deficiencies but also to excess energy intake and obesity. Obesity in pregnancy causes higher stillbirth rates, neonatal deaths, congenital malformations, proteinuric pre-eclampsia, and obesity in offspring at 4 years of age.
- Anemia is considered responsible for 20% of maternal deaths and affects productivity and income. It also increases the risk of sepsis, perinatal mortality, prematurity and LBW and reduces productivity and income. Anemia affects 20%–44% of pregnant women in half the countries in the Region, with similar rates in young children.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for six months is the most effective intervention to prevent deaths in children under 5, but exclusive breastfeeding rates are stalling.

WHY WE NEED TO ACT

- Underweight is the largest cause of deaths and disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in children under 5 years, followed by suboptimal breastfeeding.
- Investing in the health of women and children leads to high economic returns, including greater national productivity and higher gross domestic product for countries.
- There has been considerable progress in the past 20 years, but substantial challenges remain. The lack of access to food of adequate nutritional quality, infections and parasitic diseases impair absorption and the use of nutrients.
- While high rates of undernutrition remain in women and children, an epidemic of noncommunicable diseases, including obesity and diabetes, has emerged in the Region and globally. The double burden of malnutrition now includes also children.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Evidence-based interventions to improve maternal and child nutrition in all countries include:

- Optimizing traditional complementary feeding, including the use of linear programming tools and multi-micronutrient powders.
- Fortifying foods, including iodized salt and fortified flour, rice, oil and condiments, is one of the most cost-effective interventions to improve health.
- Preventing women’s anaemia by promoting iron and folic acid supplements before and during pregnancy.
- Preventing childhood and adult overweight by promoting healthy diets and physical activity with protective laws, bans on the marketing of food for children, and health-promoting schools, workplaces, communities.

Specific contexts include:

- Vitamin A supplements for child survival, eye health, immunity and growth.
- Iodine supplements for women of reproductive age, where needed.
- Deworming for women, preschool and school children.
- Maternal supplements of balanced energy and protein.
- Ready-to-use therapeutic foods to treat severe undernutrition.