

4D

Dialogue #2: Food security and nutrition for demographic dividend(s)

Government–Government
Policy Dialogues on
Demographic Diversity
and Dividends



INTRODUCTION

Food security and lifelong nutrition underpin development of human capital and are essential for achieving demographic dividends. Better policies and practices are key for sustainability. As leaders around the world plan for demographic change from youth bulges to population ageing, food is proving foundational. Countries face an urgent collective challenge: How can we shift to sustainable agriculture, promote healthy diets and ensure food security and adequate nutrition to enable all persons to fulfil their potential and contribute to lasting development? Despite significant population growth over the past 50 years, the world has achieved a notable decline in the burden of hunger. But that achievement has come at a high cost for our planet, persistent micronutrient deficiency and a rise in unhealthy diets – factors that have contributed to a double burden of malnutrition and hunger co-existing with overweight and obesity.

Over 100 participants from 42 countries participated in a discussion on food security and nutrition for demographic dividends during the second digital event of the quarterly **Government-Government Policy Dialogue series on Demographic Diversity and Dividend(s)** held on 11 March 2020. The 4D Series, hosted by the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Government of Germany, builds on discussions launched in 2019 at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 around policies and practices that countries can apply in population and development planning.

Six breakout groups focused on the lessons learned and current initiatives relevant to policy planning:

- Investing in maternal and infant nutrition for human capital development
- Assuring food security for school-age children
- Promoting gender equality in the context of food security and nutrition
- Growing food demand, climate change and the greening of the agriculture sector
- Expanding decent work in the agricultural sector
- Laws, policies and regulations to promote healthy diets.

This booklet provides a brief account of the dialogue with the aim of inspiring further discussions on the issues raised. It summarizes the views of a diverse group of stakeholders and features some of the many country examples shared during the event. An input paper prepared to inform discussions at the event is available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2Q4Bi5D>.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food security and nutrition contribute to demographic dividend(s) because they promote good health at all ages and enhance well-being and productivity. Food security and nutrition are essential for good health, for robust growth and development of the individual, for learning, productivity and ultimately for economic development.

In countries where the working-age population is much larger than the number of elderly and young dependents, there is a window of opportunity to harness the benefits of demographic change. Demographic dividends accrue when this favourable age structure is accompanied by major investments in the health, education and employment of young and working-age people, boosting overall productivity and economic growth. In addition, when older persons have the health and wealth to invest in younger generations, a second demographic dividend can further spur economic growth. Demographic dividends are not automatic, but depend on strategic investments and policies to ensure that individuals can realize their full potential.



The following list, though not exhaustive, captures key action points raised in this second dialogue:

- **Behavioural changes** are required in both consumption and production to create a sustainable future for agriculture.
- The **empowerment of women and girls**, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights are crucial to realizing the potential of women and young people for building sustainable food systems and harnessing demographic dividends.
- **Intensification of agricultural production** is essential to match growing and changing demand for food resulting from population growth and changing demographics, while taking climate change impacts into account.
- **Climate change** poses an increasing challenge to food systems and food security. Building resilient and greener food systems requires policies and incentives to shift away from unsustainable practices.
- **Engaging youth as producers and consumers of healthy foods** is pivotal to the future of effective food systems.
- **Laws and policies may be used** by governments to address nutrition-related health issues such as obesity, e.g. through restrictions on sodium in processed food or taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages.
- **Food safety laws for consumer protection** require capacity and resources for monitoring and enforcement over time.
- Making connections **between different fields** – e.g. between agriculture and the social sciences of demographics and economics – is necessary to attain food security.
- **Programmes providing meals at school** have the potential to support local food systems and ensure more balanced nutrition for children.
- **Women's access to land and capital**, especially in rural areas, is key to ensuring food security.
- The agriculture sector can provide **employment for women and youth** today and transform economies towards greater sustainability tomorrow.

The **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** defines food security as a state in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.



1. WOMEN AND YOUTH: HEALTH, EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

“ Women are often the guardians of food security. When they control more of the income and benefit of that, families can gain.

Rachel Snow, Branch Chief of Population and Development, Technical Division, UNFPA

Despite ample evidence that nutrition interventions in the 1,000 days from the start of pregnancy until a child reaches 2 years of age provide highly cost-effective, lifelong benefits and constitute a public health “best buy”, millions of women and infants still lack access to such basic support. Women continue to face greater food and nutrition insecurity than men, often in the same household, even if pregnant or breastfeeding. Disparity is intensified in humanitarian situations. Discussions in the breakout group “**Investing in maternal and infant nutrition for human capital development**” highlighted the importance that medical staff across the continuum of care be well educated on the benefits of healthy diets, and that these life-long effects be communicated to governments, families and young people alike. Effective strategies discussed in the group included empowering midwives to educate pregnant women and motivate healthy nutrition, addressing cultural beliefs that may limit the uptake of services, learning from the private sector to motivate young people to adopt nutritious foods, and involving religious leaders as community influencers.

► In **Eritrea**, the Minimum Integrated Household Agriculture Package (MIHAP) is a country-wide initiative that includes nutrition counselling and directly provides each beneficiary family with the agricultural resources to raise livestock and grow vegetables. MIHAP provides each household with one dairy cow or six goats, 25 chickens, two beehives, a vegetable plot and 20 trees in addition to land for crop production. This package has the potential to improve living conditions and satisfy the food and nutrition requirements for the family plus four others, as well as to add extra income by selling surplus products.

The breakout group "**Ensuring food security for school-age children**" agreed that school feeding programmes are crucial to ensure that children and adolescents are on a positive path to adulthood by supporting better school performance and improving learning, skills acquisition and attendance. School meals are also a safety net that can play a key role in ensuring continued nutrition for children even in emergency, conflict or extreme weather situations. Programmes that use products from local sources through home-grown school feeding can play a valuable role in local food systems, providing market access to small farmers. In the context of school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have designed new approaches for reaching school-age populations, for example through the provision of take-home dry rations or cash transfers. As schools reopen, re-establishment and enhancement of school feeding programmes should be a priority for "building back better" with resilient food systems that foster linkages between food, nutrition, human capital development, and economic growth.



- ▶ Several programmes in **Ghana** support women and girls and enhance food security. **LEAP (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty)** provides cash payments to extremely poor households across the country and ensures recipients receive social services and are registered for national health insurance benefits. A safety net programme for pregnant adolescents ensures that they access timely and quality maternal health and family planning services and that they are visited regularly at home; it also encourages girls to go back to school or learn a vocation. The National Health Insurance Scheme provides antenatal care, delivery, postnatal and child welfare services free of charge to registered women.

▶ In the state of Kerala in southern India, women are taking advantage of opportunities for specialized skills training in the agriculture sector provided by the agricultural university and supported by the government. The initiative supports women to form a farming service unit, where they are trained in all uses of modern machinery. Some machines, such as tractors, have been redesigned for the beneficiaries, because the dimensions are generally more suitable for men than for women.

Engaging women and youth in food systems from production to consumption levels has the potential to improve agricultural sustainability as well as family economic stability and health. Yet, the discussion in the breakout group “**Promoting gender equality in the context of food security and nutrition**” showed that women’s participation in food production is impeded by discrimination: systemic biases limit women’s access to credit for buying land and equipment, and employment creation projects emphasize harvesting jobs held by men. Discrimination also excludes women from access to and control over land, decision-making regarding crop selection and planting, and from learning technical skills such as driving a tractor. Participants emphasized the need for gender-responsive approaches to food security and nutrition policies and programmes, community dialogue on the cultural and socioeconomic barriers women face, and targeted interventions and holistic approaches to strengthen women’s access to agricultural subsidies, financing and markets. Investments in voluntary family planning as part of a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health services and the empowerment of women and girls are also critical to ensure their full participation in the sustainable development of agriculture and to create the preconditions for demographic dividends.



2. SUSTAINABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT: FOOD SYSTEMS OF THE FUTURE

“ There is a key requirement that agricultural intensification leap forward to a sustainable state, and not continue unsustainable systems leading to climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. Greening our agriculture is hugely important. This involves intensification based on agroecological principles to farm in harmony with nature, that creates decent employment opportunities in rural spaces.

Fergus Sinclair, World Agroforestry,
Kenya

Climate change is disrupting agricultural production, while the population is growing, creating higher food demands. To what extent demand will increase is a complex question and depends on many factors, including the trajectory of population growth and consumption preferences, such as meat versus vegetables. Meeting the rising need will require agricultural intensification. Participants in the breakout group on “**Growing food demand, climate change and the greening of the agriculture sector**” discussed policies and practices that favour sustainable intensification pathways. They emphasized the need to rely on natural processes instead of disruptive chemicals, to foster biodiversity, and to intensify through labour and knowledge rather than capital – to create resilient and greener food systems that look to the health of the soil, the land and people. Policies and incentives to support a shift away from unsustainable practices are critical, as is a change in lifestyles and mindsets. Technological, societal and economic innovations can further support the transformation of food systems, yet care must be taken to consider the social and economic context and to reinforce the role of smallholders and actors along the food chain and within food systems rather than decreasing their autonomy with more centralized control.



► Rural Resource Centres in **Ethiopia** seek to aid farmers, particularly young people and women, while fighting climate change. The Ethiopian Government has committed to converting about 130 governmental tree nurseries, which produce seedlings for farmers to plant, into entrepreneurial opportunities that create employment by supplying a wider range of farm inputs as well as advice on how to most effectively use them.

Taking a systems approach that takes into account food production as involving the whole cycle of activities from production through marketing and distribution is critical to improving the environment as well as employment. Agricultural intensification can create employment opportunities in rural areas, and sustainable, climate change-sensitive agricultural intensification tends to be more labour-intensive than more environmentally destructive agricultural methods. The discussion in the breakout group “**Expanding decent work in the agricultural sector**” underlined what is required to promote an inclusive and sustainable transformation of rural economies: Priorities include improving working conditions, supporting skills development, unlocking entrepreneurial potential and promoting the uptake of modern technology. The engagement of women and young people in the sustainable development of agriculture is essential. Yet even as countries move towards modernization, digitalization and productivity, they must protect vulnerable populations and subsistence agriculturalists.

A profound transformation is needed to meet the challenges of persistent malnutrition and rural poverty, aggravated by the growing consequences of climate change. The agriculture sector has the potential for sustainable solutions, and a real food-systems transformation will spur the economy, providing employment opportunities for youth and women.

▶ In **Nigeria**, the **Babban Gona** social enterprise supports small farmers who join together to form “trust groups” or a “big farm”, as the name means in Hausa. The company can raise capital cost-effectively through partners from the private sector and development financing, and offers members loans at far better terms than traditional banks and microfinance institutions. The farmers do not receive money, but quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and airtight harvest bags for the amount borrowed. The organization collects the bags in central warehouses to sell them at the best possible price.

▶ Programmes across Africa are striving to make agriculture more accessible and attractive to young people. The **Junior Farmer Field and Life School (JFFLS)** has provided training for more than 30,000 young women and men in over 20 countries, fostering skills through visits to small- and medium-scale agricultural enterprises. A pilot project in six African countries as part of the **Integrated Country Approach** identifies “youth decent-work champions” (young people who are doing well in agriculture) and gives them opportunities to build businesses and contribute to the expansion of decent work in their communities. Another example is the global **4H model – Head, Heart, Hands and Health** – which has been active in Africa for decades and provides children with hands-on learning about agriculture and food systems early in their lives in more than a dozen countries.

▶ **Hello Tractor**, a ride-share style programme for agricultural machinery based in **Kenya**, is enabling African smallholders who could not afford to buy a tractor to share one. The company operates a system based on GPS positioning and telematics that makes it possible to monitor at any time where the tractor is located, whose field it is on and how long it has been in use. Farmers enter the information on when and where they need a machine on their mobile phones. Specially trained coordinators in the regions bundle the bookings and send the drivers off, with equipment ready for sowing, ploughing and harvesting.



3. LEGAL INTERVENTIONS AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE: FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTHY CHOICES FOR CONSUMERS

“ There are many distinct entry points to make legislation friendly and promotional for food security and nutrition: Social protection legislation, minimum wages to enhance ability to purchase, strengthening gender equality to help keep girls in schools, food safety and quality legislation from farm to table, and specific labelling schemes to provide information about nutritional content of foods.

Lalaina Ravelomanantsoa, Legal Officer, FAO

The breakout group on “**Laws, policies and regulations to promote healthy diets**” discussed the growing range of legal interventions designed to discourage consumption of calorie-dense, low-nutrient diets, and to instead encourage healthy diets for all. National policymakers have advanced various laws and regulations to promote healthy diets, well-being and productivity across all stages of life, in diverse country and regional contexts. These include food fortification, incentives to diversify the agriculture sector, regulations for consumer protection and labelling, advertising and marketing, as well as taxation. Taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and limits on salt in processed foods are examples of governmental legal interventions, as are mandated school feeding programmes.

A “healthy diet” means the foods we eat provide the nutrients we need in the right proportion. Current diets often fail in this respect, leading to different forms of malnutrition, including undernutrition, but also problems of overweight and obesity, and diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Many countries are adopting preventive measures to address these problems. Such complex challenges often require overarching policies to guide actions by government and other stakeholders across all the components of the food system.



Legal entry points to healthy diets include voluntary guidelines, food safety and food quality legislation from farm to table, front-of-package labelling schemes to provide information about nutritional content of foods, laws that ensure minimum wages and purchasing power to food consumers, and laws to strengthen gender equality and help keep girls in school. When a girl stays in school, she may benefit from school feeding programmes, in contrast to the risk of being the last to eat at home. Historically, hunger rates fall and nutrition improves when women and girls have access to information and are free to make their own decisions. Consumer protection laws regarding food safety form another key element of legal interventions related to food security. Ongoing funding must be made available to ensure that these laws are monitored and enforced over time.

It is not possible to propose a single uniform law on nutrition because countries have different needs and priorities to consider. Situations may differ even within the same country from areas where food availability is limited to areas where overconsumption of salt and sugar may be of paramount concern. Nonetheless, to the extent possible harmonization of measures would reduce inconsistencies in practice and in messaging to consumers.

▶ **Mexico** has enacted a law targeting childhood obesity that restricts advertisement of sugar products to children. Policymakers estimate that implementing these regulations will lead to a decrease in some 10,000 yearly advertisements during children's TV programming. As an additional measure, manufacturers are required to label the sugar, fat and saturated fat content on their food and drink products.





The right to food and the right to be free from hunger stem from Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations continue to engage around food security at high-level events such as the forthcoming Food Systems Summit in September 2021.

▶ Most sugar consumed is not what consumers add to their food, but rather sugar included in processed foods such as breakfast cereals and sodas. Attempting to discourage the consumption of soda, a sugar-sweetened beverage tax was adopted in **South Africa** in 2018, known as the Health Promotion Levy on Sugary Beverages. According to the World Health Organization, the tax has reportedly slashed the beverage sector's use of sugar by a third.



▶ The Breast Milk Substitutes Act in **Kenya** promotes breastfeeding as an ideal food for healthy growth and development of young children. The act has established a National Committee on Infant and Young Child Feeding and is promulgating rules for advertisement and labelling of complementary food products.

CONCLUSION

By supporting food security and nutrition for all, governments and partners are investing in key areas to harness demographic dividends and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Increasing access to land and to food production for women and youth, building food systems that are economically sustainable and take climate change into consideration, and promoting health through legal interventions to ensure consumer protection and healthy diets, will advance food security and provide opportunities to foster human capital across generations.



“ We have a number of challenges in Africa. The first is keeping up with the demand of an increasing population against a changing climate: our production is being impacted and the ability of families to cope is undermined. The second is low employment: few working-age youth are able to get a job, and for those that do, each has a dependency ratio of 1:8. The parameters of how to achieve demographic dividends don't work when employment is low and dependency is high. We have to double down on employment of young people and on dealing with climate change.

Dr. Agnes Kalibata, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy

IMPRINT

Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Sector Initiative Population Dynamics, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 44 60 – 0
F +49 228 44 60 – 17 66

E demografie@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en

Editor: Susan Guthridge-Gould, Principal, Beyond Jargon LLC, NY, USA

Design/layout: DIAMOND media GmbH, Neunkirchen-Seelscheid

Photo credits/sources:
GIZ/ZUMHOO STUDIOS; GIZ; GIZ/Sanjay Austa; GIZ/Thomas Imo/photothek.net; GIZ/Joeng Büthling;
GIZ/Martin Godau; GIZ/Unsula Meissner; GIZ/Guenay UlutunAok; GIZ/Dirk Gebhardt; GIZ/Hamish John Appleby;
GIZ/Ranak Martin; GIZ/Dirk Ostermeier;

On behalf of
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Division Population Policy, Social Protection

Bonn, 2021