

## Food Systems Dialogues - Health Talks

### Women Nutrition: Resilience and Recovery on the Road to 2030

8 June - 5.30-6.30 pm IST, 2-3 pm CET, 8-9 am EDT

#### Session Objectives and Desired Outcomes

During the virtual launch of the Nutrition for Growth Year of Action in December 2020, the Government of Bangladesh pledged an emphasis on women's empowerment, and, at the same time, the Government of Canada made a commitment to invest in 'gender'-informed nutrition interventions. Building on their example, this session focuses on the urgent need for new and SMART commitments for food and health system interventions that build women's health and resilience and empower them in their roles as food producers and caretakers. In recognition that the wellbeing of women is essential to the strength of families, communities, and nations – and that this resilience is being tested now more than ever – this session will discuss evidence-based approaches to improve women's nutrition and increase synergies between health and food systems. The Micronutrient Forum, Standing Together for Nutrition and the Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Consortium are calling for greater levels of ambition with respect to commitments made for women's nutrition at the U.N. Food System Summit, Tokyo's Nutrition for Growth Summit, and for nutrition to be appropriately costed and integrated into global and country COVID-19 recovery efforts.

#### Context and Need

The wellbeing of women is essential to the strength of families, communities, and nations. Good nutrition for women begins at birth, continues into adolescence and enables a woman to transition healthily into adulthood – and later, motherhood if she chooses. Children who remain well-nourished have up to an 18-point higher IQ<sup>1</sup>. For girls, this creates a positive cycle of staying in school, marrying later and having higher earning potential<sup>2</sup>. As the Global Nutrition Report and 1,000 Days have highlighted – '[nutrition interventions are an underleveraged tool in the fight for women's rights](#)'.

We only have to look to the negative impacts of poor women and maternal nutrition to see the impact of failing to invest. The results are wide ranging, particularly in low- and middle-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3796166/>

<sup>2</sup> Global Nutrition Report (2020); <https://globalnutritionreport.org/blog/why-tackling-malnutrition-matters-womens-empowerment/>

income countries (LMICs) and include maternal anemia and negative pregnancy and infant outcomes - such as: low birth weight, small for gestational-age, pre-term birth, lower cognition and productivity, and greater mortality. Continuing as we are, will hinder economic and social progress<sup>3</sup>.

Around the world, the pandemic has exacerbated underlying structural inequity – creating more hunger and nutrition insecurity for vulnerable women, men, adolescents, infants and children. Given the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, in addition to escalating shocks caused by the climate crisis, women around the world are facing additional stresses affecting their resilience. The burden of care - for the ill, for shelter, for water, for food on the table, lie on a woman's shoulders. Women are often, also, food producers, making up 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries and even two-thirds of agricultural farmers in South Asia.<sup>4</sup> The case for boosting women's resilience and immunity is clear so why is more not being done?

As things stand, across countries of all income status, women often eat last and least. Many women cannot access vital health and nutrition services, have limited access to sustainable and equitable income generating opportunities, diverse and healthy diets, and are disempowered economically and within their homes. Insufficient investment targeting female farmers and entrepreneurs results in inequitable access to credit, insurance, training, technology, information and markets for women. Investment in these domains, and in other cost-effective interventions that support women's nutrition, would help to limit tradeoffs within food system. Greater investment in women's nutrition – and in the socio-economic drivers behind alarming rates of poor women's nutrition – would also lower pressure on already burdened health services and improve connections between food and health sectors.

The U.N. Year of Action on Nutrition is a chance to shine a light on women's rights to health and nutrition – and the wider factors underlying poor maternal nutrition – both as an innate human right itself, and in context of COVID-19 recovery plans. Within broader commitment-making efforts for COVID-19 recovery, the Food Systems Summit and Nutrition for Growth this year, **investments to protect women's health and improve their resilience need to be recognised for their multiplying effect on the resilience of communities.**

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<sup>3</sup> Halim, N., Spielman, K. & Larson, B. The economic consequences of selected maternal and early childhood nutrition interventions in low- and middle-income countries: a review of the literature, 2000—2013. BMC Women's Health 15, 33 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-015-0189-y>

<sup>4</sup> Oxfam <https://www.oxfam.org/en/empowering-women-farmers-end-hunger-and-poverty>

## Proposed Session Outline (60 minutes)

This hour-long session will consist of short presentations (3-5 minutes) and a moderated dialogue where session attendees will be invited to ask questions.

- **Framing and Opening** – Mrs Aisha Buhari, First Lady of the Republic of Nigeria
- **Empowering female farmers ensure access to healthy food and resilient farming communities** – Cherrie Atilano, AGREA, the Philippines.
- **Food and health system interventions to improve women & maternal nutrition and foster resilience** - Jess Fanzo, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health & Saskia Osendarp, The Micronutrient Forum
- **The role of female entrepreneurship, access to healthy foods and women's nutrition** - Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli, AACE Foods and Sahel Capital Partners, Nigeria
- **Collaborations across Food and Health systems to improve nutrition** - Michael Ojo, Country Director GAIN, Nigeria
- **Commitments for Women Nutrition in the Year of Action on Nutrition** – Jemimah Njuki, Director for Africa, IFPRI
- **Moderated Dialogue & Closing** –. Moderator is Anna Lartey, Professor of Nutrition at the University of Ghana

### Organizer

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