

UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025: priority actions on nutrition for the next five years

World Cancer Research Fund International welcomes the opportunity to feed into the revision of the priority actions for the next five years of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025 and contribute key approaches that best address tackling all forms of malnutrition, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases.

There is urgent need to prioritise actions (Action Area 3, “Social protection and nutrition education”) specifically designing and implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection policies that ensure coherence with other policy areas. This includes actions to better leverage schools as a platform for food and nutrition education and implement policies to ensure nutrition labelling on food products to inform consumers. The latter contributes to a package of policy recommendations featured in Action Area 5 (“Safe and supportive environments for nutrition at all ages”) that need further prioritisation: scaling-up implementation of regulatory policies including introduction of sugar-sweetened beverage taxes, elimination of industrially-produced trans fats, marketing restrictions and reformulation of products high in unhealthy fats, sugars and/or salt, as well as public food procurement policies that follow dietary guidelines.

It is imperative that policy approaches aimed at widening the set of healthy choices and creating a supportive environment for nutrition be regulatory rather than voluntary/self-regulatory in nature. Self-regulatory systems are ineffective at reducing the exposure and power of marketing of unhealthy food to children for example, and in order to scale-up efforts, regulatory policy recommendations like the [WHO Best Buys](#) are the preferred evidence-based standards to follow rather than CFS’s Voluntary Guidelines. The latter do not fully reflect the recommendations of mandated international bodies and normative agencies as well as not having civil society’s full support.

A further key element to be considered for there to be true coherence between social protection and other programme areas, the focus of action needs to follow the Best Buys evidence-based health recommendations in all of the areas listed under Action Area 3. Social development provides an opportunity for positive government action that promotes healthier lifestyles therefore this priority focus area must also include a systems approach that addresses the whole environment and MUST refer to protecting populations from private sector vested interests and thus not facilitate the promotion of unhealthy foods.

In adopting dietary guidelines, integrating social protection to food security and nutrition, and ensuring safe and supportive environments for nutrition, policy makers face increasing barriers and pushback from industry. Implementing evidence-based nutrition policies is essential to tackle the growing burden caused by diet-related NCDs such as cancer, heart disease and

diabetes, and regulatory measures are best positioned to limit industry interference and their efforts to promote unhealthy products. The need for mandatory regulation over voluntary self-regulatory measures is cross-cutting to all Action Areas. Policies, partnerships and dialogues that address nutrition-related commercial determinants of health must adopt rigorous principles of engagement to prevent vested interests from undermining health goals.

Industry interference is very likely to hamper the achievement of global nutrition targets: as countries begin adopting marketing restrictions for unhealthy products, the private sector adapts to a much faster rate than government regulation, with industry adopting new means of promotion through numerous media platforms. For this purpose, it is crucial to address nutrition policy needs with a systems and cross-sectoral perspective including stakeholders beyond the nutrition and health sector such as tech, media and community-based organisations.

Accountability mechanisms are needed and all actors, including the private sector, have a role to play in creating transparent, accountable and democratic food systems that deliver nutritious diets for all. Thus, addressing the role of the private sector, streamlining a global nutrition accountability infrastructure by making sure commitments are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound, reinforcing social and political accountability platforms, and strengthening the role of parliamentarians, the media and communities must be prioritized within Action Area 6.