



## Micronutrient Forum 6th Global Conference

The Hague, The Netherlands & ONLINE  
16–20 October 2023

# The Way Forward

## A road to resilience to protect and accelerate nutrition progress in an era of crises.

*We—a group of deeply concerned experts from across research, academia, program and policy organizations, and governments—bring forward opportunities for immediate, evidence-based action by the international community to galvanize the momentum necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goals’ promises for protecting nutrition and health in the face of unprecedented crises. We fundamentally believe good nutrition is a human right—it is both a contributor to and an outcome of resilience. The need to strengthen nutrition resilience has never been more urgent, and the opportunities for action to do so are compelling and viable.*

**We must work together immediately to ensure that current and future generations of children and their communities and nations are able to achieve their full potential.**

We have reviewed the evidence on how civil conflict, economic disruptions, health emergencies, and the escalating impacts of climate change all threaten the food and nutrition security of billions of people around the world. We know that these crises affect the availability, affordability, and quality of nutrient-rich foods, putting healthy diets out of reach for more than 3.1 billion people. They are leading to rises in all forms of malnutrition, including diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCD) and micronutrient malnutrition, which affects at least 1.6 billion women and young children worldwide. We have learned about the long-lasting, irreversible impacts of malnutrition on survival, health, and economic productivity of future generations. At the same time, we have seen examples from countries in different contexts that have been able to maintain and strengthen the resilience of systems, communities, and individuals during times of crises, safeguarding health and nutrition. We have overwhelming evidence that optimal nutrition improves overall people’s health, physical growth, cognitive development, immunity, and productivity and is integral to building resilient societies.

We must act now, both to protect the gains made to date and to accelerate progress in securing the survival, health, and future economic productivity of vulnerable and at-risk communities worldwide and building resilience in the face of rising climate-, conflict-, economic-, and health-related challenges that are poised to exacerbate malnutrition in the years to come.

**We therefore urgently call upon community, national, regional, and global leaders to commit to the following six recommendations that reflect rigorous evidence for strengthening the nutrition resilience of individuals, households, and communities**

- 1. Scale up proven and cost-effective micronutrient interventions across food, health, and social protection systems.**

Overwhelming evidence exists on a suite of micronutrient interventions that are impactful, low-cost, and immediately scalable. These include the promotion and protection of breastfeeding, large-scale food fortification and biofortification, vitamin A and multiple micronutrient supplementation (MMS), zinc supplementation (for diarrhoea), and the use of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (for the treatment of wasting). Other proven interventions include home fortification with micronutrient powders (MNP) and small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS), which should be part of a broader package of infant and young child feeding interventions, along with food-based approaches. Evidence shows that these interventions can help reduce mortality, prevent disabilities and cognitive deficits, improve growth and immune functions, strengthen population health, and build the resilience of communities to withstand future shocks. Micronutrient interventions are among the highest-return investments in overall development: for example, \$1 invested in MMS gives a return of \$37, and \$1 invested in large-scale food fortification delivers \$27 in benefits. As such, they represent essential components of broader nutrition and health packages.

## 2. Drive more equitable and well-nourished futures for women and girls.

Gender equality and nutrition are deeply interconnected in households and communities worldwide. Empowering women and girls is the foundation for nutrition resilience, and, in turn, improving women and girls' nutrition is fundamental to increasing their own agency over their health, diets, productivity, empowerment, and ability to reach their full potential. Special efforts are urgently needed to elevate anemia in women and girls as an overall marker of progress on health and development. New stakeholders from diverse sectors must come together to advance multisectoral actions to reduce anemia in women. We must start with proven and scalable micronutrient solutions that are immediately available and address gender equality. Food fortification strengthens food systems and makes nutrient-rich diets more affordable for women and adolescent girls. Improving the quality of prenatal services to include the provision of MMS as the standard of care, as is common in upper-income countries, can dramatically improve maternal health and pregnancy outcomes. SQ-LNS is an effective, affordable, and convenient solution that empowers mothers and caregivers to protect and support their child's nutrition and healthy growth and development without requiring enormous time and financial resources. Prioritizing women and girls in humanitarian responses and social protection systems and ensuring their voices drive community-driven programs offer immense opportunities to strengthen the nutrition resilience of households in crisis-prone contexts. Last, aligning agendas with gender partners is critical for enacting gender-transformative policies and actions that incorporate women's nutrition. At the same time, we must join forces to tackle biased social norms, improve women's access to finance, and eliminate discriminatory laws.

## 3. Accelerate generation of data and evidence for impactful decisions and action.

A thorough understanding of local contexts is essential for designing and implementing more effective nutrition policies and more impactful programs. Robust and real-time information systems are critical to measure changes in access to and consumption of nutritious foods, micronutrient status and intake, coverage of and adherence to essential nutrition and micronutrient services, and positive practices before and after shocks. New and innovative technologies and digitization can help monitor and track trends in nutrition and micronutrient status and populations at risk. Accelerated investments in fundamental, translational, and applied research and knowledge sharing are critical to understand intractable and emerging issues of significant public health relevance, such as the nature and scale of nutrition-climate linkages and influence of micronutrients on long-term health, including the gut microbiome and immune function. Program research and economic cost-benefit analyses can also help, for example, strengthen and promote the integration of nutrition in national shock-responsive social protection systems.

## 4. Join forces with the climate sector to leverage and amplify shared agendas and solutions.

Climate crises are nutrition crises, and rising climate challenges are poised to ominously exacerbate all the underlying inequities that cause malnutrition. Together with climate partners, we must support adaptation and mitigation efforts to enhance food and nutrition security, livelihoods, and resilience, as prioritized in the *COP28 Emirates Declaration on Resilient Food Systems, Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Action*. Climate change affects the availability, affordability, and access to nutrient-dense foods and healthy diets. At the same time, food loss and waste, food production and processing, and consumption of unhealthy diets are substantial contributors to greenhouse gases. Emerging evidence also shows that extreme weather events, including prolonged exposure to excessive heat, raises the prevalence of infectious diseases and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Scaling up access to critical nutrition services and nutritious foods, in addition to stimulating demand for healthy and sustainable diets, is an essential part of protecting the nutrition resilience of communities against the ravages of climate change in a more sustainable way. Transformative adaptations to food systems can have a positive impact on environment, health, and micronutrient nutrition. Examples include investments in adaptive and diverse production systems and markets and the development of climate-resilient, nutritious, and indigenous crops. Progress also requires increased investments in agricultural research and more sustainable agricultural technologies. More timely and comprehensive surveillance and data systems and data modelling can help identify populations at risk for climate change and nutritional shocks.

## 5. Invest in nutrition-resilient systems and programs across humanitarian and development programs to protect and maximize nutrition gains in the near and long term.

Countries with high levels of micronutrient malnutrition also experience a continuum of interconnected and compounding development and humanitarian challenges that reverberate over years, if not decades. Urgent investments are needed to build the nutrition resilience of programs and national systems for continued access to nutrition services and nutrient-rich foods that vulnerable communities depend on, particularly in crisis-prone contexts. In conjunction with humanitarian programs, multiple national systems—including food; health; social protection; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and education—must adapt to help prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises and accelerate progress toward global nutrition targets and goals. Robust evidence on nutrition-sensitive social protection programs and country lessons from pandemic responses demonstrate how national governments adapted and strengthened the delivery of critical nutrition services.

## 6. Accelerate the mobilization of financing for food and nutrition security actions at scale

Building food- and nutrition-resilient systems demand moving beyond the traditional funding silos and mechanisms that have failed to deliver the necessary resources for nutrition, despite strong evidence in support of such resources. Achieving impact requires that we bring in new national and global financing approaches and commitments across sectors by emphasizing co-benefits (for example, climate co-benefits) and incentivizing integrated actions across a continuum of contexts. The World Bank's forthcoming updated Investment Framework for Nutrition will provide a strong evidence-based case for prioritized investment in high-impact, investment-ready nutrition interventions, determine the costs of scaling up these interventions, and highlight potential benefits and impacts. We need to look at, among other things, high-impact and highly cost-effective micronutrient interventions, evidence on gender and climate links, and nutrition-sensitive interventions in social protection and agriculture, as well as fiscal and regulatory policies to address the rising burden of obesity. Collectively, these interventions and approaches will improve population resilience, including reducing the risk of NCDs. While domestic financing is critical for longer-term sustainable financing, current trends suggest that domestic financing is still well below pre-pandemic levels and will likely not recover to pre-pandemic levels until the end of the decade. Official development assistance (ODA) is similarly challenged because of economic constraints in high-income countries and multiple crises. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the nutrition community to leverage and maximize innovative financing opportunities. Given the growing share of climate finance in ODA, it is urgent to invest in clarifying and developing the evidence base for nutrition-sensitive interventions with pathways to climate goals, whether from a mitigation or adaptation standpoint, and actively engage climate funds and funders on how to ensure that climate finance is nutrient sensitive

## Mobilizing stakeholders along a Road to Resilience

The urgency of the nutrition resilience agenda calls for aligning and weaving together policy agendas of cross-sectoral stakeholders across forthcoming global moments. Country decision-makers, United Nations agencies, multilateral and bilateral funders, responsible private sector actors, civil society, and research and academia will have to work together more closely. All stakeholders have important and unique roles—particularly civil society organizations, which are critical to ensure accountability and to help build trust between communities, governments, and partners. The collective voice of community, national, regional, and global leaders, experts, and advocates coming together along a *road to resilience* can lead to new commitments to strengthen nutrition-resilient systems that both protect and accelerate nutrition progress.

**We call for this *Way Forward* agenda and recommendations to be elevated in high-level global fora and events including, but not limited to, the following:**

- Committee of World Food Security, October 2023
- COP28, November 2023
- UK Food Security Summit, November 2023
- World Health Assembly, May 2024
- SUN Global Gathering, June 2024
- UN General Assembly, September 2024
- World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings, October 2024
- Nutrition for Growth Summit, France

We further call for this agenda to be taken up in **regional and national forums** and appropriately adapted to fit local contexts and meet local needs for improved nutrition for resilience.

*In closing, we call for the international community to invest in evidence-based, cost-effective, and impactful actions to protect nutrition in the current era of multiple and cascading crises.*

## About This Statement

At the Micronutrient Forum's 6<sup>th</sup> Global Conference, "Nutrition for Resilience (N4R)," leaders, experts, and advocates from around the world and across sectors and disciplines are coming together to report on evidence, share lessons learned, and identify policy solutions and investments that can help safeguard and nourish vulnerable communities in the presence of frequent and persistent crises affecting food, health, and social systems. The conference—held October 16–20, 2023, both virtually and in The Hague, Netherlands—is designed to drive compelling, evidence-based agendas that will promote nutrition and strengthen population resilience in the face of rising shocks, including climate change and human-caused conflicts.

This "Way Forward" statement is issued by the Micronutrient Forum based on a synthesis of the evidence presented in the conference program and thought leadership provided by more than 50 scientific, program, and policy experts in the past year who are members of the Forum's conference program sub-committee, the Forum's Board of Directors, and/or the Forum's Program Advisory Council. It reflects consultations before and during the conference. As a collective and expert statement, it is intended to guide decision-makers, leaders, and advocates across sectors and accelerate global, regional, and national policy and financing agendas that safeguard nutrition and, ultimately, strengthen the resilience, health, and productivity of all communities and nations facing increasing crises. It does not imply endorsement by the conference participants or cosponsors.

