

Briefing for U.S. Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations on

“Leveraging U.S. Funds: The Stunning Global Impact of Nutrition and Supplements during the First 1,000 days”

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Introduction

On behalf of Dr Graziano Da Silva, Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, I would like to thank Chairman Royce, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Members Bass and Engel for the opportunity and honor to brief you this afternoon on the work the FAO is undertaking to support the efforts of the U.S. in the fight against global hunger and malnutrition. I would also like to acknowledge USAID, an extremely valued partner to FAO and especially Dr Beth Dunford and the Feed the Future Team who are staunch advocates for the principals of Chairman Smith’s Global Food Security Act. Chairman Smith’s contribution, passion, and unyielding drive in advancing the health and nutrition needs of children worldwide is at the core of what brings us here today.

FAO – United States History and Relationship

From the beginning, FAO has been inspired and supported by generous contributions from the people of the United States of America. The United States and FAO have a historic relationship- the very idea of creating FAO began with the United States. In 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt convened 40 countries in Hot Springs, Virginia to charter an international organization dedicated to global food, nutrition and agriculture – and so, began the roots of FAO right here in the United States. Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee, the United States was instrumental in the creation and leadership of FAO and FAO owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to your country’s vision for a world free from hunger. To this day, America’s vision remains at the heart of FAO’s charter and mandate.

Chairman Smith’s Global Food Security Act and its significant bipartisan sponsorship further demonstrates U.S. leadership in securing a world with zero hunger and where no child is left malnourished. I hope that the U.S. further leverages the longstanding relationship and partnership with FAO in advancing the Act’s worthy principles to the benefit of children of the 197 countries and members of our Organization.

FAO – United States Contribution

By way of background, and to further underscore the significant relationship between the U.S. and FAO, it is important for this Subcommittee to note that the you are not only the FAO’s

founding member country, but also our largest resource partner. The United States contributes the lion's share of the FAO core budget and is second only to the European Commission in voluntary contributions. In addition to significant financial contribution, through USDA, USAID, and other U.S. Agencies, FAO receives valuable in-kind contributions vis-a-vis U.S. scientific and technical experts. The U.S. experts have been instrumental in shaping key FAO policies and programs at the global and country levels. Major areas of cooperation include food and nutrition security, emergency assistance and resilience building, food safety, and sustainable agricultural production and natural resource management. There is ample scope for expanding and deepening collaboration in nutrition.

With that, I'll turn to the concerted efforts of FAO in the area of global nutrition in the first 1000 days:

FAO's commitment to mother and child nutrition in the first 1000 days in the context of the SDGs

When nations came together in 1945 to create the the FAO, they did so with the aim of *"raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of peoples under their jurisdiction"* (Preamble to FAO's constitution). Ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition is one of FAO's three global goals and it is the focus of one of the Director General Dr Da Silva's five strategic Objectives under our reviewed Strategic Framework (2010-2019). In 2014, FAO, together with WHO, hosted the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) during which 170 countries committed to reduce "all forms of malnutrition" by adopting the Rome Declaration on Nutrition. Since 2014, FAO has reaffirmed its commitment to nutrition by making it a corporate priority.

The rationale for supporting proper nutrition is not simply a moral imperative but also economic: it has been long established that malnutrition undermines economic growth and perpetuates poverty. The productivity losses to individuals from undernutrition have been estimated as greater than 10 percent of lifetime earnings. Losses to the economy can be just as high – for example, over 11% of GDP lost annually in Africa and Asia is due to malnutrition alone. Yet investing yield high returns. Nutrition interventions, such as investments in micronutrients and community-based programs targeted to children under two years of age, were among the highest of 17 potential development investments. Nutrition must be understood as both an input to and an outcome of sustainable development, and is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Improving nutrition in the first 1000 days is central to breaking the cycle of poverty and malnutrition, and therefore vital to FAO's work. FAO's comprehensive strategy to improve nutrition is focused a food systems approach that requires a sustainable public-private partnership.

Private Sector Engagement

FAO values the role of the private sector and recognizes its essential contributions to assure the nutritional quality and safety of foods, investment to infrastructure and storage, improvement to supply chains. The private sector is a key ally in the fight against hunger and is recognized in FAO's Private Sector Strategy which focuses on: Policy Dialogue; Norms and Standard Setting;

Development and Technical Programs; Advocacy and Communication; Knowledge Management and Dissemination; Mobilization of Resources. FAO recognizes two main categories of contributions from the private sector: financial and in-kind as know-how exchange, and managerial and scientific expertise.

Improving nutrition in the first 1000 days: the rationale behind FAO's approach

Why are the first 1,000 days in a child's life so critical?

The first 1000 days are critical. If not properly provided for can lead to malnutrition, infection, stunted growth and development in children; with consequences for long-term physical and poor cognitive function.

A key challenge in ensuring good nutrition during the first 1000 days is ensuring increased nutrient requirements for both the mother and the child, particularly in protein and vitamins.

Finally, research shows that the challenges of nutrition in the first 1000 days are not only related to access to the right foods: even when family food resources are adequate, caregivers are often unable to make optimal use of them because of insufficient knowledge, skills and practices in infant and young child feeding, and the lack of a supportive environment.

Why are diets an important of addressing nutrition in the first 1000 days of life?

Interventions targeted to pregnant and lactating women, infants and young children often emphasise micronutrient supplementation, food supplements, therapeutic feeding and care for the most vulnerable. While these have a key role to play, a comprehensive food-based approach that promotes the availability and consumption of a variety of nutrient-rich local foods is essential.

Research has confirmed the importance of dietary diversity for meeting micronutrient requirements. Women of reproductive age and young children can increase the likelihood of improving the adequacy of their micronutrient intakes by consuming diversified food groups.

Promoting healthy diets is key to empower local populations to make optimal use of their resources and limit dependency on external resources. In addition, healthy diets are also essential to prevent obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases.

What is FAO doing to improve nutrition during the first 1000 days?

FAO's work in nutrition focuses on promoting healthy diets and ensuring that investments made in food systems and agriculture result in improved nutrition, in particular for women and children. FAO's "food-based approach" to nutrition complements the work done on nutrient supplementation supported by other partners and is essential to ensure sustainable and lasting improvements in nutrition.

FAO's assistance focuses on developing capacities of national institutions to improve nutrition through food-based approaches, together with the creation of a policy environment that enables households—in particular the most vulnerable—to access and consume healthy and nutritious diets.

By providing scientific advice, fostering inter-country exchange and knowledge sharing, creating forums for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, facilitating the development and dissemination of norms and guidelines, and delivering technical assistance on the ground, FAO seeks to inform and enable effective action by a variety of stakeholders, including governments, development partners (including the U.S. government), food producers, the private sector, philanthropies, and civil society organizations.

Improving nutrition in the first 1000 days through action at community and household levels

FAO promotes the following interventions by providing policy and technical assistance to governments and service providers who are engaged in direct implementation:

➤ **Promoting the diversification of women’s diets and their consumption of nutrient-rich foods:**

FAO promotes improvements in women’s diet through a combination of interventions such as household food security activities and nutrition education. Furthermore, investments in agriculture and food systems should be designed so as to benefit women and help them improve their diets. (see related sections, below)

In order to monitor whether this is the case, FAO, USAID FANTA and other partners have developed a simple indicator: Minimum Dietary Diversity for women of reproductive age (MDD-W) defined as the proportion of women 15-49 years of age who consume food items from at least 5 out of 10 defined food groups. This indicator is key as it links all the components of SDG 2 (improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture) by highlighting the quality of women’s diet. FAO is promoting this simple indicator for use by countries to monitor the intakes of women especially. USAID’s ‘Feed the Future’ program has adopted the use of MDD-W as a dietary quality indicator in its programs.

➤ **Promoting improved complementary feeding with locally available foods for children 6-24 months**

FAO promotes the improvement of complementary feeding for children 6-24 months using locally available foods, by targeting agriculture and dietary diversification and practical hands-on learning to enable families to practice good nutrition behaviors in complementary feeding.

FAO’s work in this area includes the Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs) carried out as part of FAO food security projects in countries like Afghanistan, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Zambia. TIPs demonstrated that young children’s diets were improved by using locally available and affordable foods that were well accepted by families. These projects combined agricultural production diversification (such as provision of seeds for maize, tubers, vegetables, legumes, nuts or fruits; small livestock; fertiliser; water and irrigation) with nutrition education and advocacy.

Evaluation of the programs showed that agriculture diversification combined with Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) participatory nutrition education, and building on community support, can be effective in improving IYCF practices and quality of children’s diets. Lessons learned from this project have been collated into a guidance note for

programme planners,

(http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/nutrition/docs/education/infant_feeding/Programme_Lessons.pdf).

➤ **Improving household food security by diversifying food production and livelihoods**

Efforts to improve children's diets can only be successful if the households in which they live have access to diverse and nutritious foods. FAO promotes a variety of interventions designed to diversify household food production and livelihoods and increase incomes. These include home vegetable gardens, small-scale poultry and livestock rearing, and aquaculture, as well as strategies to sustainably intensify local food production. Production activities are complemented with food processing and support to smallholders to better access markets. These interventions can improve nutrition in several ways: 1) direct access to a diversity of nutritionally-rich foods, 2) increased purchasing power from marketing of production 3) fallback food provision during seasonal lean periods.

FAO specifically promotes gender-sensitive approaches; ensuring women benefit and have increased access to both more diverse foods and income. Indeed, research shows that income controlled by women is much more likely to be invested in food for the family, health care and children's education.

In Bangladesh, for example, FAO – with support from USAID and the European Union – has been promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture through the implementation of small-scale horticulture, livestock and aquaculture with the aim of promoting dietary diversity. These activities were combined with practical nutrition education and cooking demonstrations with a focus on improved recipes for pregnant and lactating women and young children. Horticulture and aquaculture interventions showed strong positive effects on household consumption of vegetable and fish, and poultry interventions had a significant impact on egg consumption. The women's dietary diversity score increased from 3.7 at the beginning of the project (baseline) to 5 during the project implementation. These activities are now being scaled up as part of the USAID-FAO MUCH (Meeting the Under-nutrition Challenge) program. These activities are aligned with the National Food Policy and Country Investment Plan.

➤ **Biofortification and fortification**

Efforts to diversify food production can be complemented by the promotion of biofortified crops, i.e., crops whose micronutrient content has been enhanced through conventional breeding. Biofortified crops released include Vitamin A-rich orange flesh sweet potato, high-zinc and iron millet, vitamin A rich cassava and maize. Efficacy trials carried out by Harvest Plus show that the biofortified crops are effective in improving micronutrient status. FAO works with partners and governments at global and country levels (for example, in Zimbabwe) to promote – where appropriate – the uptake of biofortified crops as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve nutrition.

FAO also promotes the adoption of food fortification strategies (post-production stage) adapted to national nutrition priorities and as a complement to diverse diets.

➤ **Promoting quality nutrition education and behavior-change**

Review of agricultural development projects consistently underline that impact on dietary adequacy and child growth depends on whether nutrition education is included in the intervention. FAO therefore promotes the inclusion of nutrition education in agricultural programmes (for example through Farmer Field Schools), and social protection programmes such as cash transfer and school food programmes.

Moving beyond handing out nutrition information to promoting healthy diets and good dietary practices is not a simple job, yet professional training with a practical focus is rarely available in many institutions and countries, as indicated by a seven-country study conducted by FAO in 2011. FAO has therefore developed the ENACT (Education for Effective Nutrition in Action) training course in nutrition education to start building this essential capacity. The course has been piloted in Africa by universities in 12 countries

FAO also supports governments in integrating nutrition education in school curricula and the adoption of a comprehensive approach to school food and nutrition, where the school curriculum, local procurement as well as school meal standards and school policy and programmes are combined to improve children's diets and promote life-long skills. The link from school to infants comes from the improved diets of female girls adolescents who may be future mothers.

FAO's core focus: creating an enabling policy environment for improved nutrition

In order for the kind of interventions described above to be implemented on the ground, it is essential that an enabling policy and institutional environment be established and national capacities developed for implementation. This is the core focus of FAO's work on nutrition.

➤ Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food system investments and policies

FAO provides guidance to countries on how to mainstream nutrition concerns – including a focus on the first 1000 days – in national agricultural investments plans, to ensure these investments support the kind of interventions described above.

In 2011, FAO facilitated a consultation process amongst a broad range of stakeholders which culminated in the formulation of *Key Recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture and Food Systems*. U.S. partners, including USAID and its SPRING project were key contributors to the process and these recommendations helped inform the mainstreaming of nutrition (with special attention to the 1000 days) in the Feed the Future program.

FAO has been using these Key Recommendations to support the mainstreaming of nutrition in national agriculture investment plans. For example in Africa, FAO worked closely with the USAID in support of the African Union's New Partnership for African Development in building capacities of its 50 Member States to mainstream nutrition in National Agriculture Investment Plans through the CAADP Nutrition Capacity Development Initiative. As a follow-up, FAO is providing technical assistance on nutrition-sensitive agricultural planning to over 20 countries, including Nigeria, Namibia, DRC, Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Seychelles, Comoros, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Angola, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Rwanda, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Kenya, Chad, South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

Similar work is also conducted in several countries in Asia (including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Cambodia, and Afghanistan) the Near East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

FAO also supports countries in improving the information systems to assess and monitor nutrition-sensitive agricultural strategies, by developing capacities to collect and analyse food consumption and food security data, and information on the nutrient composition of foods.

Nutrition-sensitive social protection and resilience policies

FAO is increasing support to its member states on the linkages between agriculture, social protection and nutrition. Indeed, when social protection programs are leveraged to increase households' access to productive assets (such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program and Household Asset Building Program) or to facilitate smallholders' access to markets (such as through Home Grown School Feeding), they can be a key instrument to lift the poor out of poverty. Food transfer programs, if they include measures to promote healthy diets (e.g. through healthy school meals) can be a way to directly improve diets, but also shape consumption patterns and generate incentives for producers and retailers to supply healthier foods.

Similarly, in crisis-affected contexts, FAO promotes nutrition-sensitive resilience programs, to ensure that investments in emergency response are leveraged to foster longer-term food security and good nutrition.

For both social protection and resilience, FAO advocates for particular attention to the needs of pregnant and lactating women, infants and young children as core components of a "nutrition-sensitive" approach.

Conclusion: opportunities for strengthening collaboration between the U.S. and FAO in support of the first 1000 days

FAO's efforts to improve nutrition, and in particular in the window of the 1000 days are very much aligned with the U.S. Government's goals, as implemented through the Feed the Future program and enshrined in the Global Food Security Act. And as noted, Mr Chairman, the United States is a key strategic, historic, and financial partner. So, we believe there is ample opportunity to strengthen and leverage FAO in reaching the goals of the Global Food Security Act and ending malnutrition globally.

Some potential collaboration to leverage our resources forward include:

- The Decade of Action for Nutrition, 2016-2025, was unanimously declared by the UN General Assembly this year – the SDGs provide a favorable environment for the U.S.
- Government and FAO to explore innovative ways to partner better nutrition in the first 1000 days and beyond.
- Collaborating more strongly with USAID's Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project and expanding its reach in FAO member countries
- Exploring how FAO can work in partnership with the United States towards mutual goals on the United States' Global Nutrition Coordination plan