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## **IFAD Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031**

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**Useful references:** Report of the Consultation on the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) (monitorable action #9) ([GC 47/L.5](#))

**Action:** The Executive Board is invited to take note of the updated IFAD Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031, which has been revised pursuant to the IFAD13 commitment.

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## Executive summary

1. In 2024, 2.6 billion people worldwide were still not able to afford a healthy diet, contributing to the high prevalence of multiple forms of malnutrition, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity. Additionally, the prevalence of nutrition-related non-communicable diseases are on the rise. With multiple forms of malnutrition occurring simultaneously within populations and countries, evidence suggests the need for a more integrated food systems approach that supports better nutrition and delivers healthy diets, while also focusing on environmentally sustainable production. Sustainable food systems can improve nutrition outcomes for rural people by increasing access to diverse, locally produced and nutrient rich foods while enhancing livelihoods and supporting environmental health.
2. As both a specialized United Nations agency supporting small-scale rural producers and an international financial institution financing rural development, IFAD is uniquely positioned to promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture in food systems-based approaches in rural communities. IFAD's mandate to contribute to sustainable food systems and healthy diets is crucial.
3. The preparation of this updated Nutrition Action Plan (NAP) 2026–2031 has been guided by insights gained from the implementation of the previous NAP. It presents an opportunity to refocus on emerging nutrition needs, expand attention on all forms of malnutrition – including overweight and obesity – through a food systems approach, and emphasize the importance of strengthening mechanisms for monitoring progress.
4. The NAP 2026–2031 responds to a commitment under the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources, monitorable action #9, which calls for development of new action plans on gender, youth and nutrition to strengthen IFAD's work in these areas. The NAP builds on IFAD's achievements so far and integrates the recent Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD thematic evaluation on nutrition findings and recommendations.
5. At the corporate level, the updated NAP aligns with IFAD's policies and guidelines. It emphasizes new areas of focus, including obesity, non-communicable diseases, and adolescent nutrition. Additionally, it addresses water, sanitation and hygiene interventions to promote sustainable food systems and enhance nutrition for vulnerable rural populations.
6. It also aligns with global nutrition and food security frameworks and contributes to support Member States in the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
7. The goal of this NAP is to improve rural communities' nutrition outcomes through integrated food systems interventions that enhance access to diverse nutritious foods and strengthen nutrition-related knowledge attitudes and practices.
8. The NAP focuses on four action areas articulated around programme and project design and implementation: (i) designing nutrition-sensitive country strategic opportunities programmes and investment programmes; (ii) strengthening capacities in support of project design and implementation; (iii) strengthening knowledge, communication and evidence, and fostering policy engagement and advocacy at the country, regional and global levels; and (iv) building partnerships and leveraging resources in support of IFAD-funded projects.

# IFAD Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031

## I. Introduction and context

### A. Introduction

1. Nutrition is core to IFAD's mandate as enshrined in articles 2 and 7 of the Agreement Establishing IFAD,<sup>1</sup> hence the Fund places nutrition at the heart of sustainable development. IFAD's vision for nutrition is a world where all rural people have access to and consume diverse, sufficient, safe and nutritious food all year round.
2. Ending all forms of malnutrition is essential to enable countries to meet their policy objectives towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) global commitments on nutrition. Globally, the cost of malnutrition is estimated to be as high as US\$3.5 trillion annually – through lost potential, reduced earnings and rising healthcare costs.<sup>2</sup>
3. Nutrition-sensitive investments in agriculture, education, water, sanitation and social protection are essential to addressing the root causes of malnutrition. Research<sup>3</sup> shows that effective investments – like breeding, diversification, biofortification and behaviour change – can yield significant returns. By integrating nutrition goals into agricultural and rural development, governments can achieve sustainable impacts on human capital and economic growth.
4. IFAD's comparative advantage in nutrition-sensitive agriculture (NSA) lies in its investments in support of rural smallholder producers and their organizations. These groups are on the front line of producing diversified and healthy foods, with a focus on improving their accessibility and intake, while also supplying markets in food deficit areas. This contributes to a relationship of mutual trust with governments, donors and rural communities. To this extent, IFAD's advantage resides in its direct relationship with governments, its ability to mobilize significant resources, and its capacity to target poor people living in remote rural areas where fewer agencies operate, including in fragile and climate vulnerable contexts. Furthermore, IFAD has the advantage of managing a large rural investment portfolio, with a potential to scale up innovations, promote partnerships with the private sector,<sup>4</sup> foster inclusive and gender-responsive rural transformation and tackle reducing malnutrition through a multisectoral, multistakeholder and inclusive approach.
5. This updated NAP 2026–2031 aims to maximize IFAD's comparative advantage and guide the organization to mainstream nutrition-sensitive agriculture approaches into its investments. The NAP draws on evidence from IFAD's nutrition efforts since 2013 and was developed through extensive consultations, including with development actors.

<sup>1</sup> [Agreement Establishing IFAD](#), articles 2 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> Global Panel. 2016. [The Cost of Malnutrition: Why Policy Action is Urgent](#). Technical Brief No.3, London: Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.

<sup>3</sup> Marie T. Ruel, Agnes R. Quisumbing, Mysbah Balagamwala, *Nutrition-sensitive agriculture: What have we learned so far?* Global Food Security. vol. 17, 2018. pp. 128-153, ISSN 2211-9124.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221191241730127X>. Olney DK; Gelli A; Kumar N; Alderman H; Go A; Raza A; Owens J; Grinspun A; Bhalla G; Benammour O. 2021. [Nutrition-sensitive social protection programs within food systems](#). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Food Policy Research Institute. Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> IFAD Private Sector Operational Strategy 2025–2030 defines the private sector as: "for-profit business companies, private and institutional investors, commercial banks, investment funds, other financial vehicles majority-owned and/or managed by private entities or interests and state-owned enterprises with financial and governance structures that comply with private sector practice. It noted that companies can be local, regional or global and range in size from MSMEs (including cooperatives, corporate farms, social businesses) to multinationals...The term "private sector" ... does not include actors who engage in productive activities for non-commercial (e.g. subsistence) purposes."

6. This NAP 2026–2031 aims to ensure the sustainability of IFAD’s NSA investments by aligning with national nutrition policies, strategies and priorities; integrating nutrition actions into existing systems; strengthening local capacity based on demand; engaging communities; promoting behaviour change; securing diversified funding; and enhancing monitoring mechanisms to support long-term impact.

## **B. Global context: Challenges and opportunities**

7. Globally, the prevalence of undernourishment is estimated to be 8.2 per cent of the population in 2024, down from 8.5 per cent in 2023, with approximately 2.3 billion people having faced moderate to severe food insecurity and lacking regular access to adequate food. Furthermore, 22 per cent, 6.7 per cent and 5.7 per cent of children under five are affected by stunting, wasting and overweight, respectively. In adults, 16.2 per cent of women and 12.3 per cent of men are living with obesity. The prevalence of nutrition-related non-communicable diseases is rising – for instance, diabetes affects 8.9 per cent of women and 10.5 per cent of men worldwide. Over five billion people suffer from an inadequate micronutrient intake, and approximately one in three women aged 15 to 49 is anemic.
8. Recent regional trends indicate that hunger is increasing in Africa and western Asia, while southeast Asia, southern Asia and Latin America are making progress in reducing it.
9. In most regions, rural areas face higher food insecurity rates than urban areas, with variations in peri-urban regions. More women than men are food insecure, with the gap widening between 2023 and 2024.
10. Along with growing poverty and inequalities, several factors further challenge nutrition and food security, including fragile supply chains, food loss and waste, economic crises, conflicts and extreme weather events. Moreover, the increasing availability of ultra-processed foods at lower prices than fresh options exacerbate access disparities between high-income and low-income people. This trend contributes to declining nutrition and further strains the incomes of the small-scale producers who are IFAD’s primary target group.
11. Investing in improved nutrition offers IFAD a powerful opportunity to unlock human potential and drive rural development. For every dollar spent on improving nutrition, there is an economic return of US\$23. This return increases to US\$35 when the focus is specifically on women's nutrition. By addressing the high financial and social costs of malnutrition, IFAD can help ensure that vulnerable people in rural areas have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Strengthening nutrition interventions within agricultural and food systems can accelerate human capital development, boost productivity and break cycles of poverty in the communities IFAD serves.

## **II. Mainstreaming nutrition in IFAD – strategic orientation, key achievements and lessons**

### **A. Strategic orientation**

12. Rather than investing in stand-alone nutrition interventions, IFAD applies a nutrition lens to the design and implementation of its investments in agriculture, food systems and rural development, so as to maximize their impact on improving nutrition. This means integrating nutrition considerations from the early stages of project design and planning how nutrition improvements will be achieved through the theory of change, as illustrated in figure 1 below. The selected entry points for nutrition can align within two complementary NSA pathways: (i) the production pathway; and (ii) the income pathway.
13. The production pathway improves nutrition by increasing the availability and diversity of nutritious foods through sustainable agriculture, valuing local biodiversity and enhancing market access. It is essential for improving both the

quality and quantity of diets by ensuring year-round access to safe and nutritious foods at household and market levels. This pathway is based on two main assumptions: (i) increasing the diversity of food production can enhance food availability and access to achieve healthy diets; and (ii) this improved access leads to better nutrition outcomes for IFAD target groups.

14. The production pathway emphasizes the importance of supporting local biodiversity, promoting the sustainable management of natural resources (land, forest, water), and adopting sustainable agricultural practices to enhance food nutritional value, and build climate resilience in food production. In line with IFAD policy, promoting Indigenous Peoples' food systems can also help preserve biodiversity and implement climate-smart agricultural methods.
15. The production pathway also supports the trade and marketing of diverse, nutritious foods. Applying a nutrition-sensitive lens across the agricultural value chain – including improved post-harvest practices, storage facilities, food safety, marketing and labelling, and strengthening linkages between producers to consumers, can promote healthier diet choices.<sup>5</sup> Public procurement of local foods is also key to improving access to nutritious food for the most vulnerable populations, such as children, through school feeding programmes.
16. The income pathway enhances nutrition by increasing household incomes. When combined with nutrition education and the empowerment of women and youth, both the income and the production pathways enable better food choices and contribute to healthy diets. This pathway supports both on and off-farm activities, improves household cash flow, and strengthens local food systems by supporting small and medium enterprises and improving access to rural finance.
17. Increased income alone does not necessarily translate into improved nutrition – but when integrated with nutrition education, social and behaviour change communication, and women and youth empowerment, dietary quality improves significantly.<sup>6,7</sup> Empowering women and girls strengthens their decision-making over food purchases and health practices, leading to improved household nutrition.<sup>8</sup>
18. Finally, both pathways require a strong enabling environment, including supportive policies and partnerships, to sustain nutrition outcomes.
19. NSA pathways should be identified during the project design phase based on the specific context of each country and project area. This includes consideration of the underlying causes of malnutrition and the key challenges within the food system faced by the project's target group, aligned with national priorities in agriculture, food security and nutrition. A nutrition situation analysis, integrated into the project's assessment of poverty, fragility and vulnerability, will help identify key entry points for nutrition within NSA investments and inform the NSA pathways in the project's theory of change.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy E, Kershaw M, Coates J. Food systems: pathways for improved diets and nutrition. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2018. vol. 2, no. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Herforth, Anna, and Jody Harris. 2014. Understanding and Applying Primary Pathways and Principles. Brief #1. Improving Nutrition through Agriculture Technical Brief Series. Arlington, VA: USAID/Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) Project.

<sup>7</sup> Hawkes, C., R. Turner, and J. Waage. 2012. Current and Planned Research on Agriculture for Improved Nutrition: A Mapping and a Gap Analysis. Report for the Department for International Development (DFID). London: Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health; Aberdeen, United Kingdom: University of Aberdeen, Centre for Sustainable International Development.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259436807\\_Current\\_and\\_planned\\_research\\_on\\_agriculture\\_for\\_improved\\_nutrition\\_A\\_mapping\\_and\\_a\\_gap\\_analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259436807_Current_and_planned_research_on_agriculture_for_improved_nutrition_A_mapping_and_a_gap_analysis).

<sup>8</sup> Kennedy E, Kershaw M, Coates J. Food systems: pathways for improved diets and nutrition. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2018. vol. 2, no. 9.

20. The six key entry points<sup>9</sup> identified for integrating nutrition into IFAD nutrition-sensitive investments are: (i) agrobiodiversity and diversified, safe food production; (ii) post-harvest handling, processing and value addition, trade and marketing of diversified, safe and nutritious foods; (iii) growth and diversification of incomes; (iv) nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices; (v) empowerment of women and youth; and (vi) Indigenous People's food systems, as detailed in annex I.

## **B. Key results and achievements**

21. Since 2019 the following key results have been obtained (further details are provided in annex III):

### **22. Nutrition mainstreaming in IFAD portfolio**

- Country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) increasingly embed nutrition objectives; and
- Nutrition has been systematically integrated into IFAD operations since the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD10), with 62 per cent of projects in IFAD11 and 60 per cent in IFAD12 meeting nutrition-sensitive criteria and high supervision ratings.

### **23. Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing**

- Regular training, knowledge products development and dissemination, and peer-to-peer learning improved implementation skills of IFAD staff and partners; and
- Guidance tools such as how-to-do notes, manuals, digital toolboxes and nutrition-sensitive value chains frameworks have been created and have improved project design and staff capacities.

### **24. Strategic partnerships and global recognition**

- IFAD has become a recognized global actor in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, taking an active role as a steering committee member and convenor for platforms such as UN Nutrition and Nutrition for Growth.

## **C. Key lessons**

25. The updated NAP builds on the findings and recommendations from the 2024 Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) thematic evaluation of IFAD's support on nutrition,<sup>10</sup> the IFAD 2022 internal stocktake and assessment of the previous action plan, conducted by IFAD with support from external consultants. Key lessons include:

- Government buy-in is stronger when nutrition aligns with national priorities, but reluctance persists where it is perceived as low-return for loans;
- There is room to improve the alignment of priorities with country-specific contexts and nutrition needs by strengthening the focus and scope of projects in order to promote sustainable healthy diets and sustainable food systems. Greater attention is also needed in addressing obesity and overweight, as well

<sup>9</sup> Entry points are practical opportunities within IFAD's projects where nutrition can be embedded into agricultural and rural development investments. These focal areas enable nutrition to be seamlessly integrated into broader development strategies, enhancing the effectiveness of projects. By addressing multiple entry points, IFAD creates complementary pathways that improve food access, economic opportunities, and nutrition-related knowledge, ensuring more sustainable and impactful outcomes for rural communities.

<sup>10</sup> IOE thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition was conducted in 2024 and was the first corporate-level evaluation of the organization's global nutrition portfolio. It covered the period from 2016, when IFAD's first NAP was adopted, to 2024 and included the second NAP (2019–2025). The evaluation was approved at the 137<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board, held in December 2022.

as focusing on youth and adolescent girls within IFAD's nutrition-sensitive investments;

- Implementation capacity of project management units is an area that requires dedicated technical assistance, particularly at the early stages of implementation;
  - Although significant knowledge has been generated in the field of nutrition over the past decade, there is a need to improve knowledge-sharing and the aggregation of lessons learned from projects to better inform project design and implementation. Partnerships at the country level are still underutilized outside the agricultural sector, both at project design and during implementation, including involvement of other United Nations agencies; and
  - Grants, either funded by IFAD or through supplementary funds, have been instrumental in mainstreaming nutrition and gathering experience from IFAD-funded projects. While IFAD's internal environment for delivering on nutrition has improved significantly, it still requires efforts to keep pace with the needs of IFAD's increased portfolio of nutrition-sensitive project.
26. The recent IOE thematic evaluation on nutrition recommended: (i) adopting a sustainable food systems approach in IFAD's next Nutrition Action Plan; (ii) enhancing human resources and capacities; (iii) enhancing knowledge management products visibility and improving monitoring systems; and (iv) adopting a more strategic, sustainable approach to resource mobilization by leveraging both internal and external sources. Annex III provides for detailed information on IFAD's progress in mainstreaming nutrition.

### **III. IFAD Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031**

#### **A. Strategic alignment**

27. IFAD's investments in nutrition-sensitive agriculture are designed to support countries in achieving their national policy objectives, with progress measured through indicators such as the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W). These efforts align with global nutrition commitments and reflect IFAD's continued dedication to address all forms of malnutrition. Improving nutrition within the IFAD target group aligns with IFAD aims to improve nutrition for five million people by 2027.<sup>11</sup> The target for the period 2028–2031 will be set in line with results as measured through impact assessments.
28. The NAP is aligned to IFAD's policies, strategies and action plans, including the policies on targeting, gender and Indigenous Peoples, the strategies on disability, environment and climate, private sector, fragility and South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), and the action plans on youth and gender. IFAD NSA interventions align with the IFAD Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP), specifically standard 6 (community health and safety), by developing specific mitigation plans.<sup>12</sup>

#### **B. Theory of change for IFAD's work on nutrition**

29. To reduce all forms of malnutrition, IFAD promotes nutrition-sensitive agriculture, supports diversified diets through sustainable and equitable food systems, and empowers rural communities, farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, hunters and gatherers, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities. By working across sectors, engaging multiple stakeholders and working with global nutrition frameworks, IFAD seeks to improve nutrition outcomes as part of a broader goal of inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. In so doing, IFAD

<sup>11</sup> IFAD13 Results Management Framework.

<sup>12</sup> IFAD. 2021. Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP), vols. 1 and 2.



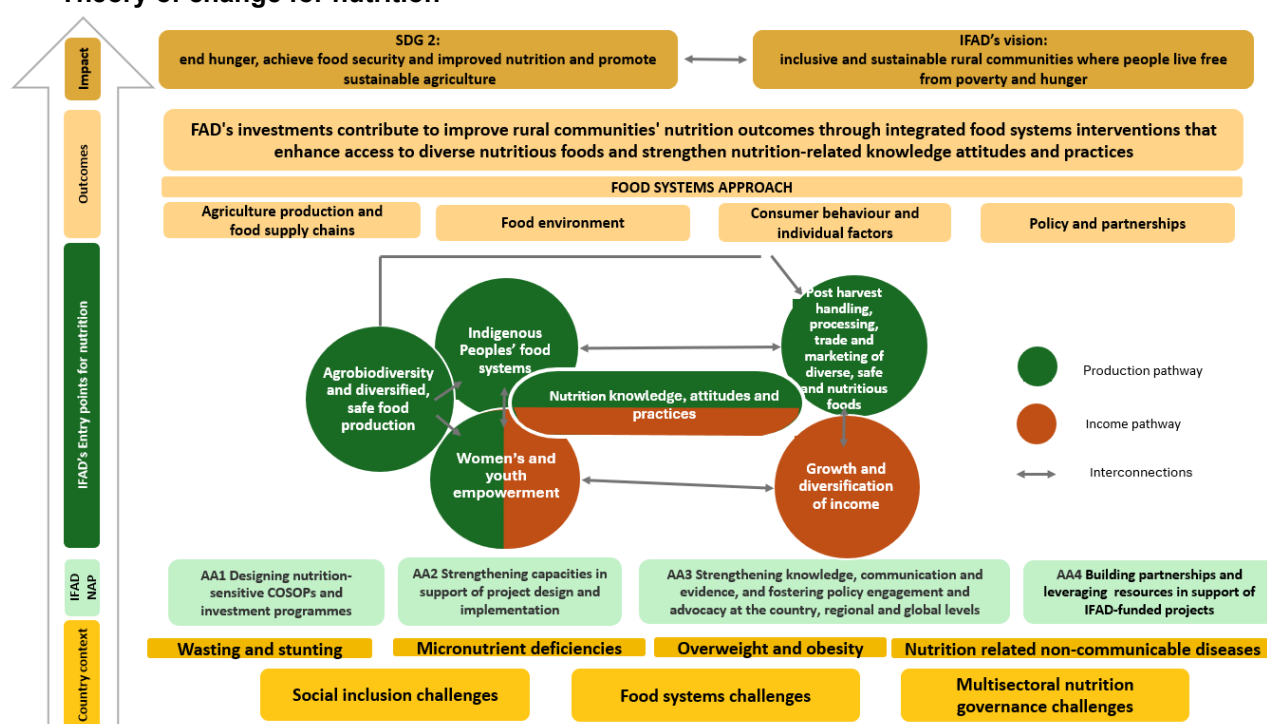
aims to support Member States in ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

30. In order for IFAD to achieve its vision of inclusive and sustainable rural communities where people live free from poverty and hunger, its goal for nutrition is to improve rural communities' nutrition outcomes. This will be achieved through integrated food systems interventions that enhance access to diverse nutritious foods and strengthen nutrition-related knowledge attitudes and practices. Results will be measured through the corporate core indicators, at output level by the number of persons provided with targeted support to improve their nutrition, and at outcome level by the MDD-W, and the knowledge, attitudes and practices indicators.
31. Focusing on the three key dimensions of food systems – food value chains, food environments and consumer behaviour,<sup>13</sup> IFAD promotes sustainable and diversified food production, post-harvest solutions, the conservation of biodiversity and market access to increase the purchasing power of vulnerable rural people. Additionally, IFAD's investments support equitable food systems policies and foster partnerships to achieve nutrition outcomes. IFAD's investments also strengthen nutrition knowledge and foster positive behaviour change through targeted nutrition education. Through an inclusive people-centred and integrated approach, and using context-specific pathways, nutrition-sensitive agriculture contributes to sustainable and equitable food systems.
32. In order to integrate nutrition into IFAD's food systems investments and achieve equitable access to diverse, nutritious and safe foods for IFAD's target group, two impact pathways, as mentioned above, and six interlinked entry points have been identified (see annex I).
33. This NAP has retained the action areas from the previous plan, which the IOE thematic evaluation found to be highly relevant, while enhancing and expanding the activities associated with each area, based on identified gaps. Achieving nutrition outcomes at the country level will depend on successfully implementing these interlinked action areas: (i) designing nutrition-sensitive COSOPs and investment programmes; (ii) strengthening capacities in support of project design and implementation; (iii) strengthening knowledge, communication and evidence, and fostering policy engagement and advocacy at the country, regional and global levels; and (iv) building partnerships and leveraging resources in support of IFAD-funded projects. This is demonstrated in the diagrammatic representation of the theory of change shown in figure 1 below.

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<sup>13</sup> IFAD's food systems approach for healthy diets is specified in the appendix.

Figure 1  
Theory of change for nutrition



## C. NAP action areas

### 34. Action area 1 - Designing nutrition-sensitive COSOPs and investment programmes

35. Since 2016, nutrition has been mainstreamed in all COSOPs, except for countries on the verge of shifting from the low-income to middle-income category. Also, since 2019, IFAD has met and surpassed its nutrition targets, with a significant share of both IFAD11 and IFAD12 projects being nutrition-sensitive. IFAD aims to strengthen evidence-based integration of NSA into COSOPs and investment programmes through a multisectoral approach that leverages complementarity with government programmes and actors on the ground, particularly United Nations agencies, NGOs and the private sector. This will contribute to defining national nutrition outcomes in line with specific country contexts, national food systems transformation pathways and relevant policies, strategies and action plans.

### 36. Action area 2 - Strengthening capacities in support of project design and implementation

37. The quality targets for NSA projects set by the NAP 2019–2025, measured through supervision and midterm review ratings, were exceeded both at the global and regional level (see annex III). Nutrition-related knowledge management products, capacity-building, SSTC and peer-to-peer learning events have been instrumental in achieving these quality objectives, with results well above the set target of 50 per cent. This highlights the importance of consistently promoting and providing targeted technical assistance that considers specific contexts, as well as ensuring the availability of human and financial resources to achieve IFAD's commitments on nutrition.

38. Additional technical assistance is still needed to address staff capacity gaps, limited NSA specialists, and weak nutrition monitoring systems, which constrain effective implementation and scaling of nutrition-sensitive activities, challenges that are

more pronounced in fragile contexts.<sup>14</sup> This updated NAP 2026–2031 aims to build on previous positive outcome and further strengthen the capacities of IFAD staff, consultants, project management units, civil society organizations including youth, farmers' organizations and Indigenous Peoples, local partners and private sector actors. Capacity-building initiatives will be needs-driven, cost-effective and tailored to regional, subregional and country contexts.

39. **Action area 3 - Strengthening knowledge, communication and evidence, and fostering policy engagement and advocacy at the country, regional and global levels**
40. Considering the evolving global nutrition landscape – marked by the rise of nutrition-related non communicable diseases, and the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity) often coexisting in the same context – IFAD's portfolio will adapt to more effectively address these challenges.<sup>15</sup> A key element of this adaptation will be the development and dissemination of strong evidence-based knowledge products to support the NSA approach, with a focus on preventing and managing non-communicable diseases and tackling overweight and obesity, including by leveraging on partnerships with sister organizations, such as FAO.
41. IFAD will prioritize the generation of robust evidence to support the integration of nutrition-sensitive metrics, such as MDD-W, into the global framework. This approach aims to fill critical knowledge gaps, inform country operations, and emphasize the critical role of healthy diets in driving food systems transformation. The evidence generated will be widely disseminated through digital platforms, knowledge hubs, toolkits, case studies and policy engagement initiatives to raise awareness, foster collaboration and strengthen advocacy at country, regional and global levels. Ultimately, these efforts will promote more equitable access to nutritious diets and enhance nutrition-sensitive agriculture across IFAD-supported programmes.
42. **Action area 4 – Building partnerships and leveraging resources in support of IFAD-funded projects.**
43. IFAD has gained significant relevance and visibility in global initiatives, highlighting the importance of showcasing its investments and actions in NSA. To further strengthen its role, IFAD will build on existing partnerships and establish new ones as needed to enhance the implementation impact of its NSA investments. This includes focused attention in fragile contexts, strengthening engagement with the private sector and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and identifying climate-resilient local solutions to combat malnutrition.
44. Partnerships with development agencies, the other Rome-based agencies, and UN Nutrition members will be reinforced to support smallholders and agrifood MSMEs, promote healthy diets, and enhance food security and nutrition in vulnerable communities, including in fragile situations. Activities will include capacity-building, joint planning, technical assistance,<sup>16</sup> innovative campaigns, and leveraging investments to deliver well-coordinated, One UN Initiatives with strong country ownership.<sup>17</sup>
45. The IFAD nutrition team has evolved and grown since 2016, including additional specialists at headquarters and Junior Professional Officers,<sup>18</sup> and through IFAD decentralization with senior specialists based in the regional offices. The

<sup>14</sup> Addressing nutrition in fragile situations is detailed in the appendix.

<sup>15</sup> The food systems approach to address overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases is detailed in the appendix.

<sup>16</sup> IFAD, WFP. 2024. Enhancing Partnership between IFAD and WFP: Action Plan on Joint Work in Fragile Situations.

<sup>17</sup> IFAD. 2023. Report of the Consultation on the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources: Building Rural Resilience for a Food-Secure Future.

<sup>18</sup> Two Junior Professional Officers are being sponsored by France and Switzerland.

establishment of a consultants roster has contributed to strengthen the provision of technical assistance to IFAD-financed projects. Supplementary funds, primarily from Canada, Germany and Norway, have facilitated an increase in the number of professionals and supported capacity-building initiatives, including regional workshops on nutrition-sensitive agriculture. While these additional funds have been instrumental in supporting IFAD's nutrition-sensitive actions, the amount mobilized remains small compared to other thematic areas. Continued resource mobilization, including through grants, is crucial to build upon past achievements and ensure continued provision of technical support for investments.

46. IFAD will continue to look for opportunities to leverage IFAD's budget with supplementary funds resources. The organization will also update the consultants roster at the regional level and develop guidelines to mobilize financial resources for nutrition. Additionally, IFAD will monitor climate finance contributions to projects that are nutrition-sensitive.
47. The four key action areas, including outputs and activities, are detailed in annex II.

#### **D. Implementation of NAP**

48. Implementation of the NAP 2026–2031 represents a corporate endeavour requiring commitment and collaboration among all relevant departments and divisions, with the Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division having an overall coordination role with respect to delivery, monitoring and reporting.
49. Implementation will follow an adaptive approach, guided by regular progress assessments and responding to emerging challenges, opportunities and iterative learning, with updates to the action plan effected as necessary from time to time. Implementation progress will be monitored through internal management systems. Management will report progress highlights, including against relevant replenishment commitments and targets, through the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE).
50. The implementation of NAP 2026–2031 is not expected to involve any notable additional costs thanks to the adoption of more streamlined delivery modalities and will largely be funded by IFAD administrative budgets approved from year to year. As outlined in action area 4, efforts to mobilize additional resources to support new or existing strategic initiatives will be pursued as needed, for example through IFAD's grants programme and when relevant partnership or supplementary funding opportunities arise.

## Entry points for nutrition-sensitive agriculture investments

### 1. **Agrobiodiversity and diversified, safe food production**

In order to improve diet quality, projects need to invest in a variety of nutrient-rich foods – fruits, vegetables, animal-sourced foods (including livestock, fish and insects where culturally appropriate), bio-fortified crops, underutilized species, and staples like grains and tubers.<sup>19</sup> Sustainable production through agroecology has proved to be an effective approach as it builds on local biodiversity and neglected and under-utilized species, improves soil and pest management, and integrates land, vegetation and water systems. The nutrition-climate-biodiversity nexus<sup>20</sup> will be embedded in production strategies through climate resilience, sustainable use of resources and environmental health considerations. Infrastructure also plays a key role in safe and sustainable food production, for instance in ensuring safe water availability for production and human consumption.<sup>21</sup>

### 2. **Processing, trade and marketing of nutritious foods**

A nutrition-sensitive agriculture approach lens will be applied across the food value chain – from inputs, post-harvest handling, processing, retailing and marketing – to enhance availability and access to nutritious foods. Projects need to promote food safety, reduce losses and foster innovations that connect producers to consumers around healthy, affordable and sustainable foods, including through enhanced public procurement of local nutritious foods. Improved labelling and marketing can further help consumers make informed, healthy choices.

### 3. **Growth and diversification of incomes**

While increased incomes for rural people alone does not automatically translate into improved nutrition, it is demonstrated to be effective when combined with nutrition education and women and youth empowerment interventions.<sup>22,23</sup> Investments that support income-generating activities on and off farm will need to invest in nutrition education and social and behaviour change communication to effectively achieve nutrition outcomes. The private sector<sup>24</sup> plays a cross-cutting role in driving both income growth and improved nutrition outcomes. Through investments in nutrition-sensitive value chains, and processing, trade, and marketing of nutritious foods, private actors create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities that support income diversification for rural communities. These activities can enhance local food availability, stabilize supply chains and address structural barriers to nutrition.

### 4. **Women and youth empowerment**

Women's education, control over resources, and participation in value chains are vital for improved household nutrition.<sup>25,26</sup> All IFAD-financed projects promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Targeted support to adolescent girls through economic empowerment, education, behaviour change and access to services is a viable strategy to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition as it helps delay early marriages and pregnancies and equips women with the right knowledge and skills for their well-being. Indigenous women have a key role to play in achieving nutrition outcomes as custodians of biodiversity and bearers of rich traditional knowledge systems that are passed on to new generations. Youth

<sup>19</sup> World Bank. Improving Nutrition Through Multisectoral Approaches Agriculture and Rural Development.

<sup>20</sup> The nutrition-climate-biodiversity nexus in IFAD's investments is explained in the appendix.

<sup>21</sup> IFAD's approach on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in nutrition-sensitive agriculture is detailed in the appendix, in the paragraph titled WASH.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 19.

<sup>23</sup> FAO. 2017. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems in practice: Options for intervention.

<sup>24</sup> A description of engaging with the private sector for improved nutrition outcomes is included in the appendix.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, Lisa C., et al. 2003. The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries. International Food Policy Research Institute Research Report 131. Washington, D.C. International Food Policy Research Institute.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy E, Kershaw M, Coates J. Food systems: Pathways for improved diets and nutrition. Current Developments in Nutrition. 2018. vol. 2, no. 9.

engagement is key in driving innovation and integrating nutrition in sustainable food systems and at every step of the value chain. The rural-urban nexus and farm-to-school programmes and e-marketing of nutritious foods are viable opportunities to empower youth as advocates for healthy diets, climate resilience and social equity.

5. **Indigenous Peoples' food systems**

Despite their nutritional richness, Indigenous Peoples' food systems are often undervalued. In line with the Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, IFAD will contribute to ensuring the protection and preservation of Indigenous Peoples' food systems, which are strongly interconnected with their secure access rights over their lands, territories and natural resources, as well as their cultural, social and spiritual well-being. In its investments, IFAD will promote: (i) diverse and Indigenous food sources, and cultural and social practices linked to food gathering and production; (ii) agroecological and territorial management practices; and (iii) the availability, accessibility, affordability and consumption of diverse, nutritious foods, including neglected and underutilized species and their genetic protection.

6. **Nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices**

This entry point is fundamental and cross-cutting to achieve nutrition outcomes. Projects need to implement behaviour change communication and nutrition education focused on food selection, preparation, hygiene and environmental health as well as food safety in value chains. Promoting low-impact diets and traditional food practices – including the use of local biodiversity and underutilized species – can improve rural communities' nutrition and sustainability. Nutrition education for agricultural extension is key and implies integrating nutritional knowledge and practices into agricultural training and advisory services, including producers' groups, enterprises and private sector actors across the value chain. Social and behaviour change communication campaigns specifically targeting women and youth have proven to be a powerful tool in enhancing nutrition outcomes in IFAD financed projects, including through partnerships with United Nations agencies.

## IFAD Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031

ACTION AREA 1: DESIGNING NUTRITION-SENSITIVE COSOPS AND INVESTMENT PROGRAMMES	
<b>OUTCOME 1.</b> Using an integrated and socially inclusive approach: a food systems framework is applied in COSOPs and projects to enhance access to diverse, safe and nutritious foods and improve nutritional outcomes for direct beneficiary populations.	
ACTIVITIES	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
<b>Activity 1.1.</b> Undertake a comprehensive desk review of poverty, vulnerability and fragility assessment including nutrition and social inclusion situation analysis for COSOPs.	Ongoing
<b>Activity 1.2.</b> Systematically integrate nutrition in 100 per cent of COSOPs and 60 per cent of project designs, in line with national food systems pathways and food security and nutrition policies, strategies and action plans, and IFAD's nutrition-sensitive approach.	Ongoing
<b>Activity 1.3.</b> Equip country teams with business cases on investing in NSA to support project design and facilitate engagement with governments and partners on the ground.	Ongoing
<b>Activity 1.4.</b> Establish integrated mainstreaming coordination meetings to ensure coherent integration of nutrition, social inclusion (gender, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities) and environment and climate change considerations from the outset of COSOP development (common to GAP/NAP/RYP).	By 2026
<b>Activity 1.5.</b> Explore the revision of design criteria and supervision markers for nutrition, gender and youth (common to GAP/NAP/RYP action plans).	By 2028
ACTION AREA 2: STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES IN SUPPORT OF PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION	
<b>OUTCOME 2.</b> Strengthened quality of IFAD NSA investments through improved technical knowledge and strengthened capacity of IFAD staff in key roles, country teams, project management teams and partners (government institutions, private sector, Indigenous Peoples, farmers, women and youth organizations, and NGOs) to advocate for design and implement nutrition-sensitive agriculture projects.	
ACTIVITIES	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
<b>Activity 2.1.</b> Conduct at least six knowledge-sharing events at regional division level for IFAD staff, PMUs and implementing partners on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems, taking into consideration all forms of malnutrition.	By 2031
<b>Activity 2.2.</b> Carry out at least one training session every year for staff, PMUs and consultants supporting the nutrition portfolio to ensure they stay abreast of the latest developments and adhere to the specified procedures when providing technical support to IFAD's nutrition-sensitive projects.	By 2031
<b>Activity 2.3.</b> Conduct at least one capacity-building session (nutrition clinics) targeting PMUs, local partners and key actors during the first two years of NSA projects.	By 2031
<b>Activity 2.4.</b> Develop and deliver a unified regional training programme on integrated social inclusion, covering targeting, nutrition, gender and youth-sensitive approaches for IFAD staff and consultants, PMUs and implementing partners (common to GAP/NAP/RYP action plans).	By 2031
<b>Activity 2.5.</b> Strategically carry out gap-filling and needs-based nutrition clinics to strengthen capacities of PMUs and enhance project implementation quality.	Ongoing
<b>Activity 2.6.</b> Following finalization of Nutrition Action Plan 2026–2031, update guidelines for supervision and midterm reviews of nutrition-sensitive investments.	By 2027
ACTION AREA 3: STRENGTHENING KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNICATION AND EVIDENCE, AND FOSTERING POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY AT THE COUNTRY, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS	

<b>OUTCOME 3.</b> Improved generation, dissemination and use of evidence on nutrition-sensitive agriculture in food systems.	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME</b>
<b>Activity 3.1.</b> Generate strategic nutrition communication and knowledge-sharing guidance with an accompanying toolkit focusing on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and make it accessible at a one-stop point internally and externally.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.2.</b> Create a repository of IFAD's knowledge generated on the nutrition-sensitive agricultural approach in food systems and leverage the partnerships with the United Nations inter-agency entity UN Nutrition on a joint repository of knowledge products and a collective nutrition advocacy strategy.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.3.</b> Develop and maintain a single, integrated digital knowledge hub and e-learning collection for social inclusion, compiling resources, tools and evidence on gender, nutrition and youth (common to GAP/NAP/RYP action plans).	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.4.</b> Update the IFAD Nutrition Glossary publication.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.5.</b> Update IFAD nutrition guidance, how-to-do notes and toolkits to align with the updated NAP, including by strengthening the focus on nutrition-sensitive agriculture pathways that address overweight and obesity.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.6.</b> Develop and disseminate a strategy to integrate school-based interventions in IFAD-funded projects, including a mapping of IFAD-funded school-based nutrition activities.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.7.</b> Develop five case studies (one per region) on innovative initiatives for nutrition-sensitive agriculture emerging from IFAD's investments, also focusing on intersectionality with mainstreaming priorities (e.g. gender, youth, climate, biodiversity).	By 2031
<b>Activity 3.8.</b> Use ODE IFAD13 impact assessments of projects with nutrition-focused interventions to distil key lessons learned to feed ongoing and new nutrition-sensitive investments.	By 2031
<b>Activity 3.9.</b> Update COI's nutrition questionnaires MDD-W and KAP in order to incorporate assessment of the consumption of food groups that relate to increased risk of overweight and obesity and NCDs.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.10.</b> Develop a compendium of additional project level indicators that capture immediate and medium-term progress towards nutrition objectives to be voluntarily adopted at project design phase.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.11.</b> Develop a user-friendly template for the analysis and presentation of MDD-W results.	By 2026
<b>Activity 3.12.</b> Develop a pilot programme for cost-benefit analysis of home garden (or school-based) activities.	By 2028
<b>Activity 3.13.</b> Support the development of at least two country-level policies on NSA and healthy diets in close cooperation with governments and leveraging the in-country presence of partners such as United Nations agencies and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement.	By 2031
<b>Activity 3.14.</b> Participate in nutrition-related policy, advocacy and knowledge-sharing platforms (RBAs, UNSCN, UN Network for SUN/REACH, CFS, African Union, NEPAD, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, IFNA and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Rome Nutrition Week).	By 2031
<b>Activity 3.15.</b> Contribute to global food security and nutrition reports and share IFAD's country experiences in mainstreaming nutrition-sensitive agriculture (e.g. the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, the Global Nutrition Report, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, Nutrition for Growth and the Rural Development Report).	By 2031
<b>ACTION AREA 4: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND LEVERAGING RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF IFAD-FUNDED PROJECTS</b>	
<b>OUTCOME 4:</b> Strengthened partnerships at the global, regional and national levels with key partners, and resources secured to mainstream nutrition within IFAD investments.	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME</b>



<b>Activity 4.1.</b> Strengthen partnerships at the global, regional and country levels (UN Nutrition, SUN, United Nations regional food systems task force, United Nations sister organizations (e.g. in fragile contexts including working across the spectrum of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus school-based activities) to benefit IFAD's operations, improve investment visibility and advocate for investments in NSA.	By 2031
<b>Activity 4.2.</b> Develop at least three new strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies, academia, research institutions and development organizations at country and regional levels.	By 2031
<b>Activity 4.3.</b> Enhance cooperation with farmers' organizations, Indigenous Peoples' organizations and networks and youth organizations at both the country and the regional levels to leverage their roles as policy advocates and grassroots groups to promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture.	By 2031
<b>Activity 4.4.</b> Develop operational guidelines on engagement with the private sector to guide county teams and strengthen engagement and partnerships for nutrition-sensitive agriculture investments.	By 2027
<b>Activity 4.5.</b> Establish and maintain a consolidated roster at regional level of vetted consultants with expertise in nutrition with operational knowledge in social inclusion (common to GAP/NAP/RYP action plans).	By 2031
<b>Activity 4.6.</b> Develop and execute strategic guidelines to mobilize financial resources for nutrition.	By 2028
<b>Activity 4.7.</b> Monitor share of climate finance in NSA projects.	Ongoing

## Key results and lessons

1. Over the past decade, IFAD has intensified its focus on nutrition, starting with the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD10). Two nutrition action plans (NAPs) were developed, for the periods 2016–2018 and 2019–2025, respectively, to promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture.
2. As of December 2024, implementation of the NAP 2019–2025 has significantly advanced nutrition mainstreaming across IFAD's portfolio, with measurable progress across all five action areas. Below is a synthesis of achievements against the NAP 2019–2025 and key lessons for each of the previous NAP's action areas used as a foundation for developing this updated NAP.

### Action area 1: Designing nutrition-sensitive COSOPS and projects

#### 3. Achievements:

- Since 2016, nutrition has been mainstreamed in all country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs), except in countries close to exceeding the Graduation Discussion Income for three consecutive years prior to the start of an IFAD financing cycle.
- Nutrition has been integrated through country nutrition assessments, identification of strategies to address nutrition issues, and the theory of change with nutrition outcomes, outputs, activities and indicators.
- IFAD has consistently met and surpassed its nutrition targets, with 62 per cent of IFAD11 projects and 60 per cent of IFAD12 projects being nutrition-sensitive.

#### 4. Key lessons:

- Government engagement is stronger when nutrition is nationally prioritized and supported by blended grant-loan financing.
- Governments may be reluctant in allocating loan resources to nutrition-sensitive agriculture because they often perceive it as low-return.
- Nutrition pathways and activities must be clearly defined, budgeted and fully embedded in project design to achieve impact.

### Action area 2: Capacity to implement

#### 5. Achievements:

- Since 2019, IFAD has organized 13 training, capacity-building and experience-sharing events, more than double the NAP 2019–2025 target of six.
- The quality of nutrition-sensitive projects has been high, with 82 per cent receiving satisfactory ratings at supervision and 66 per cent meeting midterm review standards, both well above the 50 per cent target.

#### 6. Key lessons:

- Recruiting dedicated nutrition-sensitive agriculture specialists early in project management units (PMUs) significantly improves project execution.
- Many PMUs lack nutrition experts or assign multiple themes to a single focal point, which reduces the quality of implementation.
- Weak capacity in nutrition indicator tracking remains a challenge, as IFAD's core indicators are perceived as costly and complex, and gaps in monitoring and evaluation integration and coordination persist.
- When nutrition core outcome indicators are aligned with baseline, midterm and end-line surveys, the additional cost is minimized.

### **Action area 3: Policy influence, engagement and partnerships**

#### **7. Achievements:**

- IFAD has built strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies, the World Bank, bilateral donors, academic institutions and networks such as Slow Food and the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty.
- IFAD has actively engaged in major coalitions and initiatives including the global School Meals Coalition, Zero Hunger Coalition, Sustainable Food Systems Programme, United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Nutrition and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Coalition, and the Regional Centre of Excellence Against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM).
- IFAD has strengthened collaboration with the other United Nations Rome-based agencies through initiatives such as joint school feeding programmes with the World Food Programme.
- IFAD has actively participated in global platforms such as Nutrition for Growth, food systems coalitions and UN Nutrition, which has enhanced its global recognition.

#### **8. Key lessons:**

- Most partnerships remain concentrated at headquarters level, with limited operationalization at the country level.
- Cofinancing of projects with other international financial institutions is difficult due to diverse institutional priorities and indicators.
- Governments often do not recognize IFAD as a key nutrition actor in the policy space.
- Stronger policy engagement at the national level and integration of nutrition into loan-supported reforms are required.

### **Action area 4: Knowledge, communications and evidence**

#### **9. Achievements:**

- IFAD has developed key knowledge products including how-to-do notes on nutrition-sensitive COSOPs and projects, a manual on nutrition-sensitive value chains, guidance on neglected and underutilized species, and a digital toolbox on Indigenous Peoples' food systems.
- IFAD has strengthened capacity through training and peer-to-peer learning, and has co-developed courses with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on sustainable food value chains, home-grown school feeding and food loss analysis.

#### **10. Key lessons:**

- Knowledge-sharing remains limited at both project and country levels.
- There is a need to systematize the collection and use of lessons learned, good practices and evidence across all levels.
- Better mechanisms are required to enhance learning, advocacy and the scaling up of nutrition-sensitive agriculture approaches.

### **Action area 5: Human and financial resources**

#### **11. Achievements:**

- IFAD has expanded nutrition staffing at both headquarters and regional levels.

- A roster of over 60 nutrition consultants has been developed to support project implementation.
- Between 2019 and 2024, IFAD mobilized US\$12 million in supplementary funds and US\$1.78 million in grants. Key funding sources have included:
  - Canada (2013–2019), which contributed US\$5 million to launch nutrition mainstreaming and financed two specialists and one administrative staff member.
  - Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (2019–2025), which provided US\$6.6 million to strengthen food systems integration in nine projects across seven countries and financed a P-3 specialist, two temporary professional officers, additional technical experts, one administrative staff member, and capacity-building and nutrition monitoring.
  - The Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, which contributed US\$267,750 to reinforce the climate–nutrition nexus.
  - Governments, which supported four junior professional officers within the nutrition team, including three funded by France and one by Switzerland.

## 12. **Key lessons:**

- The demand for technical support in design and implementation exceeds the available capacity. The headquarters nutrition team is overloaded, with 124 ongoing nutrition-sensitive agriculture projects.
- The consultant roster has uneven regional representation, and short-notice contracting often limits expert availability.
  - Supplementary funds have been instrumental in expanding technical support.
  - There is potential to leverage additional financial resources such as climate finance and strengthen the climate-biodiversity-nutrition nexus.
- Regular updates and wider promotion of the nutrition consultants roster, particularly in multiple languages, are needed to ensure equitable regional support.

## Thematic spotlights

1. The spotlights provided below, show the new dimensions that this updated NAP will focus upon, such as overweight and obesity, biodiversity, nutrition in fragile contexts, and engagement with the private sector.

### **IFAD's Food Systems Approach for Healthy Diets<sup>27</sup>**

2. Evidence suggests that adopting a more integrated food systems approach is essential for reducing all forms of malnutrition and NCDs.<sup>28</sup> To optimize IFAD's investments, suitable pathways for enhancing agriculture-nutrition linkages will leverage on entry points within food systems that align with IFAD's strengths and focus areas and address nutrition challenges in food system approach.
3. These challenges span various dimensions of the food system. In agricultural production and the supply chain, factors like limited access to seeds/planting materials, land, water, and energy, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and post-harvest food loss hinder sustainability. In the food environment, critical issues include food safety<sup>29</sup>, unsafe processing, poor food quality, and limited access to clean water. Access to nutritious local foods is affected by weak marketing, poor labeling, and reduced purchasing power, while the rise in processed foods limits healthy choices. Consumer behavior and individual factors such as intra-household/community resource allocation and perceptions play a significant role in equitable access to and actual consumption of healthy diets and can lead to an increased risk to several forms of malnutrition. These challenges disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples. Addressing these interconnected barriers is essential for creating more resilient and equitable food systems. To tackle the challenges that hinder access to healthy diets for everyone, IFAD will leverage its comparative advantages including its direct partnership with UN agencies and other actors, governments, private sector and target group, resource mobilization, and extensive rural investment portfolio to support small-scale producers in promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture and combating all forms of malnutrition<sup>30</sup>.

### **Nutrition Climate-biodiversity nexus in IFAD's Investments**

4. Biodiversity loss threatens livelihoods and food systems, reducing resilience and adaptive capacities of rural communities. This is especially critical for vulnerable rural households, whose production system and livelihoods depend directly on health and biological diversity of these ecosystems. About 70 per cent of the world's poor people depend on wild species, 1/5 people rely on wild plants, algae and fungi for food and income<sup>31</sup>. Biodiversity at all levels—genetic, species, and ecosystem—

<sup>27</sup> Healthy diets are those diets that are of adequate quantity and quality to achieve optimal growth and development of all individuals and support functioning and physical, mental and social wellbeing at all life stages and physiological needs. Healthy diets are safe, diverse, balanced, and based on nutritious foods. They help to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity and lower the risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases. The exact make-up of healthy diets varies depending on an individual's characteristics (e.g. age, gender, lifestyle and degree of physical activity), geographical, demographical, cultural patterns and contexts, food preferences, availability of foods from local, regional and international sources, and dietary customs. Healthy dietary practices start early in life – breastfeeding fosters healthy growth and improves cognitive development and has long-term health benefits. WHO publishes guidance for healthy diets. Many national health authorities publish specific dietary guidance. Regional health organizations, where applicable, may publish documents related to healthy diets and specific dietary advice as well. CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> This results in an integrated approach that extends from access to land, fisheries, livestock, pastoralism, natural resource management, social inclusion and empowerment of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples' and persons with disabilities, rural employment and finance, social protection, environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation among others. Furthermore, this approach is crucial to foster environments that promote healthy diets and lifestyles. That is basically IFAD's investments that apply a nutrition sensitive agriculture lens.

<sup>29</sup> "Food safety is the absence, or safe, acceptable levels, of hazards in food that may harm the health of consumers. Food borne hazards can be microbiological, chemical or physical in nature and are often invisible to the plain eye; bacteria, viruses or pesticide residues are some examples." (FAO food safety website).

<sup>30</sup> As mentioned in IFAD13 Replenishment Report.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Government, 2021. State of the Environment, 2021.

is essential for nutrition, food security, and dietary quality and diversity<sup>32</sup>. It serves as the primary source of a variety of essential foods and medicines contributing to healthy diets, while improving livelihoods, promoting gender equality, and ensuring social equity.

5. Protecting and promoting biodiversity, as well as developing diversified and resilient agricultural systems, directly enhances dietary diversity by increasing the availability and accessibility of nutrient-rich foods and indigenous species. Practices such as agroforestry contribute to the conservation and production of nutrient-rich crops while also promoting soil and water conservation, protecting wetlands and forests thus leading to a healthy ecosystem. Healthy ecosystem closely linked to food stability and have ability of helping to buffer climate shocks but also notably reduce pollution which has also a direct impact on people health and food safety.
6. In IFAD13, IFAD specifically acknowledge the relevance of this nexus and committed to utilize climate and biodiversity finance to promote access to nutritious, diverse and safe foods and strengthen rural communities' resilience to climate change. This includes focusing on neglected and underutilized species, indigenous seeds, and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and practices. IFAD will also collaborate with partners to explore sustainable approaches that advance gender equality and women's empowerment while integrating nutrition outcomes<sup>33</sup>.

#### **Leveraging IFAD's water investments to boost nutrition outcomes in rural areas**

7. Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) are foundational to achieving lasting nutrition outcomes, particularly in rural communities where agriculture is the primary livelihood and malnutrition rates remain high. Poor WASH conditions—such as lack of access to clean water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene practices—exacerbate undernutrition by increasing the burden of disease, especially children's diarrheal infections and environmental enteric dysfunction, which inhibit nutrient absorption. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture can only reach its full potential when WASH is integrated to create a holistic environment for health and well-being. This is why IFAD, under its IFAD13 framework, is strategically prioritizing water management and infrastructure as central to its mission of improving food security and nutrition, including recognition that water security and nutrition are inextricably linked. IFAD's investments in climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, and ecosystem restoration—such as agroforestry and **watershed management**—enhance soil health, secure **water availability**, and improve **water quality**. These measures not only support environmental goals but also reduce health risks associated with water scarcity and contamination, which are significant barriers to improved nutrition.
8. Between 2010 and 2023, IFAD allocated approximately 60% of its USD1.385 billion in rural infrastructure investments—about USD830 million—to water management. This included substantial funding for irrigation, renewable energy for water use, sanitation and waste systems, and safe drinking water. Notably, about USD60 million was specifically directed at **improving access to basic drinking water, sanitation and waste management, directly impacting rural nutrition** by reducing illness and improving hygiene in food preparation and consumption.
9. There are numerous opportunities to enhance IFAD's work in water security, particularly in designing and implementing investments that maximize positive and interconnected impacts on water, food security, and nutrition. This approach contributes to SDG2 and 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). To achieve this, there is a need to improve donor coordination, strengthen institutions, engage the private

<sup>32</sup> World Health Organization and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2015: Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health A State of Knowledge Review.

<sup>33</sup> IFAD13 Replenishment consultation report.

sector, and attract climate finance. By viewing water as a tool for climate adaptation and nutrition, IFAD aims to deliver multiple benefits through its investments.

### **Engaging the Private Sector for Improved Nutrition Outcomes**

10. As highlighted in IFAD private sector operational strategy, one of the pathways adopted by IFAD to drive positive benefits for IFAD's target group through higher private sector engagement in rural areas and food systems, leads also to improved nutrition outcomes<sup>34</sup>. The pathway's rationale is that supporting the local private sector, especially MSMEs, women, and young entrepreneurs, can benefit IFAD's target group—small-scale producers and poor rural populations. By enhancing connections between these groups and larger companies, they can access jobs, income, markets, and financial services. This local market development can improve the availability and affordability of diverse quality foods, positively impacting nutrition. To this extent, IFAD has been promoting more inclusive nutrition-sensitive value chains (NSVCs) and the public-private-partnership-producer (4P) model to respond to the asymmetry of power between small-scale producers and bigger private sector actors. For instance, IFAD conducted studies in Nigeria's Katsina and Sokoto states under its Climate Change Adaptation and Agribusiness Support Programme (CASP) to develop NSVC projects for smallholders. The research identified cowpea, groundnut, soybean, millet, and sorghum as key crops to improve nutrition and livelihoods. Smallholders face nutrition challenges, leading to high rates of wasting and stunting in children and undernutrition in women, which are exacerbated by seasonal variations. Promoting these crops can enhance diets, empower women, and build resilience to climate change, while also being economically beneficial for smallholders.

### **IFAD Funded School-based Interventions**

11. **Schools are increasingly recognized as a relevant platform for enhancing the nutrition of children and rural communities.** School meals are an entry point for multiple SDGs through their positive impact on access to nutritious food for children, school enrolment, poverty reduction and girls' education. Additionally, nutrition activities in schools play as a catalyst for food systems transformation by generating demand for sustainably produced, nutrient-rich foods, supporting rural smallholder farmers, raising awareness of household members on the importance of diet diversity and quality and teaching children about healthy eating habits and sustainable food choices, as they are a crucial part of the future decision makers.
12. IFAD recognizes the potential of nutrition activities in schools to not only enhance children's health and nutrition but also to contribute to the development of sustainable and equitable local food systems. This is achieved through various approaches, including for instance improving nutrition education, increasing availability and production of diverse, safe, and nutritious foods, and the promotion of Indigenous food species. Additionally, nutrition education in schools has the potential to drive behavioural changes within targeted communities, fostering demand for safe and nutritious foods. For example, in Lao PDR, the [PICSA](#) project improves the national school meal programme by coordinating fresh produce from local farmers and school gardens, benefiting 160 schools. These gardens diversify students' diets and provide practical learning about nutrition and agriculture. The project also promotes hygienic practices by supplying cooking kits and enhancing water access in schools.
13. IFAD will continue and strengthen its engagement in the School Meal Coalition, an initiative launched within the framework of the Food Systems Summit in 2021 to bring together governments, international organisations, civil society, private sector entities and research institutions to scale-up and improve school meal programmes

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<sup>34</sup> IFAD, 2024. Private Sector Operational Strategy 2025–2030.

globally and through collaborations with Rome-Based Agencies and South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

### **Addressing Nutrition in Fragile Situations**

14. Fragility<sup>35</sup> is present in different forms in many rural areas where IFAD operates, is often closely linked to poverty and food insecurity, and it can be an important obstacle to sustainable progress out of poverty. IFAD's work in fragile contexts is guided by four principles: i. build long-term resilience, working with rural communities and particularly rural women, girls, and vulnerable groups to reduce their vulnerability to both natural and man-made shocks, countering the negative impact that social, institutional and environmental fragility can have on people's vulnerability, ii. focus on prevention, which entails identifying and addressing drivers of fragility that are within IFAD's scope of action and mandate and leveraging its investments into rural people's livelihoods and institutions to reduce or preventing fragility, thereby mitigating people's vulnerability, iii. the principle of do no harm, which entails that programmes are monitored and adapted as needed to avoid unintentionally exacerbating or creating new tensions and divisions. This includes embedding conflict sensitivity approaches in operations. iv. remaining engaged, wherever possible, during periods of crisis and emergency, in order to preserve development and resilience gains, protect local service delivery and benefits to local populations and identify opportunities to strengthen rural people's livelihoods that may be created by the work of humanitarian or peacebuilding actors. IFAD addresses both manifestations and selected causes of fragility that fall within its mandate and scope of influence, under the three priority dimensions of institutional, environmental and climate, and social. This will be achieved through four practical entry points: (i) strengthening local institutions and communities for effective local governance and service delivery; (ii) increasing food and nutrition security through enhanced food systems; (iii) fostering sustainable natural resource management, including disaster preparedness and climate adaptation; and (iv) boosting the roles of rural women and youth and the empowerment of vulnerable groups in building resilient communities<sup>36</sup>.
15. All these initiatives also contribute to improved nutrition. Amid Sudan's fragile context, the IAMDP project strengthened resilience by forming 51 cooperatives with 5,891 members (48% women, 45% youth). These cooperatives improved access to inputs, finance, and training, helping farmers adopt better technologies and increase productivity. During the April 2023 conflict, cooperatives played a vital solidarity role—sustaining operations, meeting WFP contract obligations, and securing sales to humanitarian agencies despite the instability.

### **Food Systems Approach to Address Overweight, Obesity, and Non-Communicable Diseases**

16. As the global prevalence of overweight and obesity continues to rise, it is increasingly recognized as a critical public health challenge closely linked to the prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). In 2022 globally, 43% of adults were overweight and 16% obese, while 5.7% of children under five years of age were overweight. These figures are starting to surpass undernutrition data revealing that overweight and obesity are global challenges affecting all countries in the world. No country is currently on track to meet the World Health Assembly's Global Nutrition Target of halting the rise in adult obesity, and very few will meet

<sup>35</sup> IFAD Definition (2016): IFAD defines fragility as: "a condition of high vulnerability to natural and man-made shocks, often associated with an elevated risk of violence and conflict. Weak governance structures along with low-capacity institutions are a common driver and consequence of fragile situations. Fragile situations typically provide a weaker enabling environment for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation and are characterized by protracted and/or periodic crises, often with implications for smallholder agriculture and food security". Re. Strategy for Engagement in Countries with Fragile Situations in 2016.

<sup>36</sup> IFAD, 2024. Updated approach to IFAD engagement in fragile situations.



NCDs target.<sup>37</sup> Conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and certain cancers are significantly exacerbated by obesity, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated strategies. Countries must adopt multifaceted approaches that not only target individual dietary choices but also address broader systemic issues within the food environment. Integral to this effort are the concepts of nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems, which emphasize the importance of agricultural practices that prioritize production of diversified and nutritious foods.

17. By promoting diverse crop production, sustainable farming practices, and equitable access to nutritious foods, these systems can enhance food security and support healthier diets. The following key intervention strategies provide a roadmap for action in the fight against overweight and obesity, laying the foundation for healthier populations and reduced healthcare costs. The strategies and actions that encompass the food system and that can be taken by countries to address overweight and obesity within the broader context of preventing NCDs are multiple, and include<sup>38,39,40</sup>.
  - (a) **Diversified Food Production:** Encouraging the production of diverse, nutritious foods, including NUS, can help reduce obesity by improving access to healthier diets and shifting consumption away from ultra-processed, calorie-dense foods. Limited availability of nutritious foods is linked to poor diet quality and rising obesity rates, especially in low-income populations<sup>41</sup>.
  - (b) **Food Environment:** Improving access to nutritious foods, particularly in underserved areas, through natural and built food environments is essential for facilitating better dietary choices. By establishing guidelines that encourage working with local farming communities, businesses, governments can foster a healthier food environment that supports positive eating behaviors.
  - (c) **Policies:** Advocating for nutrition-sensitive trade policies can ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of nutritious foods through equitable and sustainable food systems, especially when these foods are not locally available. Policies aiming to incentivize sustainable production, supply and consumption of nutritious foods, can also help make healthy diets less costly and more affordable for all<sup>42</sup>.
  - (d) **Regulations and Standards:** Implementing food standards that limit harmful ingredients in processed foods is crucial. By promoting biofortification, enhancing compliance to the regulations, governments can help ensure that populations, especially vulnerable groups, receive essential nutrients. This approach tackles not only micronutrient deficiencies but also obesity that can lead to NCDs.
  - (e) **Food Labelling:** Clear food labelling in local languages empowers consumers to make informed choices. By enhancing transparency about nutritional content and ingredients, individuals can better understand the health implications of their food selections, encouraging healthier eating habits.

<sup>37</sup> Global Nutrition Report. 2022 Global Nutrition Report: Stronger commitments for greater action. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> World Bank. 2025. *Reshaping the Agrifood Sector for Healthier Diets: Exploring the Links between Agrifood Public Support and Diet Quality*. World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

<sup>39</sup> FAO, IFPRI. 2020. Food Policies and their Implications on Overweight and Obesity Trends in Selected Countries in the Near East and North Africa Region.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank. 2017. *An Overview of Links Between Obesity and Food Systems Implications for The Food and Agriculture Global Practice Agenda*. World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>41</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9692en>.

<sup>42</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en>.

- (f) **Consumer Behavior:** Raising awareness about food choices and good dietary practices is critical. Multisectoral policy frameworks, backed by political leadership, are essential for promoting a healthy lifestyle. Collaborative efforts involving UN organizations, private sector and NGOs are vital for implementing these strategies.