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**PROGRESS REPORT ON FOLLOW-UP TO THE ICN:
IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN OF ACTION
FOR NUTRITION**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The December 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), convened by FAO and WHO, was attended by delegations from 159 countries and the European Economic Community, along with representatives from 144 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 11 intergovernmental organizations, and 14 UN organizations. The ICN unanimously adopted the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition. On adopting the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, governments affirmed their commitment to revise or prepare before the end of 1994 National Plans of Action for Nutrition (NPAN).
2. The ICN recognized poverty, social inequality, and lack of education as the primary causes of hunger and malnutrition. The World Declaration on Nutrition emphasizes that improvements in human welfare, including nutritional well-being, must be at the centre of social and economic development efforts. It calls for concerted action to direct resources to those most in need in order to raise their productive capacities and improve their social opportunities and increase access to food in a sustainable way. It also stresses the need to protect the nutritional well-being of vulnerable groups through specific short-term actions as needed, while continually working towards long-term solutions.
3. The Plan of Action for Nutrition presents policy guidelines and action areas under nine themes: incorporating nutrition objectives into development programmes and policies; improving household food security; protecting consumers through improved food quality and safety; preventing and managing infectious diseases; caring for the socio-economically deprived and nutritionally vulnerable; promoting breastfeeding; preventing specific micronutrient deficiencies; promoting appropriate diets and healthy lifestyles; and assessing, analyzing and monitoring nutrition situations.

II. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

National Plans of Action for Nutrition

4. Responsibility lies in the hands of national governments to develop or revise National Plans of Action for Nutrition, in cooperation with NGOs, the private sector, the donor community, and international development agencies. These plans should establish appropriate

goals, targets and time-frames; identify priority areas of action and programmes; indicate the technical and financial resources available for programme development and implementation; and foster continued intersectoral involvement. Success will depend in a large part on the ability of the food and agriculture sectors to carry out their fundamental roles in promoting nutritional well-being and assume their rightful positions in leading the fight against hunger and malnutrition. Guidelines for preparing National Plans of Action for Nutrition were developed by the Food Policy and Nutrition Division of FAO and have been widely distributed and made available to decision makers and technical experts at country level through the FAO Representatives' offices.

5. National Plans of Action for Nutrition are to lead towards shifts of government priorities and funds within national budgets in order to accelerate improvements in the nutritional status of the population. They should result in the formulation of a range of food, agriculture, health, and education projects related to nutrition improvement plans and programmes. Adequate levels of donor support will be needed to enable efficient overall country programme implementation. FAO has received more than 60 official requests for assistance in the follow-up of the ICN. Its Regional and Headquarters staff, as well as specifically recruited consultants have visited and provided technical assistance in almost 50 countries in the different regions through missions or projects. Eight TCP Projects for a total sum of approximately US\$ 1,000,000 have been executed or are in the pipeline for approval. Ten Letters of Agreement have been or are being prepared with countries to provide the financial and technical assistance to undertake activities towards the formulation of National Plans of Action for Nutrition. UNDP has also provided funding of three TSS1 projects for the formulation of National Plans of Action for Nutrition.

FAO's Programme and Strategy

6. FAO's Technical Divisions have been asked to review their programmes on the basis of the ICN recommendations since all FAO agricultural and development programmes relate either directly or indirectly to nutrition. As endorsed by the Twelfth Session of FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG) held in April 1993, FAO will continue to promote nutritional well-being by working in areas in which it has a comparative advantage, particularly by promoting household food security and community development, ensuring the quality and safety of food supplies, combating micronutrient deficiencies, promoting nutrition education, and assessing and monitoring food and nutrition situations.

7. In the area of improving household nutritional status, FAO promotes agricultural development both as a source of food for increased consumption and as a source of income to reduce poverty and ensure access to food. Although most commonly the main objectives of agricultural policies have been to increase production, both to generate foreign exchange and to feed the population, it is clear that increasing supply does not by itself lead to increases in food consumption. Recent policy emphasis on nutritional improvement has made the production-consumption linkages of agricultural policies much more explicit. These include increased production and consumption of under-utilized traditional food crops, promotion of simple techniques in food preservation and storage, and enhanced small-scale agricultural industry and marketing with an aim to improve nutrition.

8. To support efforts towards improved food quality and safety, FAO will continue to assist countries in strengthening food quality control measures and in implementing the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius. FAO is currently exploring the feasibility of establishing a Training and Reference Centre for Food Quality and Pesticides and a Food Quality Liaison Group to assist member countries. FAO will expand its support for sustainable food-based approaches for solving micronutrient deficiency problems and will promote fortification programmes where there is a strong cash economy and an effective food marketing system. Nutrition education programmes coupled with other efforts to improve nutrition such as school and urban

community gardens will receive greater attention through the Nutrition Education and Communications Group being established within the Food Policy and Nutrition Division.

Promoting Intersectoral and Interagency Support

9. Effective working links among various levels of government, national and international organizations, including NGOs, academia, and community-based groups, as well as specialized institutions and the private sector, will need to be established and strengthened. FAO is stressing the role of policy makers, planners and field workers in agriculture and rural development to address the causes of malnutrition rooted in poverty and underdevelopment, to improve food supplies and access to them, and to encourage work with planners and policy makers in the health and social welfare sectors.

10. As the leading UN agencies mandated to work for improvements in food supplies, nutrition and health, FAO (and WHO) have specific responsibilities for fostering interagency cooperation at the country level. FAO Representatives have been requested to work closely with their WHO counterparts in order to coordinate their initial approaches to the government, other UN agencies and members of the international donor community, and then to follow-up those approaches vigorously. FAO has also raised the concerns of ICN at several international fora including the Human Rights Conference in Vienna and various technical meetings. Collaboration is continuing with various UN bodies including IFAD, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO to support intersectoral work at the country level.

Regional/Sub-Regional Level Follow-up

11. The ICN was in large part a successful undertaking because of the country and regional/sub-regional level preparatory activities which preceded the ICN itself. Some regions are in the process of holding ICN follow-up meetings to further promote coordinated national and regional approaches in preparing and implementing plans of action for nutrition, and to continue to build the awareness and strong political commitment necessary to improve nutrition that has been generated by the ICN. FAO, in cooperation with other interested agencies will assist in organizing such meetings.

Non-Governmental Organizations and ICN Follow-up

12. Non-governmental organizations are recognized as playing important roles in fostering equitable national and community development and in achieving the goals and objectives of the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition. In order to encourage their participation in ICN follow-up activities, FAO is actively promoting the establishment of international, regional and national NGO networks aimed at improving food supplies and nutritional status, as well as supporting and working directly with several large, independent international NGOs. In particular, FAO is continuing to work with the Rome and Geneva-based Working Groups which were formed to promote NGO participation in the ICN.

13. The following paragraphs provide a summary report about the different activities, both at the regional and national levels, that have been undertaken in the different regions and countries towards the formulation and implementation of National Plans of Action for Nutrition and on other ICN-related activities.

AFRICA REGION

14. Participation in ICN follow-up in the Africa region has taken the form of regional and sub-regional meetings and other coordinated projects. Guinea-Bissau hosted a Lusophone Seminar on Food and Nutrition Surveillance and ICN Follow-up Actions from 24-28 May, 1993 in which the countries of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Sao Tome and Principe participated. From 6-9 December 1993, representatives from many African nations, NGOs, and international organizations assembled in Nairobi, Kenya at a Post-ICN All-Africa Conference on Food and Nutrition sponsored by Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Food and Nutrition Cooperation (ECSA) and the government of Kenya. The meetings examined effective country nutrition interventions, assessed the status of African nations in the follow-up to ICN, and made recommendations for developing National Plans of Action for Nutrition.
15. Africa is planning a series of regional meetings for 1994, two in Francophone Africa and one in Anglophone Africa. Other proposed projects include a food preservation project for seven or eight Sahelian countries, and a Population and Nutrition Training Programme (West Africa and Lusophone countries).
16. At the country level, several African nations have conducted national seminars and workshops on drafting National Plans of Action for Nutrition. Countries such as Sierra Leone, Gabon, Guinea, Mozambique, Tanzania and Cameroon have included representatives from various government ministries, NGOs, and the private sector in their ICN follow-up process by forming multisectoral committees. In Nigeria, a national follow-up meeting to the ICN was organized by a major INGO.
17. Fostering agriculture and nutrition policy linkages is a major feature of the ICN follow-up process in some African countries. The Food and Nutrition Council handling ICN related matters in Uganda, is chaired by the Minister of Agriculture. Guinea designated increasing family income as one of their eight themes to incorporate into the National Plan of Action for Nutrition, thus allowing for greater access to food and agricultural inputs. Many nations make improving household food security part of agriculture policies and programmes -a policy that serves to link nutrition and agriculture. For example, Madagascar plans to promote food security within the Ministry of Agriculture to liaise agriculture and nutrition policies. In Angola, a Food Security Unit was created by the Ministry of Agriculture to serve as an interministerial secretariat on food and nutrition issues, and Mozambique's Family Sector Agriculture programme will also incorporate food security objectives.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

18. In many countries of the Asia and the Pacific Region, National Plans of Action for Nutrition are being devised and integrated with existing national and sectoral development plans, including national poverty alleviation programmes, comprehensive food security programmes and/or action programmes to meet the goals established by the World Summit for Children. For example, in Indonesia the Plan of Action for Nutrition is being formulated in the form of both general and sectoral policies within the State Policy Guidelines. Food and Nutrition Plans have been developed for many years in Thailand within the National Economic and Social Development Plan. The current plan focuses on production and distribution of foods, promoting desirable food habits, controlling micronutrient deficiencies and ensuring the safety and quality of foods. In India, the National Nutrition Policy is providing the framework for their National Plan of Action for Nutrition. The National Plan of Action for Nutrition in Pakistan is being based on recommendations made in the 8th Five Year Plan. Sectoral and intersectoral concerns are forming the basis of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition in Sri Lanka, and programmes for poverty alleviation, social security and nutrition programmes have been integrated at the national level. Such links are to be encouraged.

19. Particular attention has been given to promoting and strengthening the role of the food and agriculture sectors in bringing about sustainable improvements in nutrition. In the Philippines many of the policies of the Medium Term Development Plan for 1993-98 address the ICN themes; the explicit goal of the Philippines National Plan of Action for Nutrition is to reduce the prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition and prevent micronutrient deficiencies. The People's Republic of China is developing their National Plan of Action for Nutrition emphasizing food and agricultural planning which includes: an overall plan for total production of major foods, with guidelines for local agriculture planning; adjustment or reform of food consumption patterns based on nutritional needs and feasibility of food production development; promotion of food diversification in urban areas and family gardening in rural areas to prevent micronutrient deficiencies. The government of Bangladesh is committed to developing a National Plan of Action for Nutrition to address the needs of the rural poor and has requested assistance to specifically strengthen the development of food and agriculture strategies. The government of Viet Nam is developing its National Plan of Action for Nutrition with a focus on strategies to improve household food security, prevent micronutrient deficiencies, improve food quality and safety measures, and promote community development and nutrition education. FAO provided assistance through a TCP project to allow the visit of a multidisciplinary team of consultants in order to prepare a consolidated National Plan of Action for Nutrition.

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN REGION

20. Many countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region have demonstrated their political commitment to the ICN follow-up and are successfully using a multisectoral approach to drafting and implementing their National Plans of Action for Nutrition. For example, in Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru an Intersectoral Committee was established to prepare the NPAN and to coordinate ICN follow-up activities. In Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, these Committees have been either restructured or created. In countries such as Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico, advanced nutrition programmes presently exist and will be strengthened by government commitment to ICN follow-up activities.

21. In October 1993, an FAO/PAHO-WHO sub-regional workshop to promote ICN follow-up activities was held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The participating countries, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic, reviewed progress in the formulation of the National Plans of Action for Nutrition in their respective countries; exchanged experiences in the process of incorporating food and nutrition policies and strategies into programmes and projects related to the nine themes presented in the Plan of Action for Nutrition and outlined strategies and recommendations for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Plans of Action for Nutrition. Another workshop for the same purpose will be held in Quito, Ecuador, for the countries of South-America. Commitment to better assess and analyze the food and nutrition situation is a priority objective in the region. Preparatory assistance in this regard has already been provided to ten countries of the region through a Norwegian-funded project executed through the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) on Configuration of Groups at Risk of Food Insecurity.

22. Within the Latin America and the Caribbean region high priority has been given to food quality control and safety assurance. By the end of 1993, ten national technical cooperation projects aimed at improving the quality and safety of priority foods, including street foods, were completed and seven others are still been implemented. Countries benefiting from these and other food control projects include: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua,

Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

NEAR EAST REGION

23. Morocco has been the first nation in the region to complete its National Plan of Action for Nutrition. The plan focuses country priorities on food security and production, agriculture and the environment, food quality, infectious disease, micronutrient deficiencies, reaching vulnerable populations, and nutrition education. The Commission Interministérielle pour l'Alimentation et la Nutrition (CIAN), which played a major role in the NPAN preparation, has been designated to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Plan. FAO provided a consultant to Morocco in June 1993 who assisted in NPAN activities and assessment of draft documents.

24. Many countries in the Near East region have demonstrated their political commitment to the ICN follow-up and are successfully using a multisectoral approach to drafting their National Plans of Action for Nutrition. For example, Cyprus has established a multisectoral committee including governmental representatives, NGOs, consumer associations, and representatives from the private sector. The Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation in Egypt has created an interministerial committee on food policy and nutrition with senior level officials to oversee the development of their National Plan of Action for Nutrition.

25. Other countries in the region have focused on ICN follow-up issues pertaining to their country needs. In January 1993, an FAO sub-regional workshop was held on population, food, nutrition, and rural development in Cairo. The participating countries, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt, revised and evaluated the FAO Manual on Population, Food, and Nutrition in Arab countries in order to introduce the manual into training activities.

26. The Near East region has also given high priority to food control and quality assurance. In Lebanon and Jordan, comprehensive studies of food control systems were completed, and a programme to strengthen these activities and to increase intersectoral cooperation is under implementation in Lebanon. A sub-regional Gulf States workshop was held on food additives and contaminants in Abu Dhabi in January 1993. Other activities being promoted in the region regarding food quality and safety include: improvement of the hygienic quality of home-prepared weaning foods; food safety in urban areas and street foods; food-borne disease surveillance; and improved food safety to promote tourism and trade. Iran and Pakistan are studying the socio-economic and nutritional aspects of street foods.

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA REGIONS

27. At the country level several nations in the European region have conducted national seminars and workshops in follow-up to the ICN. Norway held a national workshop in November 1993 to plan follow-up activities to the ICN. The National Food and Nutrition Institute, the focal point for ICN activities in Poland, has initiated a series of activities which will contribute to the development of a multi-sectoral policy of food production and nutrition and will culminate in a Congress on Food, Nutrition in Health to be held in 1994 to initiate action on ICN issues. Switzerland has increased public awareness of the ICN goals and objectives through a series of articles in professional journals, private sector publications and radio interviews.

28. Countries have also integrated National Plans of Action for Nutrition or nutrition policies into existing programmes and are coordinating ICN follow-up activities with currently running projects. Follow-up actions reflect the countries' needs assessment and previous initiatives.

Poland has instituted specific nutrition goals and objectives into the National Health Program, targeting public education on diet and cardiovascular disease and cancer prevention as a priority. The NPAN for United Kingdom also gives priority to diet-related, chronic diseases.

III. CONCLUSION

29. The progress made over the last decades indicates that the goals of the ICN, although ambitious, are attainable. Nutritional status can be markedly improved by political will, commitment and the formulation of well-conceived policies and concerted actions at national and international levels. The immediate challenge to the international community is to build upon this progress and to accelerate the pace of activities that contribute to improving the nutritional well-being of all people.

30. In virtually all countries a wide range of agricultural, fishery, forestry and rural development activities, many of which are FAO-supported, are or can be directed at promoting nutritional well-being. Many of these could be strengthened to improve their nutritional impact, but they should all be recognized explicitly as furthering the goals and objectives arising from the ICN. In addition, in many countries, new approaches and programmes built around the specific strategies and actions adopted by the ICN will need to be developed at country-level.

