The Double Burden of Malnutrition

The nutrition landscape has changed dramatically in the past decades. Rapid economic and income growth, urbanization, and globalization have contributed to changes in human diets, activity patterns and nutritional status. Food systems have been transformed by macroeconomic and structural adjustment policies, liberalization of international food trade and foreign direct investments. This has changed the local availability, nutritional quality, affordability and acceptability of foods. Diets are shifting away from their traditional composition and are moving towards diets dominated by processed foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar and low in micronutrients and fibre. With these changes, diets have become an important risk factor for the growing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) epidemic.

Malnutrition in all its forms heightens the risks for morbidity and mortality throughout the life course. While undernutrition impedes children’s achievement of their full economic, social, educational and occupational potential, unhealthy diets contribute to the rise in diet-related NCDs, which results in premature mortality (below 70 years of age) and the early onset of disease with high levels of disability. The double burden of malnutrition within the same individual is of increasing concern. Children who are overweight can be micronutrient deficient, and stunted children may have increased risk of obesity. An emphasis must be placed on healthy nutrition throughout the life course.

Member States in the Western Pacific Region face a double burden of malnutrition: undernutrition – including wasting, stunting, micronutrient deficiencies and low birth weight – coexisting with overweight and obesity, as well as an increase in nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

For more information:

HEALTH INFORMATION AND INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM
http://hiip.wpro.who.int
WHO WPRO WEBSITE
http://www.wpro.who.int/nutrition
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NUTRITION FOR LIFE
Action Plan to Reduce the Double Burden of Malnutrition in the Western Pacific Region (2015-2020)
OUR GOAL
To improve nutrition throughout the life course in the Western Pacific Region.

Nutrition targets to be achieved by 2025

50% reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age.
30% reduction in low birth weight.
50% increase in the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months.
Reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5%.
40% reduction in the number of children under 5 who are stunted.
No increase in childhood overweight.
Halt the increase in diabetes and obesity.
30% relative reduction in the mean population intake of salt.

OBJECTIVE 1
Elevate nutrition in the national development agenda

Nutrition should not only be included but should be high on the national development agenda and linked to poverty reduction, as well as other whole-of-society approaches to social and environmental development and health, which are being influenced by rapid and unplanned urbanization, globalization of food systems, disasters, and climate change, as well as other factors. Nutrition is also an important goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). National nutrition planning, which includes planning with health and non-health sectors that impacts nutrition, for example planning in trade and/or agriculture, needs to be coherent and adequately funded.

OBJECTIVE 2
Protect, promote and support optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices

Interventions to prevent the double burden of malnutrition start early in life. They include creating supportive and conducive environments for mothers, caregivers and children, especially in the first 1000 days, to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and optimal complementary feeding. Early initiation, exclusive breastfeeding and continued breastfeeding until 2 years of age and beyond, as well as optimal complementary feeding, set the stage for healthy growth and development and reduce the risk of childhood obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) later in life.

OBJECTIVE 3
Strengthen and enforce legal frameworks that protect, promote and support healthy diets

A legal and policy environment is necessary to ensure the population receives accurate and unbiased information and to ensure availability of nutritious food options. Food regulations and standards should align with Codex Alimentarius guidance, be risk based, and facilitate trade in safe and healthier food. Legal frameworks to protect, promote and support healthy diets are also within non-health sectors, including for example education (the WHO Set of Recommendations on the Marketing of Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages to Children and measures to ban or limit sales of sugar-sweetened beverages to address childhood obesity) or agriculture (Codex Alimentarius). Whole-of-government approaches to salt reduction will contribute to the reduction of preventable deaths from hypertension. Evidence-based restrictions on marketing to children may be considered based on country-specific regulatory regimes to include food labelling and warnings; bans on advertising, sponsorship, brand mascots or characters popular with children; point-of-purchase displays; and communication through “viral marketing” of foods high in salt, sugar and fats.

OBJECTIVE 4
Improve accessibility, quality and implementation of nutrition services across public health programmes and settings

The health system has a major role in addressing the double burden of malnutrition. In particular, ministries of health might play a more active role in convening and building consensus with other sectors on policies that will result in improved nutrition outcomes. Accessibility and quality of nutrition services through the health system need to be ensured and sustained. UHC presents an important opportunity to ensure nutrition services also reach the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Integration of nutrition into programmes that impact nutrition from other sectors (e.g. agriculture, water and sanitation, education and trade) and into settings-based programmes (e.g. including ensuring healthier food choices in canteens through health-promoting schools and workplaces) will contribute to reducing the double burden of malnutrition. During emergencies, mobilizing support to reach affected and displaced populations.

OBJECTIVE 5
Use financing mechanisms to reinforce healthy diets and ensure delivery and use of nutrition services

Mobilizing resources and generating sustainable financing sources, for example through taxation, are pivotal to secure funds for policy implementation. Creating incentives through taxes and subsidies that improve the affordability and encourage consumption of healthier food products and discourage the consumption of less healthy options can be considered by countries as relevant to national contexts.