

## **Summary of discussion on Food Systems and Nutrition Patterns**

### **held on 2d April 2020 in preparation for the 7th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)**

Feeding an ever-increasing population with scarce resources and in a sustainable manner while limiting environmental pollution, lowering carbon emissions and minimizing human health risks is the persistent challenge of our times. Building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns is particularly relevant for the Asia-Pacific where the highest number of the undernourished people in the world live, with unacceptably high rates of stunting, wasting, anemia and micronutrient deficiencies persisting, while a simultaneous rise in obesity and overweight is costing the region upwards of US\$166 billion annually. The Asia-Pacific region is significantly off track to meet its SDG targets for food security and nutrition. The regional approach to agriculture emphasizes an increase in food production which, coupled with the impressive economic growth, has enhanced food security and incomes in the past decade. However, improvements in nutrition are lagging in many countries. Unhealthy diets underpin all forms of malnutrition and have become the leading risk factor for the global burden of disease. Malnutrition will not diminish unless action is accelerated to reshape current food systems to achieve healthier diets. Ensuring nutrition sensitivity at every stage of the supply chain is therefore crucial. The wider adoption of a holistic food system approach that enables food security and nutrition and promotes economic, social and environmental sustainability is even more urgent. The COVID19 pandemic is currently testing the resilience of the food system and is an opportunity to reshape it into one that supplies healthy and nutritious food, apart from being productive.

Participants in the webinar acknowledged the multi-sectoral nature of food systems and nutrition the need for creating strong convergence of programs in health, public food distribution, social protection, water and sanitation, rural development and agriculture for provision and access to healthy sustainable diets. The accomplishments of some countries in improving nutrition indicators have their origin in investments made in areas closely linked to nutrition such as maternal care, infant and young child feeding, gender and social protection. Participants recognized that countries with a non-coherent approach towards nutrition sensitive and sustainable models which could facilitate access to healthy diets had a high prevalence and burden of undernutrition particularly among children; and an increasing trend on overnutrition among adolescents and adults in particular. Governments can help reduce hunger, improve nutrition and transform food systems through community programs, behavior change communication and mainstreaming nutrition through multiple sectors including agriculture and development policies, combined with an emphasis on food safety and universal health coverage. The COVID-19 outbreak has brought back to the fore the importance of local food production especially by smallholders which in turn can increase youth employment and women's empowerment, support more livelihoods and increase resilience.

*This webinar and associated entry point profile was organised by ESCAP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme.*