Sustainable food and nutrition security at the global level starts at home

Making healthy food choices doesn’t just impact you and your body, it ultimately impacts our shared world. The link between planetary and human health is evident considering agricultural practises, increasingly dominated by large industry, represent one of the largest GHG emission contributors. Agriculture, livestock and forestry account for at least 1/3 of global GHG emissions, with huge implications on global warming and biodiversity loss. At the same time, poor diets, driven by the industrialisation of food production, poverty, and lack of access to healthy food, are now the leading cause of death globally. Ironically, on a planet with enough food to feed 7 billion people, one billion do not have enough food to eat, whereas 2 billion over-consume food. These two sides of the same coin, called malnutrition, have huge implications on human health. Over-nutrition, which is generally related to a diet low in fruit and vegetables and rich in processed food produces overweight and obesity, one of the main causes of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), now accounting for 68% of all deaths in the world.

With a growing population that will reach 9 billion by 2050, the relevance of the food system in terms of both planetary and human health will be intensified. In fact, global food demand is increasing and a recent scientific model shows that current trends could lead to catastrophic food shortages by the year 2040\(^1\). Our planet is currently being exploited at a rate which is unprecedented and in a manner that is irreversible. Scientists estimate we have up to 15 years to transform the food system and slow down global warming or face irreversible consequences (current trajectory will lead to an increase of 4 degrees by the end of the century). The humanitarian community which is called upon to address the humanitarian consequences, should recognize this as an urgent priority and should advocate strongly for a solution.

Thus there is the urgent need to decrease waste and increase efficiency in order to avoid future famines, but also food systems will have to produce more healthy food in a more sustainable and secure way. A calamitous example of the interconnection between planetary and human health in the current context of climate change are humanitarian crises, with more frequent floods and droughts having significant consequences on food production, poverty and nutrition, including a shift to unhealthy eating habits.

OCHA initiated and co-led a multi-stakeholder, High-level side event at the World Humanitarian Summit about how to end world hunger in the next 15 years with some of the most innovative and influential thinkers in the field. Through its membership on the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, OCHA is a strong advocate and facilitator in breaking down silos, promoting a joined up, multi-sector approach to food security and nutrition in emergencies.

What is REAL FOOD?

- Food which truly nourishes producers, communities and the earth;
- Food systems – from seed to plate – that fundamentally respect human dignity and health, animal welfare, social justice and environmental sustainability
- Food that is as close as its natural and original state without any alteration of any kind

Food, Health and Planetary Sustainability are inextricably linked.

- The 3 agendas are interdependent and impact on humanitarian action, yet we approach them all in silos. The need for consolidated and transformative action is urgent.

\(^1\) Global Sustainability Institute of Aglia Ruskin University 2014
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- Humanitarian actors should be concerned and push for coordinated action through ongoing processes: SDGs, follow up to World Humanitarian Summit, UN Climate Change Conference, UN Decade for Action on Nutrition.
- Today’s food systems, production & consumption, are unsustainable in every way (food, health, planet) and contributing to growing humanitarian requirements.
- Problems need to be addressed at the source: Rebalancing the earth’s ecosystem.

What does a Healthy Food System Look Like?

There is no single definition of a healthy and sustainable food system, but these are desirable qualities for every food system:

- Industrial food system countries must increase fresh food consumption and rebalance protein sources away from certain animal sources in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, land and water degradation, and chronic disease risk.
- Mixed food system countries must reduce packaged food consumption.
- Transitioning food system countries must improve agricultural productivity while improving production diversity.
- Emerging food system countries must employ policies to reduce the double burden of malnutrition through more affordable healthy food in a manner that does not further threaten the environment.
- Rural food system countries must focus on improving agricultural productivity and food security.

Food: why is it so important?

- It’s what keeps us alive and makes us sick, including our precious planet... Let’s act now before it’s too late.
- Leading scientists, academics, and think tanks have referred to the Food Agenda as the “make-it/break-it agenda for humanity”.
- Real food agenda touches us all, globally. Let’s work to address it together as a matter of urgency.