

A young child with dark skin and curly hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The child is holding a piece of crumpled paper to their mouth with both hands, looking off to the side with a worried or sad expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with a patterned curtain visible on the left. The entire image has a teal or cyan color cast.

Responsible to Protect

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON
FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION
AND THE ROLE OF THE G20

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A young child from a drought-affected region of Madagascar being treated for malnutrition. ACTION led a journalist delegation in 2016 to facilitate the production of media content to help build political will and public support for investment in key global health financing mechanisms.

Photo credit: Tom Maguire for RESULTS UK

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Key Numbers and Figures

Scenes from a village in Madagascar visited by ACTION in 2016 to build support for and a deeper understanding of priority issues among key journalists around the globe.

Photo credit: Tom Maguire for RESULTS UK

THE WORLD BANK ESTIMATES THAT THE PANDEMIC COULD RESULT IN:



+ 83–132 million
UNDERNOURISHED ADULTS

+ 88–115 million
PEOPLE AFFECTED
BY EXTREME POVERTY

UNDER \$1.90
PER PERSON PER DAY¹

CURRENTLY THERE ARE

149 million
CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS
AFFECTED BY STUNTING



45 million
SUFFERING FROM WASTING



38.9 million
CHILDREN ARE OVERWEIGHT

340 million
CHILDREN WITH VITAMIN
AND MINERAL DEFICIENCIES.²



IN THE NEXT
MONTHS

+ 9.3 million
CHILDREN MAY SUFFER
FROM WASTING

+ 2.6 million
MORE CHILDREN MAY BE
STUNTED BY 2022.³



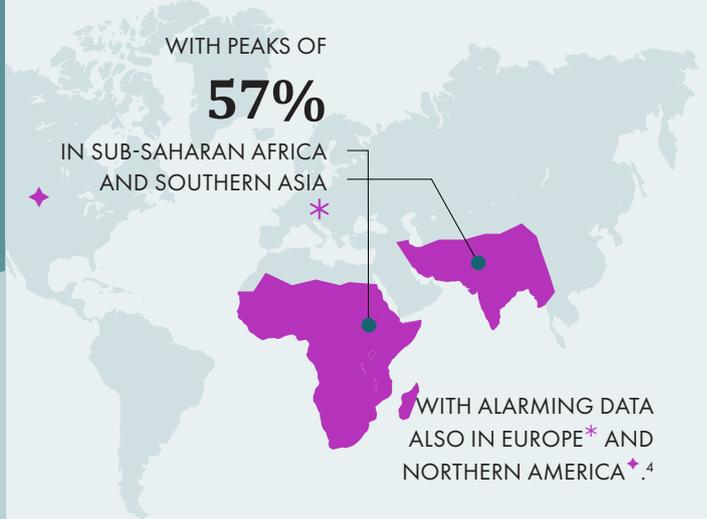
CURRENTLY,
AN ESTIMATED
3 billion
PEOPLE IN THE
WORLD CANNOT
AFFORD A
HEALTHY DIET



WITH PEAKS OF

57%

IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
AND SOUTHERN ASIA



WITH ALARMING DATA
ALSO IN EUROPE* AND
NORTHERN AMERICA*.⁴

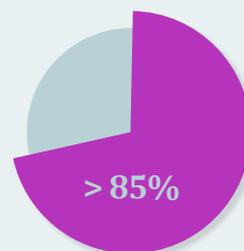
FOODBORNE DISEASES⁵
IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME
COUNTRIES IS
ESTIMATED TO COST



\$110 billion

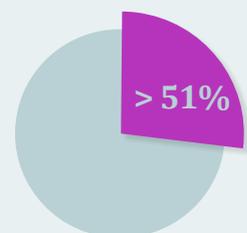
IN LOST PRODUCTIVITY
AND MEDICAL
EXPENSES EACH YEAR.⁶

IN APRIL 2020, AT THE
HEIGHT OF THE EPIDEMIC,
OF 114 COUNTRIES



REPORTED
DISRUPTIONS
IN THE DELIVERY
OF NUTRITION
SERVICES

AND
CURRENTLY

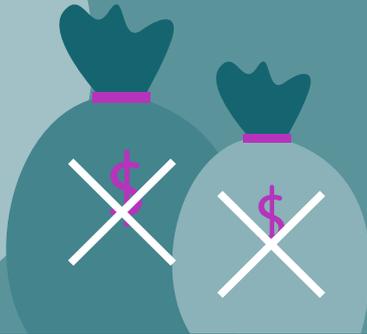


COUNTRIES
STILL REPORT
SUCH DISRUPTIONS
IN NUTRITION
SERVICES.⁷

THE INTERNATIONAL
LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO)
HAS ESTIMATED THAT

345 million

FULL-TIME JOBS WERE LOST IN THE
THIRD QUARTER OF 2020.⁸



ACCORDING TO THE MOST RECENT
ESTIMATES, AN ADDITIONAL

\$ 1.2 billion

IS NEEDED ANNUALLY ON TOP OF
THE WORLD BANK'S ESTIMATES OF

\$ 7 billion/year

TO TACKLE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION.⁹

HEALTHY AND
SUSTAINABLE DIETS
CAN REDUCE WILDLIFE LOSS BY UP TO ¹⁰

46%



FOOD-RELATED GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG)
EMISSIONS BY AT LEAST

30%



PREMATURE DEATHS BY AT LEAST

20%

OBESITY
INCREASES
COVID-RELATED
DEATHS BY ¹¹

48%

HOSPITALIZATION BY

113%

INTENSIVE
CARE UNIT
ADMISSION BY

74%

IF ALL COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBE ADOPTED THE G20
COUNTRIES' FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS BY
2050, THERE WOULD BE A

263%

INCREASE OF FOOD-RELATED GHG. ¹³

G20 COUNTRIES'
CONSUMPTION
PATTERNS ARE
RESPONSIBLE
FOR

3.7 Gt

OF GHG EMISSIONS,
ACCOUNTING
FOR AROUND

75%

OF THE TOTAL OF

5 Gt

THAT IS CONSIDERED
THE "CARBON BUDGET"
FOR FOOD. ²

Executive Summary

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE THAT REQUIRES A CROSS-SECTORAL, COORDINATED APPROACH INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS AT LOCAL, NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS.

Food security and nutrition is intrinsically linked to several sustainability dimensions, from the fight against hunger and the transition towards sustainable farming practices (SDG 2), to health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12), the fight against climate change (SDG 13), and the protection of biodiversity on land (SDG 15) and under the sea (SDG 14). Even before the pandemic, most countries were not on track to achieve the targets set in the Agenda 2030.

Against this backdrop, the G20 plays a crucial role in supporting the global fight against hunger and malnutrition in its multiple forms such as undernutrition and obesity. The pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of increasingly globalized food supply chains, exposing the most vulnerable population (e.g., children, women, the elderly, internally displaced people, and informal workers in urban contexts) to several forms of insecurity. Food security and nutrition is a global challenge that requires a cross-sectoral, coordinated approach involving stakeholders at local, national, regional, and international levels.¹⁴ Food is the first medicine

for healing our ecosystems, supporting livelihoods, and ensuring thriving and more equitable societies.¹⁵

Malnutrition severely weakens people's immune systems. Iron, iodine, folate, vitamin A, and zinc deficiencies are the most widespread illnesses, with over 2 billion people affected worldwide,¹⁶ and can be further exacerbated by COVID-19. In this context, it is crucial to avoid repeating the same mistakes as during the 2008–2009 food crisis that hit several regions of the world¹⁷ Studies in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Mauritania assessed that the global food price crisis increased wasting (low weight for height) by 50 percent among poor children. Other studies found evidence of a significant rise in stunting (low height for age) among both urban and rural children.¹⁸ Globally, the burden of malnutrition is unequally distributed, with many G20 countries largely suffering from high rates of overweight and obesity (e.g., 72 percent of Americans and 63 percent of Australians) while many non-G20 countries are exposed to hunger and food insecurity.¹⁹ Moreover, G20 countries use up 75 percent of carbon emissions that the Paris Agreement allocates to food production²⁰ and, thus, put at risk the global climate agenda.

G20 countries have a strong responsibility to create the conditions for more equitable and sustainable food systems. The G20 economies produce up to 80 percent of the world's total cereal production and account for a similar share of world agricultural exports.²¹ Therefore, G20 actions, both domestically and globally, are critical for promoting sustainable growth in food and agriculture, fostering better nutrition, and building the world back better and more equitably.

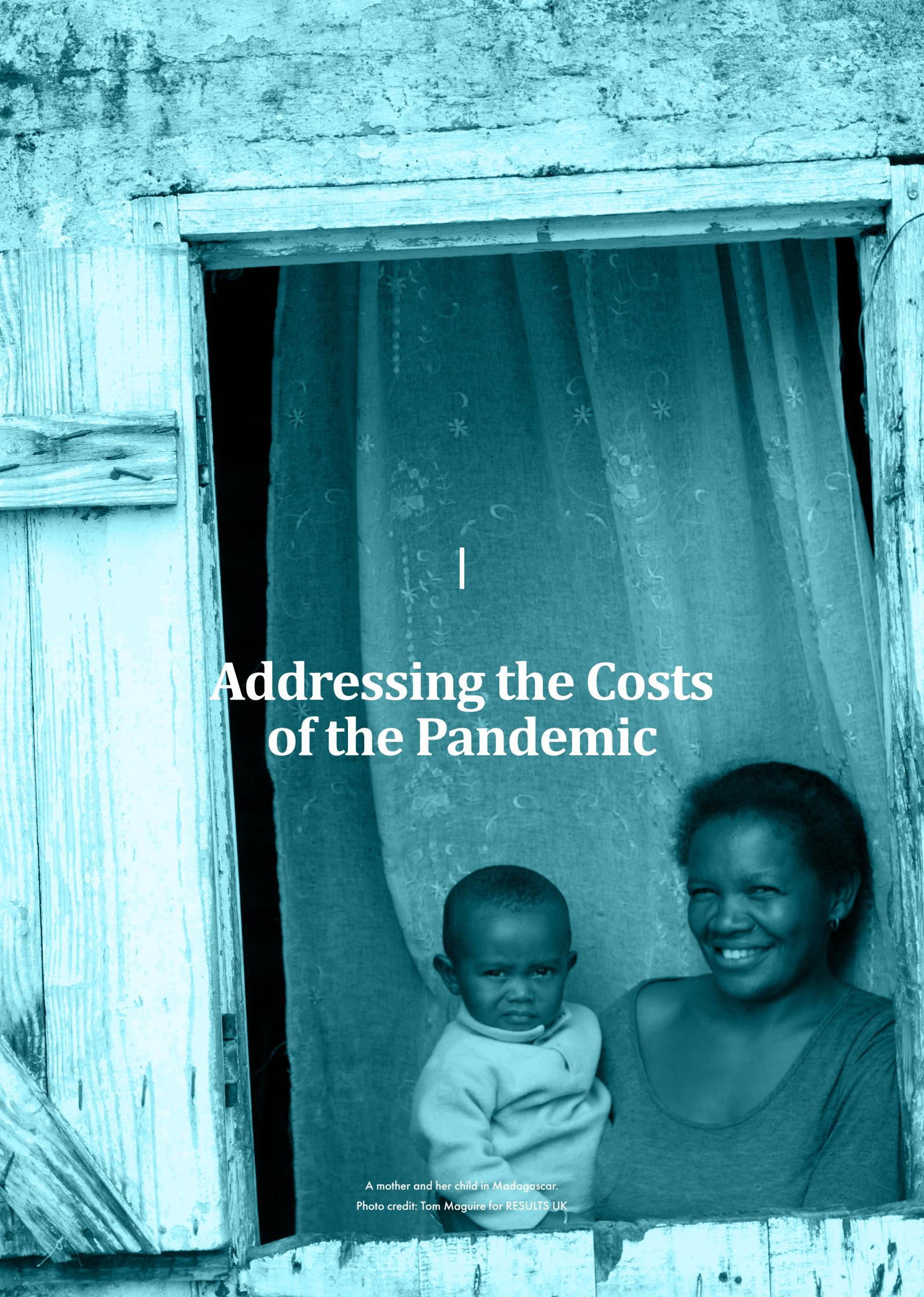
Access to nutritious food (both physically and economically) are an essential factor that underpin health and well-being. A healthy diet focused on a reduced intake of animal-based proteins and richer in fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, whole grains and non-tropical vegetable oil (e.g. vegetable oils from sunflower or rice bran that are less harmful than palm oil) can prevent both malnutrition and non-communicable diseases. Unhealthy food habits, however, lead to 9.1 million premature deaths from cardiovascular diseases worldwide every year, which account for as much as 50 percent of all cardiovascular deaths.²²

The G20 can provide collective and coordinated leadership to tackle food crises, promoting an inclusive approach and coalition with all stakeholders, private and public, and ambitious initiatives across its different sectoral tracks. A key moment in this regard will be not only the final summit scheduled at the end of October 2021, but also a series of intermediate milestones, such as the Foreign Affairs and Development Joint Ministerial Meeting that has resulted in the Matera Declaration and during which the Italian Presidency has proposed the G20 members to fully endorse the FAO-led Food Coalition.²³ This approach could help address food secu-

rity and nutrition in a horizontal and cross-cutting way and could serve as a legacy for the future Indonesian and Indian G20 Presidencies in a "3 Is" (Italy, Indonesia and India) perspective.

A series of high-profile events make 2021 a crucial year to tackle malnutrition and present a unique opportunity to drive significant political commitment, regulation, and financial flows toward a more sustainable food system. First, the UN Food Systems Summit will be a key moment to discuss about solutions towards a more sustainable food system. Second, G7 hosted by the UK is likely to include a drive for global leadership on nature protection, tropical forests and deforestation-free commodity supply chains, the ocean, and food loss and waste. In the June 2021 Communiqué, G7 countries endorsed the G7 Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact, reaffirmed leaders' commitment to provide \$7 billion in humanitarian assistance and stressed their support towards commitment to the Broad Food Security and Nutrition Development Approach launched in 2015.²⁴ Third, the Biodiversity Conference in China in October 2021 will see nations signing up to a new global biodiversity framework, with significant commitments on food and land use. Fourth, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change climate summit (COP26) in November 2021 will bring a major focus on sustainable agriculture and tropical forest protection. Finally, the Japanese government will host the Nutrition for Growth Summit in December 2021, a crucial opportunity for governments, donors, development partners and stakeholders to renew their financial and political commitments to tackle malnutrition.²⁵

THE G20 CAN PROVIDE COLLECTIVE AND COORDINATED LEADERSHIP TO TACKLE FOOD CRISES, PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH AND COALITION WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC, AND AMBITIOUS INITIATIVES ACROSS ITS DIFFERENT SECTORAL TRACKS.



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Addressing the Costs of the Pandemic

A mother and her child in Madagascar.
Photo credit: Tom Maguire for RESULTS UK

The health dimension

CCOVID-19 has had a huge impact on nutrition worldwide. The costs of the pandemic have been particularly high both at the health and socio-economic level. The World Bank estimates that the pandemic could result in an additional 83–132 million undernourished adults and 88–115 million people affected by extreme poverty (under US\$1.90 per person per day).²⁶ COVID-19 hit the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, women, children, migrants, and internally displaced persons, the hardest. Currently, there are 149 million children under 5 years affected by stunting, 45 million children suffering from wasting, around 38.9 million children from overweight, and at least 340 million with vitamin and mineral deficiencies.²⁷ In addition, some studies forecast that, in the coming months, an additional 9.3 million children may suffer from wasting and 2.6 million more children will be stunted by 2022.²⁸

Spikes in malnutrition caused by COVID-19 has a clear geographic concentration. They tend to concentrate in low-income inner-city neighborhoods, large metropolitan regions, and remote rural regions of particularly low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and those countries affected by long-lasting conflicts and political fragility.²⁹ Children have paid a very high price in the past months, and what is even more striking is that current data available are able to capture only a fraction of the problem. Although the percentage of children under 5 affected by stunting has decreased from 33 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2020,³⁰ the WHO states COVID-19 has led to an increase in wasting levels. Moreover, a survey conducted by Save the Children in seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean showed that restrictive measures adopted have had significant consequences on the lives of children.³¹ Even before the pandemic, a healthy diet was far more expensive than \$1.90 per day (international “extreme poverty” line) and costed about five times more than a high starch diet.

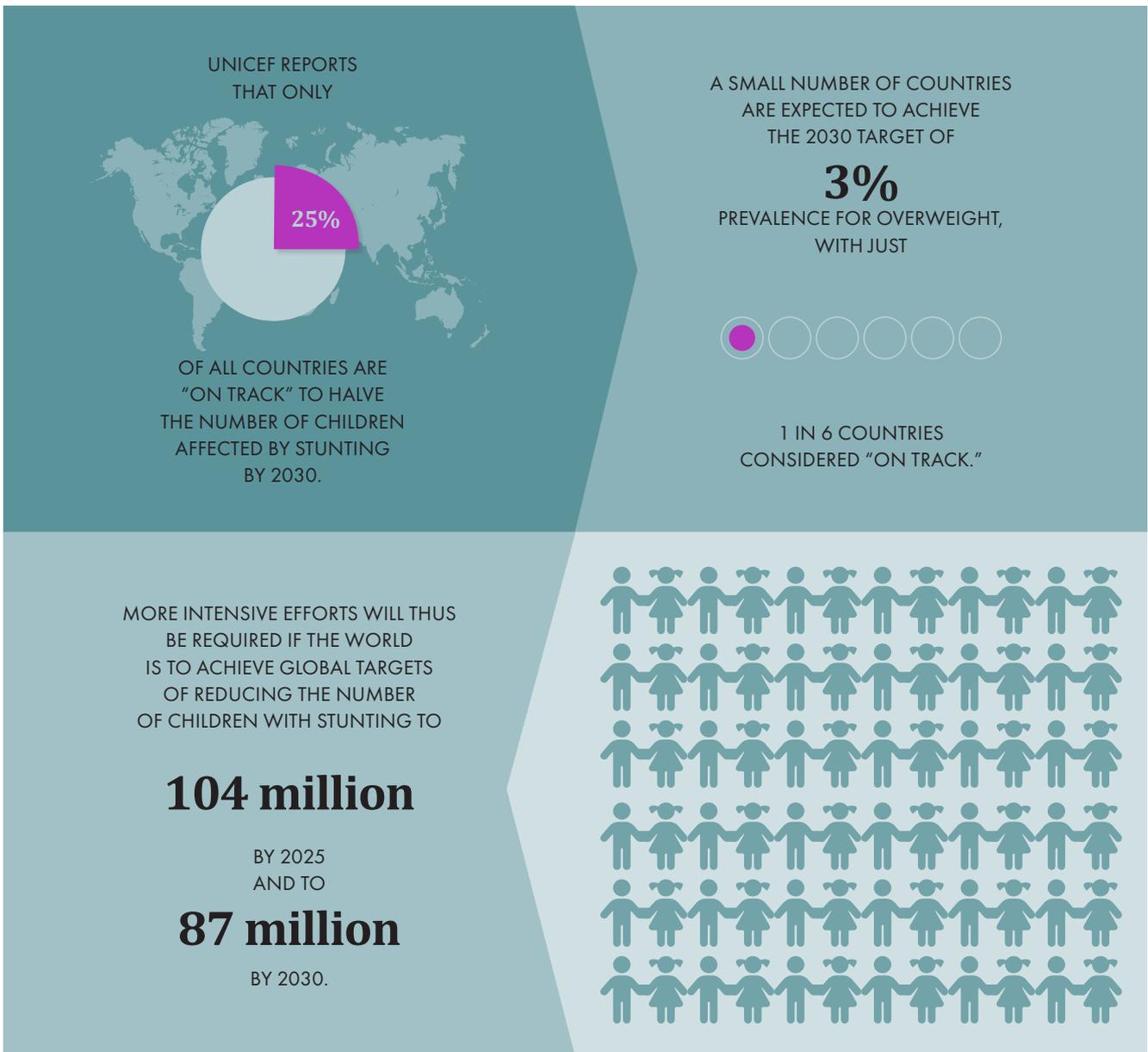
Currently, it is estimated that about 3 billion people in the world cannot afford a healthy diet, with peaks of 57 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, but with alarming data also in Europe and Northern America³². Furthermore, food safety is imperative in LMICs, with foodborne diseases estimated to cost \$110 billion in lost productivity and medical expenses each year.³³

Current estimates are unable to fully tabulate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition, but it seems plausible that the virus may have turned pre-existing nutrition crises — driven by poverty, conflict, disasters, and climate shocks — into nutrition disasters. According to UNICEF in April 2020 at the height of the epidemic, 114 countries (over 85 percent) reported disruptions in the delivery of nutrition services, and 51 percent of countries still report such disruptions in nutrition services,³⁴ which, in several cases are still considered as “non essential”. The top three reasons reported for disruptions in nutrition services included i) lockdown restrictions to mobility and transportation,

ii) fear of infection, and iii) closure of services/facilities. For instance, in several countries, such as Kenya, the combination of this lack of safe and accessible nutrition services with the low levels of protection against the virus in health facilities exposed pregnant women to high risks of getting the infection and this has had major consequences on their children.³⁵ Among them, children are missing out on life-saving vaccines while many children, especially the most vulnerable, even risk losing their lives to preventable diseases because access to healthcare is disrupted. A 2020 study by the Johns Hopkins University estimated that a 15 percent breakdown of routine health services for 6 months could result in 253,000 additional child deaths and 12,200 additional

maternal deaths, in 118 countries surveyed.³⁶

Therefore, the pandemic is likely to cause a huge slowdown in global sustainability efforts. UNICEF reports that only one quarter of all countries are “on track” to halve the number of children affected by stunting by 2030, with an assessment of progress to date not being possible for another quarter of countries. Moreover, even fewer countries are expected to achieve the 2030 target of 3 percent prevalence for overweight, with just 1 in 6 countries considered “on track.” Finally, more intensive efforts will thus be required if the world is to achieve global targets of reducing the number of children with stunting to 104 million by 2025 and to 87 million by 2030.³⁷



The socio-economic costs of the pandemic

Nearly half of the 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods, with informal workers being particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality healthcare and have lost access to productive assets.³⁸ By April 2021, Africa had 100 million lost jobs,³⁹ and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has claimed that 514 million Africans risk falling below extreme poverty line in 2021.⁴⁰ This risk having devastating consequences for families, national economies, and productivity and a predicted nearly \$30 billion in losses to the economy.⁴¹

Against this backdrop, most LMICs are ill-equipped to manage the COVID-19 related social and economic costs and its consequences given their susceptibility to external shocks, limited financial resources, and weak provision of public services.⁴² The International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that 345 million full-time jobs were lost in the third quarter of 2020⁴³ and the global GDP is anticipated to be 5.0–6.5 percent lower than predicted for 2020, while remittances are forecasted to drop in 2021 by 14 percent globally.⁴⁴ This could impact tax revenues that fund essential public health and social security services,⁴⁵ with women and girls disproportionately affected by these shocks due to lower job security in the informal sector, and greater childcare demands at home.⁴⁶ Women and girls may resort or fall prey to negative coping strategies, such as predatory loans, early marriages, or child labor.

Economic losses can have a huge impact on nutrition, affecting the 3 billion people who could not afford a high-quality diet even before the crisis. Despite the 1,414 measures that the World Bank reported were introduced, adapted, or expanded within social safety-net programs as of December 2020 in 215 countries

and territories,⁴⁷ delays in implementation and the limited capacity to meet demands have only partially mitigated increased food insecurity among the poorest. Furthermore, the pandemic has disrupted domestic supply chains, in particular with regards to micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMES), which are largely responsible for supplying food consumed in LMICs.⁴⁸ In this sense, although current forecasts suggest that staple crop production will remain relatively unaffected by the pandemic (rice, wheat, maize, lentils, and soybeans), the same cannot be said for high-value, labor-intensive, and perishable crops such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and animal-sourced foods. The shortage of labor due to COVID-19 becomes problematic and could lead to very poor-quality diets, micronutrient deficiencies, and rises in maternal and child undernutrition or overweight/obesity.⁴⁹ Therefore, protecting workers in the informal economy and in poorly protected and low-paid jobs, including youth, older workers, and migrants, is crucial. A study by ILO suggests that various kinds of measures, such as cash transfers, nutritious school meals, support for employment retention and recovery, and financial relief for businesses, are necessary.⁵⁰

Filling the financial gap

Addressing global and regional nutritional challenges require resources to i) ensure resilient and sustainable increases in agricultural productivity and affordable healthy foods available on local markets, ii) avoid any sort of interruptions to nutrition and health services, and iii) set up programs to protect families from shocks through adaptive social safety nets linked to food security and nutrition. According to the most recent estimates, an additional \$1.2 billion is needed annually to tackle the impact of COVID-19, on top of the World Bank's estimates of \$7 billion per year needed for food security and nutrition.⁵¹ Additionally, a Ceres 2030's research calls on donors to roughly double the amount to be invested in nutrition each year, together with an additional \$19 billion a year from LMICs' own budgets, to tackle the extent of the malnutrition crisis.⁵²

In this sense, the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit in September and the Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) hosted by the Government of Japan in December 2021 will be important milestones to highlight new actions to accelerate food systems transformation toward a more healthy, nutritious, sustainable, and to address drivers of malnutrition spanning health, food, and social protection systems. G20 countries should scale-up sustainable funding for immediate humanitarian action in areas affected by a food and nutrition crisis and identify flexible and predictable funding mechanisms that go beyond immediate humanitarian aid. Investing in nutrition and crisis preparedness not only saves millions of lives, but also ensures considerable returns, as it is estimated that every US dollar invested in these initiatives generates a median saving of \$1.50 in the next emergency response.

Against this backdrop, the World Bank Group between April and September 2020 provided \$5.3 billion in new commitments for food security, through the International Development Association (IDA).⁵³ In order to cope with the needs of the most vulnerable countries, the IDA Deputies decided to advance to 2021 the IDA 20 negotiations. To address the rising food insecurity crisis, IDA Deputies decided at the April meetings to increase the ceiling of the Crisis Response Window Early Re-

sponse Financing from \$500 million to \$1 billion. The replenishment campaign started in April and will finish in December, when donors will announce the policy commitments that will guide IDA's interventions between 2022 and 2025.

While the decision to anticipate IDA 20 negotiations has been important to tackle the immediate impacts of the crisis, it is crucial that future pledges and commitments take into account long-term investments in nutrition; quality and sustainable infrastructures; and agribusiness value chains, which have a strong potential for job creation. In this context, the G20 can play a crucial role in boosting investments in crisis preparedness and the diagnostic capacity of fragile countries to address the root causes of food insecurity, reinforcing the collaboration with relevant humanitarian and development partners (such as FAO, World Food Program, and IFAD). The work undertaken by the G20 high-level panel on crisis preparedness will be important to inform IDA Deputies' discussions with lessons learned and best practices from the ground.

Finally, G20 and G7 leaders should reaffirm a collective commitment at the Tokyo N4G Summit in December to lift 500 million people out of malnutrition and hunger and commit to disburse bold, ambitious multi-year pledges between 2021 and 2025.



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The Role of the G20: A Plan for 2021

A mother and her child in Tanzania
Photo credit: Results Canada

The priorities of the Italian G20 presidency: The road towards the Matera Declaration

Food security and nutrition play a key role in the Italian G20 Presidency. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the phenomenon, the topic is addressed by four main Thematic Working Groups under different Ministries: the Thematic Group on food security, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Development Working Group; the Health Working Group; and the Agriculture Working Group. Although this fragmentation increases the risks of overlapping and duplications, all groups address food security and nutrition from different entry points, and each contributes solutions and deliverables to common challenges.

The G20 has historically intervened with strong actions to tackle food security crises, and the Italian Presidency is working to build consensus to provide concrete deliverables and actions to build back better from the pandemic. In this sense, especially within the Development Working Group, the Presidency is working to reach consensus among G20 members to adequately prioritize food security and nutrition in their response to the COVID-19 crisis, catalyzing political support to interventions at global, regional, and national levels. Moreover, although food and nutrition do not represent a top priority action in the policy agenda, the Health Working Group is working to identify practicable actions to address the nexus between public health and food security, supporting the so-called *One Health* approach. The Group is trying to identify projects aimed at preventing malnutrition

and improving diets through effective and sustained multi-sectoral nutrition programming. Boosting the resilience of food systems is not only key to improve livelihoods, but also to support healthy diets, in line with the ICN2 Framework for Action⁵⁴ and encouraged under the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.⁵⁵

Against this backdrop, the Matera Declaration represents a milestone in this process. The Declaration has re-iterated the importance of keeping food security and nutrition as priority issues on the international political agenda and promoting innovative medium- and long-term policies and investments in agriculture and food systems; it invited all partners to support a global Call to Action and mobilization to address current food emergencies, while building resilient and sustainable food systems, with the aim to eradicate hunger by 2030.⁵⁶

Several steps have been identified to reach such an ambitious goal:

1.

G20 members are asked to endorse the FAO-led Food Coalition, a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral global alliance to coordinate a common response to the impact of COVID-19 on food systems, food security, and nutrition.

2.

G20 countries are asked to enhance effective social protection programs to tackle the emergency, reducing vulnerabilities and achieving food security to support the most in need, such as informal workers and children.

3.

The Italian Presidency is **building consensus to make sure that investments in food security, nutrition, and sustainable food systems are full fledged pillars of COVID-19 emergency funds and recovery packages**.

4.

The Presidency is trying to **identify strategies to operationalize the One Health approach on sustainable food systems**, promoting policies to properly manage these intersections, minimizing risks, and avoiding unintended consequences.

5.

Building on strong synergies with the OECD, the Presidency is **fostering local approaches**, to support place-based solutions and strengthen rural-urban linkages to make local food economies more resilient to external shocks.

6.

Bearing in mind the importance of avoiding a disruption of international food trade flows, the **Presidency is trying to support projects to foster shorter value chains**, boosting investments in infrastructures (e.g., secondary roads that link rural remote areas to food markets); storage facilities; and processing and preservation to increase value chain efficiency, thus reducing post-harvest losses and increasing the affordability of nutritious foods.

Together with the Matera Declaration, endorsing the Food Coalition will be another key step to support countries most in need.⁵⁷ The initiative is currently mobilizing support for FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, which is still underfunded. The program has so far received only a fraction of the \$1.32 billion⁵⁸ needed to achieve its seven priority areas of work to help countries in the areas of response, recovery, and building back better.⁵⁹ In the meanwhile, FAO has been working with national governments and other key non-state actors to develop 100 Action Sheets, and it has launched a web-based hub to serve as an online repository for all those seeking project-focused information and data as well as the type of assistance required to facilitate mobilization of resources and expertise.⁶⁰

Data collection will indeed play a key role, and the G20 is well suited to support programs that allow for the development of coherent and coordinated policy responses for the triple challenge of food security, livelihoods, and sustainability. The OECD Making Better Policies for Food Systems report showcases just the sort of policies to enact around the world.⁶¹

Finally, the G20 policy process will need to ensure strong consistency and coherence with other key international milestones related to food security and nutrition that will take place during 2021. Among them, the G20 policy agenda on food security and nutrition needs to ensure alignment with the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit. The July pre-Summit has already generated a rich discussion and debate across

various stakeholders, with several attempts (e.g., the SUN Movement Food Systems Summit Dialogues) to engage in national-level discussions, with the aim to bring context-based solutions.⁶²

In addition, the Tokyo N4G Summit in December will be another key moment and will focus on five thematic areas, namely, (1) Health: Making nutrition integral to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for sustainable development; (2) Food: Building food systems that promote safe, healthy diets and nutrition, ensure livelihoods of producers, and are climate-smart; (3) Resilience: Addressing malnutrition effectively in fragile and conflict affected contexts; (4) Promoting data-driven accountability; and (5) Securing new investment and driving innovation in nutrition financing.⁶³

The N4G Summit will be essential to keep strong engagement on the health and social dimensions of food security and nutrition and to make sure that countries undertake both short and long-term solutions to address the immediate impacts of food crises, as well as adopt a comprehensive multi-sectoral package of solutions. Hence, the Italian G20 Presidency should work hand in hand with the Japanese Government, to ensure that the G20 policy processes take on board topics that could be further reinforced by the N4G Summit, such as integrating basic nutrition intervention into Universal Health Coverage (UHC), promoting access to more sustainable diets, and support proven life-saving interventions (e.g., primary health-care, vaccines, or WASH programs) that are essential to reduce child and maternal mortality.

THE G20 HAS HISTORICALLY INTERVENED WITH STRONG ACTIONS TO TACKLE FOOD SECURITY CRISES, AND THE ITALIAN PRESIDENCY IS WORKING TO BUILD CONSENSUS TO PROVIDE CONCRETE DELIVERABLES AND ACTIONS TO BUILD BACK BETTER FROM THE PANDEMIC



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Food as Healer

ACTION partner Results Canada led a delegation in 2020 to build nutrition champions by exposing members of parliament to Canada's investments in nutrition in Tanzania. These are some school children benefiting from those investments.

Photo credit: Results Canada

Changing our diets

HEALTH FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS ARE POWERFUL IN IMPROVING HEALTH AND REDUCING DISABILITY AND PREMATURE DEATHS, WHILE ENSURING DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

Recent studies have confirmed that healthy and sustainable diets can reduce wildlife loss by up to 46 percent, premature deaths by at least 20 percent, and food-related GHG emissions by at least 30 percent.⁶⁴ COVID-19 has dramatically revealed that food habits are intrinsically linked to health. Nowadays, unhealthy diets pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than does unsafe sex, alcohol, drug, and tobacco use, combined.⁶⁵ Studies have shown that obesity increases COVID-19-related deaths by 48 percent, hospitalization by 113 percent, and intensive care unit admission by 74 percent.⁶⁶ That is why the WHO issued a “Manifesto for a green and healthy recovery,” addressing the importance of sustainable food systems that reduce their impact on ecosystems but also to prevent future pandemic.⁶⁷

Ultra-processed unhealthy foods are not only putting our health at risk but they also have a growing environmental footprint. While most of the G20 countries are originators of these foods, smaller, poorer countries are dumping grounds for ultra-processed cheap food, and this exacerbates their nutritional and health crises.

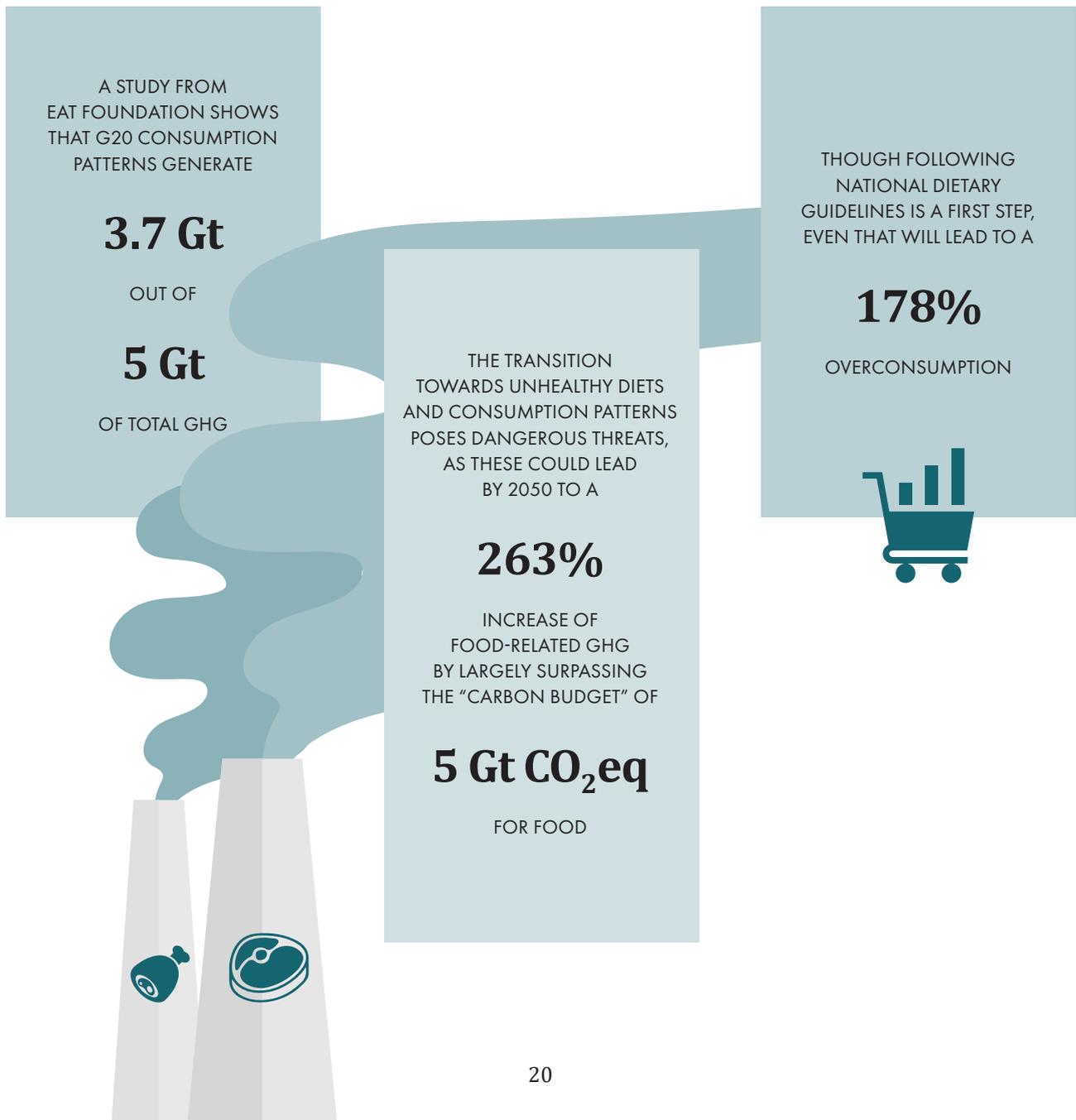
A recent report by the EAT Foundation⁶⁸ on G20 countries stresses that if current trends continue, we will double food emissions by 2050. In this context, G20 countries bear a strong responsibility. Although G20 countries present huge differences in food consumption and National Dietary Guidelines, there is a common trend towards increased prevalence of unhealthy diets, characterized by overconsumption of red meat, dairy, sugar, and highly processed foods and under consumption of healthy foods such as fruits and

vegetables. On the one hand, the study points out that while more than half of the G20 countries have current consumption patterns of meat between three to five times the maximum optimal intake value of 28 g/day in the Planetary Health Diet.⁶⁹ On the other hand, authors highlight that consumption levels of vegetables in all countries are below this optimal intake range except for Turkey, Italy, the USA, South Korea, and China.

In addition, the study shows that these consumption patterns generate 3.7 gigatons (Gt) out of 5 Gt of total GHG; thus, fostering change through the G20 countries can have positive effects on the people’s health and that of the planet. Moreover, the transition of non-G20 countries towards meat-based diets poses dangerous threats, as these new consumption patterns could lead by 2050 to a 263 percent increase of food-related GHG by largely surpassing the “carbon

budget” of 5.0 Gt CO₂eq for food. Therefore, though following National Dietary Guidelines is a first step, even that will lead to a 178 percent overconsumption.⁷⁰ Hence, it is crucial that G20 countries lead by example, advocating for a global shift towards healthier and more sustainable diets within planetary boundaries, in line with targets set in the Paris Agreement and the UN Agenda 2030. Against this backdrop, it is important to note that for LMICs and for those countries affected by wars and crises, it is crucial to strike a balance between the need for protein and consumption patterns that do not harm the environment. In the absence of high quality affordable protein options, communities will inevitably look to increasing meat component of their diets, hence the very first step is to avoid protein undernourishment.

More sustainable consumption and production models would not only reduce the food-related environmental footprint, but also feed up to 10 billion people by protecting biodiversity, culinary traditions, and indigenous communities. Some studies suggest that in order to achieve these goals, governments should reform their subsidy and regulatory regimes to encourage greater consumption of healthier foods and to address high rates of obesity and other non-communicable, diet-related diseases. These approaches would also lead to better remunerations for farmers and agri-food workers and revert the negative externalities of harmful subsidies. Every year, around \$600 billion is allocated to agricultural subsidies,⁷¹ with 70 percent of these funds used to provide direct income support and a very small fraction (around 5 percent) used to support sustainable farming practices and restoration activities.⁷²



Streamlining the One Health approach into policy planning

The One Health approach provides an effective way to unmask the inner link between human, animal, and planetary health and their shared environment. It is no coincidence that in the last 20 years, around two-thirds of the emerging infections have originated from animals and are linked to the destruction of ecosystems that is accelerated by urbanization, extraction industries, intensive food production, and deforestation.

However, currently the SDGs are not able to fully capture the complexity of the One Health approach in measurable metrics and to streamline it into the sustainability agenda. Working on the synergies among these areas is, thus, key to prevent and mitigate the impact of new outbreak diseases, while improving the immunological response of all organisms to existing and new pathogens of zoonotic origin. In other words, applying the One Health approach to food security and nutrition means assessing the impact of agricultural production and food-related activities on the environment and animal health and welfare.⁷³ Therefore, harnessing the full potential of the One Health approach is essential to promote progress on UHC, support human development, preserve our health as well the health of ecosystems, animals, plants, and ecosystems and to increased preparedness against new pathogens.

To achieve these goals, it is crucial to integrate the One Health approach into national legislation, providing the regulatory basis to strengthen animal and plant health in agriculture and wildlife, as well as to ensure food safety. A study from the FAO assesses that the implementation of a One Health approach would clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in the food chain, as well as re-establish the rights of local communities and, more broadly, the realization of the right to health and a healthy environment.⁷⁴ So far, One Health has been integrated into some development policies, programs, and financing, both at the country and regional levels. For example, sub-Saharan African countries have had to deal with numerous zoonotic diseases in the last 20 years. Since the 2014–2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak, West and Central Africa programs for pandemic preparedness have incorporated One Health programs. Furthermore,

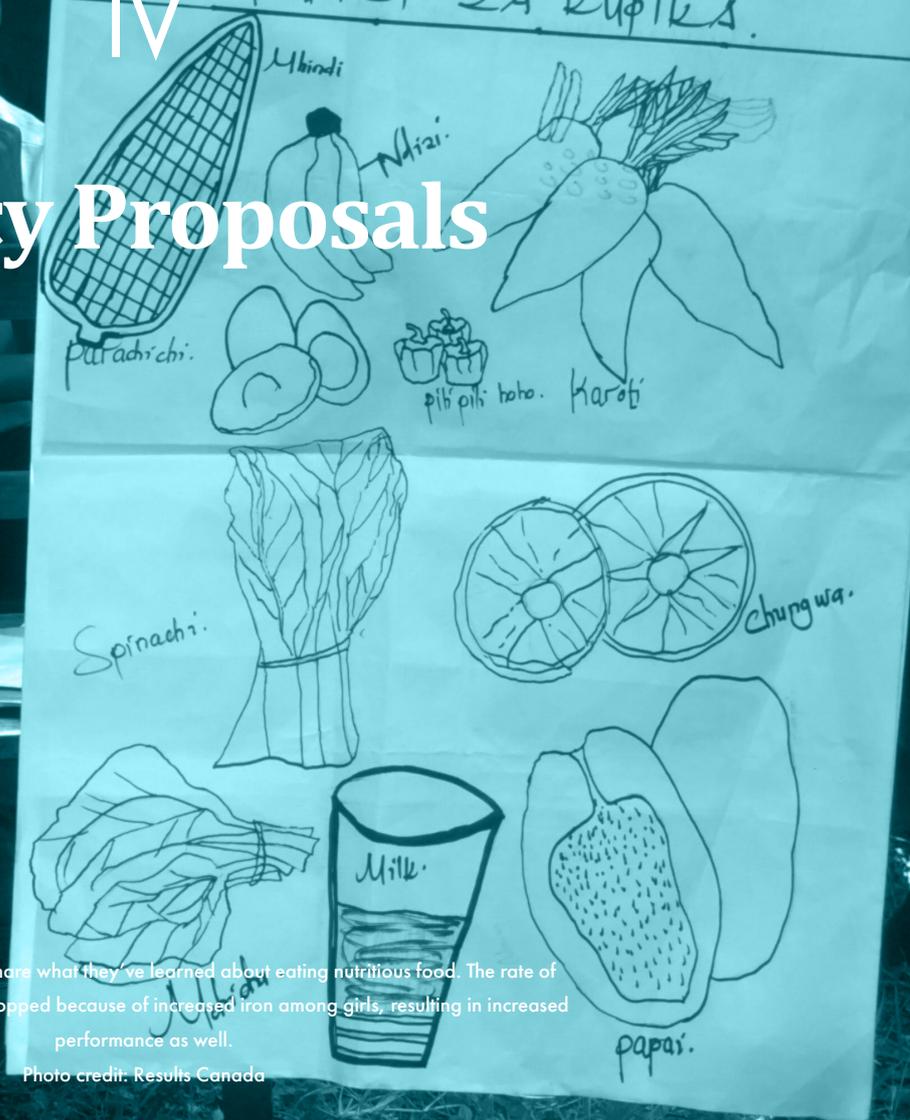
the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), created in 2017 by the African Union, has made One Health innovation an important feature of its Southern Africa Regional Coordinating Center in Zambia.⁷⁵

The Italian G20 Presidency should learn from these experiences and build consensus to fully embrace the One Health approach and foster a global arrangement for systematic coordination between food security and nutrition and other thematic institutions, as well as a territorial pact that involves national and sub-national entities, and combines public and private investment.⁷⁶ Some suggest creating an independent, cross-agency commission with a clear mandate to coordinate and consolidate global sectoral, governmental, private, and social and economic interests and to chart a way forward. Such a commission should be composed of the major public and non-state actors in the international health community.⁷⁷ Applying the One Health approach through nutrition is essential to changing the way we address sustainability. The pandemic has revealed that the reckless destruction of ecosystems linked to unsustainable production and consumption patterns comes at a very high cost for our health systems, our economies, and our societal balance. Therefore, we need to converge nutrition into people's and habitats' health.⁷⁸ COVID-19 has had a huge impact on farming activities, especially for small-holder farmers and urban dwellers, exposing huge masses of population to the lack of safe and nutritious food, especially the most vulnerable groups to malnutrition, such as children and the elderly. If current trends continue, the next decades will see new pandemics of zoonotic origin spreading, threatening global health and economy.

VYAZUWA VYA NAF'ALA, MIZIZI NA
NDIZI ZA KUPIKA.

IV

Policy Proposals



Youth at a school in Tanzania share what they've learned about eating nutritious food. The rate of absenteeism at this school has dropped because of increased iron among girls, resulting in increased performance as well.

Photo credit: Results Canada

Food systems need to evolve to provide food security and nutritious diets for all without adverse effects on the environment. While global food production has tripled, ensuring more food per person at lower prices, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed billions who do not already have regular access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to further stress.⁷⁹ The G20 must play a crucial role in ensuring that effective policies and initiatives are put in place to meet sustainability criteria and leave no one behind. Therefore, this paper outlines some policy proposals that the Italian G20 Presidency should consider.

1.

It will be crucial to ease the burden of debt on LMICs to allow them to allocate proper resources to nutrition-related programs. The decision to extend the Debt Suspension Service Initiative (DSSI) until the end of 2021 is a good first step, but it will need to be coupled by other, more ambitious decisions to grant fiscal space for nutrition in LMICs' national budgets. It is indeed fundamental to prevent these countries from being trapped in a debt crisis, as this may hamper the possibilities to allocate resources to essential services for the poorest and most vulnerable groups.⁸⁰ Therefore, the G20 countries should implement the OECD's nutrition policy marker to better track all global nutrition targets, including funding to programs that directly target reducing malnutrition. In addition, the G20 should ensure that economic recovery plans are perfectly aligned with global climate and sustainability commitments, such as the UN Agenda 2030, the WHA global nutrition targets, and the Paris Agreements.

2.

G20 countries should support the increase of government spending for health up to at least 5 percent of GDP. A G20 paper argues that Governments should raise revenues for health and nutrition systems in an equitable way, through prepaid, mandatory, and progressive taxation, pooling all public funds to increase purchasing power. Persistent underfunding of healthcare systems, even in advanced countries, has resulted in weakened pandemic preparedness. Health care systems are key delivery mechanisms for interventions to protect those suffering from malnutrition. Hence, national plans must incorporate sustainable financing for community-based health services and ensure that civil society, as well populations who are the most vulnerable to shocks, are involved in planning.⁸¹ Moreover, the G20 should support tools to collect accurate and granular data on food security and nutrition across all countries.

3.

G20 countries will need to work to ensure access to sustainable and healthy foods at affordable prices for all. G20 members should, first of all, implement decisions to prevent a new global crisis that may lead to trade restrictions and disruptions and food price spikes.⁸² Therefore, the G20 should invest more in the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) platform⁸³ as a tool to enhance food market transparency and prevent unexpected food price hikes. This encompasses phasing out market price distorting transfers to agriculture and shifting budgetary expenditures towards agricultural innovation systems, including research and development for nutritious crops and produce that are not traditionally targeted by agricultural research efforts. Moreover, to ensure that nutrition is included as an essential component in pandemic preparedness, the mandate of AMIS could be expanded through the development of a demand-side AMIS.⁸⁴ This is essential to strengthen the One Health approach and give all countries the right normative and regulatory tools to respond to future pandemics of zoonotic origin, reverting those agricultural policies and measures (e.g., harmful subsidies) that disrupt ecosystems and risk contributing to the spread of pathogens like H1N1, avian flu, Ebola, and Zika.⁸⁵

4.

It will be crucial to realign public spending to match health and nutrition objectives, ending subsidies for unhealthy foods and crops that do not ensure higher levels of nutrition and food security. For example, in Nepal, data shows that unhealthy snack food and beverage products comprise nearly 25 percent of calorie-intake among 1- to 2-year-old children. Therefore, the G20 should embrace recent calls from the World Bank to increase taxation on unhealthy foods and regulate their marketing and advertising.⁸⁶

5.

Since food is a cross-cutting issue that touches upon several dimensions of sustainability, **the Italian G20 Presidency should organize joint sessions of Agriculture, Finance, and Development Track Ministers to engage in policy dialogue leading to concerted action for the repurposing of agricultural support measures.** This approach could help address food security and nutrition in a horizontal and cross-cutting way and could serve as a legacy for the future Indonesian and Indian G20 Presidencies in a “3 Is” (Italy, Indonesia and India) perspective.

6.

The G20 must ensure full alignment and coherence with other key nutrition-related milestones that will take place in 2021. In particular, the G20 final Declaration should build strong synergies with the N4G, as this Summit provides a unique opportunity to catalyze investments towards multi-sectoral nutrition programs to ensure recovery from disease and increase resilience in case of future pandemics or external shocks.⁸⁷

**THE G20 MUST PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN ENSURING
THAT EFFECTIVE POLICIES AND INITIATIVES ARE PUT
IN PLACE TO MEET SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA
AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**

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