



ASIA AND THE PACIFIC'S ZERO HUNGER CHALLENGE

OVERALL GOAL

The FAO Regional Initiative, “Support to the Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and Pacific”, seeks to assist Member Countries in achieving zero hunger in three specific and complementary areas where FAO has comparative advantages and experience: i) formulating and operationalizing national food security and nutrition policies and investment plans; ii) improving child nutrition and reducing stunting; and iii) improving capacity for measurement and calculation of undernourishment.

About the Regional Initiative

The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) launched the Zero Hunger Challenge (ZHC) at the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil in June 2012 as a dramatic call and powerful tool for mobilizing forces towards a future free from hunger and malnutrition. The Zero Hunger Challenge addresses five elements critical for the eradication of hunger and malnutrition: i) zero stunted children less than two years of age; ii) 100% access to adequate food all year round; iii) all food systems are sustainable; iv) 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income; and v) zero loss or waste of food.

As a follow-up to the global ZHC, the Asia-Pacific ZHC was launched by the UN Deputy Secretary-General in April 2013. Subsequently, the Regional Guiding Framework for Achieving Zero Hunger in Asia and the Pacific was developed by the UN Regional Thematic Working Group on Poverty and Hunger. It is chaired by FAO and co-chaired by ESCAP and UNDP, to assist Member Countries to translate the key ZHC elements into concrete, time-bound actions towards achieving a hunger-free Asia-Pacific by 2025.

However, given the large scope and ambition of the initiative, it remains a challenge for Member Countries to ensure effective implementation without support from development partners including FAO. It is in this context that the Regional Initiative on Support to the Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and Pacific was formulated in alignment with the FAO's new Strategic Objective 1 (SO1) and became operational, following the endorsement of the Regional Initiative by Asia-Pacific Member Countries at the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific in March 2013. The Regional Initiative has since concentrated its efforts on five focus countries – Bangladesh, Lao, Myanmar, Nepal, and Timor-Leste – and delivery on the three specific and complementary areas of work mentioned earlier.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

All five focus countries are committed to eradicating hunger and malnutrition and have policies, strategies and plans of action related to food security and nutrition in place. The National ZHC for all these countries was launched by the highest government official and has created a strong momentum to make efforts to address hunger and malnutrition, while making it possible to mobilize stakeholders across sectors.

Further, the Regional Initiative aims to build on lessons learnt to assist other focus countries to put in place, implement, and monitor a comprehensive policy and investment framework for agriculture, food security and nutrition. The countries are also expected to develop country investment plans in order to convert policies into investment priorities and better targeted programmes towards reducing malnutrition with a focus on preventing child stunting. A monitoring system will be set up for the framework and investment plan to provide regular assessment of achievements, gaps and evolving requirements, make necessary adjustments, and maintain momentum to fill any gaps.

The countries taking part in the Regional Initiative are faced with significantly high stunting rates among children under the age of five years, which requires urgent attention of policy makers to invest and implement nutrition sensitive interventions to reduce child stunting. It is critical to ensure that national policies, programmes and actions in the food and agricultural sector address severe malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of life, the time frame in which malnutrition has irreversible consequences. The Regional Initiative supports the governments to develop the capacity of creating and implementing nutrition-sensitive programmes such as school and home gardening, family nutrition education, improved complementary feeding based on locally available food, and small-scale food processing and preservation.

Finally, the Regional Initiative is designed to assist in conducting agricultural and food data analysis and producing quality and reliable estimates of the prevalence of undernourishment. With timely and consistent food security and nutrition statistics available for assessment and monitoring of nutritional status, the effectiveness of national policies, plans, programmes and resource allocation will be improved.

IN PRACTICE

All five focus countries have established coordination and oversight mechanisms related to food security and nutrition. Important highlights of the results achieved at county level to date are as follows:

- Bangladesh continues to expand activities during and beyond 2015 through the "Meeting the Undernutrition

Challenge (MUCH) Programme." Results include the formulation of a new Food and Nutrition Policy and support to the implementation and monitoring of a Country Investment Plan.

- Lao PDR is promoting nutrition sensitive agriculture through agriculture and education interventions under the framework of the Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan.
- Myanmar began the process to develop a National Action Plan for the ZHC in the fall of 2014. The government established a National Committee on Food and Nutrition Security and a Working Committee on Food and Nutrition Security to support the implementation of the ZHC.
- Nepal established high-level, steering and technical committees in 2015. The development of a National Action Plan for the ZHC is ongoing, and the government is committed to promoting national nutrition education, redesigning agriculture extension curriculum, and developing a national strategy to improve child nutrition.
- Timor-Leste has committed to allocate approximately ten percent of the national budget annually to the implementation of the ZHC, and a donor coordination meeting was convened in October 2014 to mobilize additional development partner support.

SCOPE FOR DOING MORE AND BETTER

The support provided under the Zero Hunger Challenge Regional Initiative reinforces FAO's ongoing commitment to the member countries' efforts toward eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

At regional level, the ZHC represents an important advocacy tool, which has created a momentum around the existing regional and national processes. These processes should be used for advocacy, experience sharing and greater coordination amongst countries conducive to FAO's work. The Regional Initiative on ZHC also encourages better partnership and collaboration amongst UN agencies and development partners to better support countries' goals of eradicating hunger and malnutrition.

The Regional Initiative is unique in that it does not duplicate existing processes, but on contrary adds value to the ongoing processes by improving their efficiency. The Zero Hunger Challenge not only adds value to national policy processes by building on and contributing to them, but by ensuring good will and continued commitment toward a world without hunger.

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MORE INFORMATION

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