

SOCIAL PROTECTION TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE NUTRITION

On-line discussion in preparation for the
Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are jointly organizing the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) to be held at FAO Headquarters, Rome, from 19 to 21 November 2014. The ICN2 will be a high-level ministerial conference and will seek to propose a flexible policy framework to adequately address the major nutrition challenges of the next decades. It will also seek to identify priorities for international cooperation on nutrition in the near and medium-term. The Conference will bring together senior national policymakers from ministries of agriculture, health and others, leaders of United Nations agencies and other intergovernmental organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, researchers, the private sector and consumers, to identify policy priorities on how national and global food, health and related systems and reforms can improve nutrition outcomes.

There is renewed political attention at global, regional and national levels of the importance of nutrition for health, agriculture, education, and economic and social welfare as well as the importance of these sectors for nutrition. There is also increasing recognition that individual interventions will not be as effective by themselves and that systemic and cross-sectoral approaches and multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed to improve nutrition. However, there is insufficient understanding of how agriculture and food systems can deliver better nutritional outcomes, what kinds of institutional arrangements have proven successful, or how agriculture and food systems can address the challenges of the future. The ICN2 will address issues related to all forms of malnutrition, including under- and over-nutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies, and will explore how agriculture, health, education, social protection and other sectors can better work together to address this multiple burden of malnutrition. It will seek to improve nutrition throughout the lifecycle, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable households, and on women, infants and young children in deprived, vulnerable and emergency contexts. The Conference will provide practical tools and guidelines to help Member States to mainstream nutrition into their work and that of development partners by ensuring nutrition objectives, concerns and considerations are incorporated into their policies and programmes. The specific objectives of the Conference will be to:

1. Review progress made since the 1992 ICN including country level achievements in scaling up nutrition through direct nutrition interventions and nutrition-enhancing policies and programmes;
2. Review relevant policies and institutions on agriculture, fisheries, health, trade, consumption and social protection to improve nutrition;
3. Strengthen institutional policy coherence and coordination to improve nutrition, and mobilize resources needed to improve nutrition;
4. Strengthen international, including inter-governmental cooperation, to enhance nutrition everywhere, especially in developing countries

As part of the preparatory process for the Conference, a key preparatory technical meeting is to be held at FAO Headquarters 13-15 November 2013. As part of the lead up activities to this preparatory technical meeting, on-line discussions are planned for which a series of background papers are being developed by experts from a variety of disciplines and regions to stimulate conversations around specific topics and issues of relevance.

The discussions will focus on specific thematic areas, including nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems, and on social protection policies and programmes that protect and promote good nutrition. These two themes reflect the twin track approach to food and nutrition security. The Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action (August 2011), has as its first track the building of longer-term livelihood and food production resilience by eliminating the root causes of hunger, poverty and malnutrition, and the second track is to respond to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable people. Social protection policies and programmes have a role to play in both tracks; and both tracks are clearly needed if hunger is to be reduced and food and nutrition security protected and promoted.

The proposed on-line discussion on “Social protection to protect and promote nutrition” looks at how the marginalized, most disadvantaged and nutritionally vulnerable groups of society can be protected by an inclusive development process through the design and implementation of nutrition-enhancing social policies and social protection interventions. To ensure that social policies have better nutrition outcomes we need answers to a number of questions. For example, what social policy measures can be identified to improve nutrition? How can national policies, programmes and plans on social protection be developed and lead to equitable and measurable improvement of nutrition? How to build more effective linkages between social policies and agriculture, health, education, employment, sanitation and other key sectors as part of more nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems? What institutional mechanisms and capacities and operational modalities need to be in place to establish more effective linkages between social protection and agriculture, health, education, employment, sanitation and other key sectors. What are the challenges regarding the design and implementation of social protection measures, including conditional and non-conditional transfers either of cash or of food, safety nets and employment policies for effectively reducing social inequality and for safeguarding nutrition?

The on-line discussion builds upon ongoing discussions at the global level through the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) was asked to identify ways to reduce vulnerability through social and productive safety net programmes and policies with respect to food and nutritional security, taking into consideration differing conditions across countries and regions. As a result of their report and the subsequent Policy Roundtable discussions held at the CFS 39 Session in 2012, the CFS encouraged Member States the following:

- to design and put in place, or strengthen, comprehensive, nationally-owned, context-sensitive social protection systems for food and nutrition security;
- to embrace a twin-track strategy to maximize impact on resilience and food and nutrition security;
- to adopt human rights norms and standards to guide the process of elaborating social protection programmes for food and nutrition security; and
- to improve the design and use of social protection interventions to address vulnerability to chronic and acute food and nutrition insecurity.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The objectives of the on-line discussion are to identify:

- the main issues for policy-makers to consider in the design, formulation and implementation of nutrition-enhancing social protection measures and related institutional and governance mechanisms;
- best-practices and lessons learned in fostering cross-sectoral linkages through social protection systems to address malnutrition and poverty reduction in terms of policy, programme implementation and institutional arrangements;

Expected Outputs of the on-line discussion will be:

- A synthesis Report of discussions, including the identification of main issues of future focus for policy-makers, best practices and lessons learned identified and open questions identified;
- A list of options/guidelines/recommendations for protecting the nutritional status of the most vulnerable populations through nutrition-enhancing social policies and social protection.

KEY THEMATIC AREAS FOR EXPERT DISCUSSION

A series of background papers will be developed by experts from a variety of disciplines and regions, stimulating the debate around specific topics and issues of relevance, which are indicatively outlined below. The purpose is to provide possible policy options and best-practices as well as guidance for institutional arrangements in order to help countries to better address the multiple burden of malnutrition.

1. **Integrated and comprehensive social protection systems:** there have been important country experiences of social protection policies, strategies and programmes aiming to reduce household food insecurity through national systems, such as Brazil's Zero Hunger programme, which evolved into an integrated and multi-sectoral system under the National Food and Nutrition Security System (SISAN) and the Brazil without Extreme Poverty Plan, and other integrated social protection programmes such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)'s Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction in Bangladesh. Both the Zero Hunger and the BRAC programme place a strong emphasis on education, training and capacity development. Integrated national systems and programmes have proven to be powerful in their impact on household food and nutrition insecurity and providing pathways to graduation for some categories of households. An example of such integrated approach is China where, by 2010 24 million rural households benefited from a multisectoral approach including subsistence allowance for housing, medical care, food and clothing, and a multifaceted human capital formation system was established. Further exploration and systematic identification of the experiences and lessons-learned of social protection systems on nutritional outcomes is needed, including analyses of the institutional and governance mechanisms that must be in place in order to ensure successful implementation and positive nutritional outcomes. Furthermore, in trying to increase social protection's impact on nutrition outcomes, we need to know where is the balance between focusing on mainstreaming nutrition-enhancing aspects in social protection design and identifying where more nutrition-focused programmes or design may need to be included?
2. **Social protection systems for nutrition within the "twin-track" framework:** Short-term, immediate needs, also during emergencies, often provide an entry point for social protection and explicit nutrition support. Social protection is a tool that can go beyond the short-term – promoting a twin-track approach towards ensuring the effectiveness of social protection policies to promote more resilience in the face of risks, particularly those that pose a threat to livelihoods and to nutrition security. As such it is important to better understand the pathways through which longer-term social protection systems build resilience (through agricultural productivity/investment, nutritional status, food stores etc...), how existing systems might better respond to shocks, and how the short-term responses can help strengthen the longer-term systems and programmes.
3. **Social protection and impact on marginalized groups:** While certain social protection initiatives focus on support to income generation, others, such as cash transfers, school feeding, and supplementary feeding are important for those populations who are otherwise excluded from productive activities including the old, infirm, disabled, as well as children. What are the specific needs of these most vulnerable groups as regards social protection that should be taken into account in social policies and social protection interventions? What are the varying impacts of social policies and social protection systems on the

nutritional status of the most vulnerable groups in society including the rural poor, women and children among others?

4. **Cross-sectoral linkages between social protection and agriculture, and other key sectors such as education, health, and employment to achieve sustainable nutrition outcomes:** The link between social protection and the agricultural sector, for example, is increasingly better understood and acknowledged. Social protection can play an important role in providing income security to vulnerable individuals and families, reducing the risk of triggering negative coping mechanisms, including sale of productive assets, or pulling children out of school, and building resilience, including through human development and agricultural/economic investments. The notion of policy coherence and the need for synergies and complementarities among social protection, agriculture and food systems, health and care, education and employment policies should be emphasized. Issues around nutrition-enhancing social protection and decent employment will also be considered.
5. **What types or combination of design issues within social protection are most effective in the safeguarding of nutrition?:** What are the best practices in the design and implementation of social protection measures, including conditional and non-conditional transfers either of cash or of food, as well as health and education programmes for effectively safeguarding and promoting the nutritional status of beneficiaries? Furthermore, what are the monitoring and impact evaluation mechanisms that should be in place in order to ensure results are being achieved, and in order to learn lessons for better design of programmes in the future.
6. **Governance issues:** How can a human rights based approach be integrated into social policies and social protection and how can legal frameworks support efficient, effective and just policies and programmes? And how can right to food inspired frameworks or systems for social protection secure better delivery of social protection benefits as regards nutritional status? There is a need to better understand practical ways of implementing the right to social security and social assistance and the right to adequate food using social policy justifications including the necessity to create effective systems of social protection. Additionally, it is important to identify entitlement mechanisms and accountability mechanisms in the implementation of social protection programmes that foster the rights-based approach.
7. **Emerging issues in social protection and nutrition:** There are potentially other dimensions of social protection and nutrition that are just emerging and need to be highlighted for discussion or future research, in addition to the key areas mentioned above. For example, one area could be how social protection design might effect behavioural changes and nutritional habits, etc.. What are other key areas that need to be highlighted at this stage?