

IMPROVING NUTRITION OUTCOMES WITH BETTER WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:



PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

NUTRITION AND WASH

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FOREWORD

Undernutrition is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and is a major contributor to maternal and child mortality in the shorter term as well as noncommunicable diseases (NCD) in the longer term. It negatively affects all aspects of an individual's health and development and impedes economic and social progress at the community and national levels. Proven, simple interventions exist to combat undernutrition, such as exclusive breastfeeding, appropriate complementary feeding practices, micronutrient supplementation where needed, handwashing with soap, and use of hygienic latrines or toilets. However, given the complexity of factors that cause undernutrition, especially lack of access to water and sanitation and poor hygiene, no single intervention alone will achieve effective or lasting results. Effectively and sustainably improving nutrition outcomes requires a coordinated, multisectoral approach among the health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and agricultural sectors and strong community engagement.

The global nutrition community has repeatedly called for greater attention to and investments in WASH as a means to improve nutrition outcomes. Most recently, at the second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in November 2014, country delegates adopted the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action, which recommends "actions on water, sanitation and hygiene". This builds upon the call and commitment made at the first International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) in 1992 to improve access to and use of safe drinking-water and sanitation services to further address the nutrition challenges. Furthermore, in 55 countries that have joined the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, partners are working together to implement multisectoral action in order to effectively and sustainably deliver nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. These commitments highlight the need to address underlying causes of undernutrition – including access to and use of drinking-water and sanitation services and improved hand and food hygiene.

This publication, jointly prepared by WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), summarizes the current evidence on the benefits of WASH for improving nutrition outcomes and describes how WASH interventions can be integrated into nutrition programmes. It provides practical suggestions, targeted at nutrition programme managers and implementers, on both "what" WASH interventions should be included in nutrition programmes and "how" to include them. It also seeks to help the WASH community to better understand their role, both as providers of technical expertise in WASH interventions and in prioritizing longer-term improvements to WASH infrastructure in areas where undernutrition is a concern.

Sustainable development cannot be realized without nutritional well-being and reaching the 2025 Global Nutrition Targets. Achieving important global health goals, such as ending preventable child and maternal deaths and the global NCD targets, will likewise require addressing malnutrition in all its forms. Integrating WASH interventions into nutrition actions can make a difference. In the dawn of a new era of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which highlight multisectoral engagement, the time is ripe to demonstrate, practically, how nutrition and WASH actions can be integrated, for better health and the betterment of humanity.

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