

Food & Nutrition Security: a key cross cutting issue to deliver on the EU-Africa partnership

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

At the up-coming EU-AU Summit, nutrition must be prioritised as a key lever of sustainable development, in line with existing priorities of the African Union. To make progress towards Sustainable Development Goals, and ensure a sustainable partnership between the continents, it is essential to improve food and nutrition security in Africa. Therefore, Generation Nutrition calls on European and African leaders to:

- ❑ Eradicating hunger in all its forms should be a priority in the statement “Europe and Africa: two continents with a joint vision for 2030”, as a prerequisite to deliver on the other EU-AU partnership’s priorities and reach the SDGs.
- ❑ The Africa-Europe investment package should support the transformation of food systems to make them sustainable, resilient, diversified and fair.
- ❑ The prevention and treatment of malnutrition should be a priority of the health and social protection initiative.
- ❑ Civil society organisations should be meaningfully included in the summit and in the implementation of the partnership.



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Africa is far from reaching SDG 2 “Zero hunger” by 2030

Malnutrition and food insecurity remain significant challenges in Africa. According to the 2021 State of Food Security and Nutrition report, **282 million people in Africa are undernourished** – which represents one third of the world’s undernourished.¹ **Africa has also the highest prevalence of food insecurity**, with 60 percent of the population of Africa (799 million people) affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020.² “If recent trends persist, the distribution of hunger in the world will change substantially, making Africa the region with the highest number of undernourished individuals in 2030”.³ Moreover, Africa is the **only region in the world where the number of children under five with chronic malnutrition is increasing**, rising from 54.4 million to 61.4 million children between 2000 and 2020.⁴ Africa also experiences a high level of wasting: 12.1 million children under five are suffering from acute malnutrition.⁵

Conflict & climate change: the main drivers of malnutrition in Africa

The 2021 Global Report on Food Crises shows that **conflicts and insecurity are among the main drivers of malnutrition**.⁶ This is evident from the Central Sahel where the three borders area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso has been increasingly vulnerable to hunger as a result of the ongoing conflicts. Access to basic social services (health including nutrition services, water, sanitation and hygiene) can be disrupted; food production, as natural resources, infrastructure, production means and livestock may be inaccessible, damaged or destroyed by the conflicts themselves or directly targeted by belligerents.

In addition, **climate change poses significant risks for food security and nutrition**. Weather events such as more frequent droughts and floods, more intense hurricanes and erratic rains decrease crop yields, destroys livestock, modifies pastures and transhumance paths, and affects transport of food. Rising carbon dioxide levels decreases the nutritional value of foods. In Madagascar for instance, three consecutive years of drought in the Grand Sud region have led to a massive humanitarian crisis with widespread food insecurity and malnutrition.

Africa was and continues to be hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

Malnutrition and food insecurity rates in Africa were unacceptably high in 2020, and have been exacerbated by the negative impacts of Covid-19, due to the **disruption of value chains** (from production, to transportation, to storage and the sale of food) and **the increase in poverty in the absence of universal social protection floors**. Indeed, restrictions on movement have reduced access to markets for farmers and consumers, and price hikes, further inhibiting equitable access to proper food and nutrition for all. Restrictions impact daily economic activities that many households depend on and decreasing or losing household income leads to difficulties accessing healthy food, or covering health needs. The pandemic also had a devastating impact on nutrition due to the **weakening and disruption of health systems and services, and the lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene**. In the early months of the pandemic, the coverage of essential nutrition services in low-and-middle-income countries declined by 30%.⁷

Why nutrition should be a priority of the EU-Africa partnership

Malnutrition represents a lifelong burden for individuals and societies as it prevents children from reaching their full potential, thus curtailing human and national economic development. Risk of dying, impairing growth in children, cognitive and physical development, weakening the immune system and increasing the risk of children dying earlier or developing chronic diseases later in life: undernutrition has huge negative consequences for health and contributes to almost half of all deaths in children under five globally. There is also a significant gender dimension to malnutrition, and assigned gender roles in many patriarchal societies unfairly put the burden of caring for undernourished children during the initial 1,000 days on women, whilst depriving them of the rights and means to cope with such a responsibility. Finally, malnutrition is expensive: the economic costs of undernutrition are devastating – up to 16.5% of GDP losses in some Sub-Saharan African countries.⁸

To make progress towards the EU’s human development, health, growth, and security priorities for the EU-Africa Partnership, it is essential to improve food and nutrition security in Africa. **To eradicate hunger in all its forms should therefore be mentioned as a priority in the statement “Europe and Africa: two continents with a joint vision for 2030”, as a prerequisite to deliver on the other EU-AU partnership’s priorities and reach the SDGs. The African Union has defined nutrition as their priority theme for 2022, therefore the prioritization of nutrition by African countries should be reflected in the statement. Nutrition should be prioritised as a key lever of sustainable development, in line with existing priorities of the African Union, following the 2021 Nutrition Year of Action and the Nutrition for Growth Summit. Prevention and treatment of malnutrition must thus be prioritised at the highest level of the partnership and mainstreamed in the investment package.**



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The alarming figures and the impact of malnutrition on individuals, communities and societies show that swift and ambitious action is desperately needed.

The Africa-Europe investment package should promote sustainable, resilient, diversified and fair food systems

The [joint communiqué](#) released after the second ministerial meeting in October 2021 rightly underlines the importance of food security and nutrition, as 1 billion people in Africa still cannot afford a healthy diet.⁹ Furthermore, according to the FAO, the agricultural sector accounts for over 15% of the region's GDP and is the main source of employment in Africa, providing jobs to almost half of the employed population.¹⁰ In line with the Green Deal, transforming food systems is needed and should therefore be a strategic area of cooperation between the two continents to ensure food and nutrition security for all while preserving biodiversity, increasing climate resilience and supporting small scale farmers.

The Africa-Europe investment package and joint initiative for multilateral action on peace, prosperity and planet should:

- Highlight the Right to adequate Food;**
- Pinpoint explicitly agroecology as one of the best approaches** to secure nutritious, safe and affordable food throughout the year preserving biodiversity and climate;
- Promote the development of local food networks** to guarantee local production and consumption, and make consumers less vulnerable to fluctuation in food prices;
- Support small-scale food producers, farmers and pastoralists** to ensure a reduction of rural poverty and secure investment into African small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Commit to empower women and youth** in local agriculture and food systems, recognise the impact of women's heavy workload on hunger (whether its badly paid work or unpaid care work) and call for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work as well as more decent working conditions

Nutrition should be a priority of the health and social protection initiative

As underlined in the previous section, commitments to transform food systems are key. However, they will not be enough to end malnutrition. Nutrition is also a health issue: treatment and preventive services related to undernutrition remain insufficiently integrated into the essential care packages of national health systems, and equitable access to care services remains insufficient. The renewed partnership should ensure a multisectoral approach to health, linking to nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), mental health and childcare, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.

Furthermore, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the “first” social protection floor and thus fully part of social protection. Social protection policies and programmes have a direct positive impact on the underlying determinants of nutrition security. They put in place schemes that ensure affordable access to essential services, such as universal health coverage, subsidised access to food, water, childcare services, as well as cash transfers for children, elderly people and people who are unable to work.

The health and social protection initiative should:

- Commit to build strong and resilient health systems** to prevent and respond to future health crises, while ensuring the continuity of essential services;
- Ensure nutrition is central to health systems strategies, plans and budgets to achieve UHC;**
- Commit to greater financial support for the health workforce, especially at the community level;**
- Increase investments in handwashing and hygiene behaviour change** and scale up funding for WASH in healthcare facilities;
- Support the set up or scale up of social policies towards the implementation of universal social protection floors**, with priority given to universal public health coverage and universal basic income security in the first 1000 days of a child’s life;
- Promote fairer and more redistributive macroeconomic policies** to allow low and middle income countries to make fiscal space for universal social protection and support African partner countries in reaching their commitment to allocate 15% of national budgets to health (i.e. Abuja Declaration).
- Call for an end to austerity measures** which lead to reductions in public spending which damage essential services and lead to the implementation of restrictive social protection programmes. It is critical that health budgets increase and the nutrition allocation with them also increase.
- Support the establishment of a financial facility to help African countries bridge the existing funding gap to urgently develop social protection floors**, whether it is through the upcoming Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection or through the **creation of a Global Fund on Social Protection**.

Ensuring the meaningful inclusion of civil society organisations

Reviewing the EU-AU partnership is crucial to build a true and equal partnership between the two continents. In this approach, involving all interested parties, including communities and civil society organisations from Africa and Europe, in all stages of the design, the implementation and the monitoring of this partnership is crucial.

Therefore, we call on the EU and AU to:

- ❑ Ensure the **main conclusions/key messages emerging from the CSO forum during the Africa Europe week are disseminated to leaders** and feed the discussions;
- ❑ Ensure the **participation of CSOs and communities’ representatives, especially women and youth**, during the heads of States’ summit;
- ❑ Commit to **meaningfully involve a diversity of CSOs and community representatives, especially women and youth, in the implementation of the AU-EU partnership initiatives** following the summit.

Sources:

¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all*. Rome, FAO, [link](#)

² *Ibid.*

³ 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, [link](#)

⁴ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all*. Rome, FAO, [link](#)

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2021. *Global Report on Food Crises 2021*. Rome, [link](#)

⁷ UNICEF, *Child nutrition and COVID-19*, July 2020, [link](#)

⁸ AFDB, *Banking on Nutrition: Harnessing “Grey Matter Infrastructure” to Unlock the Human and Economic Potential of Africa*, [link](#)

⁹ FAO. 2021. *Stories from Africa: Changing lives through diversified healthy foods*. Accra, [link](#)

¹⁰ OECD/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2016), “Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects and challenges for the next decade”, in *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2016-2025*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [link](#)

Generation Nutrition is a network of civil society organisations, collaborating to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. Members of Generation Nutrition include Action Against Hunger, Alliance2015, CARE, Global Health Advocates, Save the Children, WaterAid and World Vision.

