Children eating well in cities

A roadmap for action to support nutritious diets and healthy environments for all children in urban settings
Children eating well in cities
All children have the right to adequate nutrition and good health in order to reach their full potential. As people around the world move into urban areas in ever larger numbers, cities and local governments are playing an increasingly important role in ensuring that children and their families have access to nutritious food and that children can live, learn, eat, play and meet in healthy environments.

Day in and day out, UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Today, the need for diets, services and practices that protect, promote and support good nutrition has never been greater. Entering 2020, our data indicate that at least one in three children under 5 is not growing well because of malnutrition, and at least two in three are not fed the minimum diet they need to grow, develop and learn to their full potential.

Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNICEF’s Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030 envisions a world where all children, adolescents and women realize their right to adequate nutrition, in all settings, through context-specific actions that are informed by evidence and innovation.

As such, UNICEF can make an important contribution to the improvement of child nutrition in urban contexts by supporting governments and stakeholders at the national and city level. This document presents a roadmap for UNICEF’s future work on the specific food and nutrition challenges that children and families face in urban contexts. It sets out how UNICEF can support through nutrition expertise, innovative multi-sectoral action, and strategic collaboration with partners and existing city platforms.

The roadmap establishes why an urban food and nutrition agenda for children is needed, where action can be taken, what sorts of relevant activities, tools and promising practices exist, and how UNICEF plans to contribute with partners in order to increase impact.
EATING WELL IN AN URBANIZING WORLD

The nutrition situation of the world’s children today is characterized by a triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition in the form of stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and the growing prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity. Child malnutrition rates remain unacceptably high and current progress is insufficient to achieve the nutrition targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, hampering the development of economies and nations. There are several reasons to focus specifically on urban contexts:

Urbanization changes the face of malnutrition

New forces are driving this global burden of child malnutrition. The State of the World’s Children 2019 highlighted urbanization as one of the key global trends contributing to the changing face of malnutrition worldwide.¹ Global demographic growth has become an almost purely urban issue, with millions of people leaving the countryside for urban areas, settling on urban borders or along migration routes, and turning un-built land into new urban space. As a result, many families are changing the way they feed their children because of a new disconnect from
food production, poverty and social inequities, changing lifestyles and the increasing cost of healthy diets in urban settings. Traditional diets are increasingly replaced by diets high in processed foods that contain excess salt, sugar and fat and are low in essential nutrients. Healthy options such as fresh fruits and vegetables are often expensive or not available. These trends not only increase the risk of overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, they can also increase risk of micronutrient deficiencies and undernutrition. As a result, the triple burden of malnutrition is concentrated in cities and urban areas – stunting and anemia can often go hand in hand with high rates of overweight and obesity, particularly in urban slums.

The urban paradox hides stark inequities

Cities are the most important generators of wealth and employment and the role of cities in the global economy is only rising. Between 2006 and 2012, the 750 largest cities in the world created 87.7 million private sector jobs, or 58 per cent of all new private sector jobs created in their respective 129 countries. Yet, paradoxically, cities often have a high concentration of poor people without secure and safe jobs, who are unable to meet the costs of expensive basic goods and services and live in polluted or insecure environments. Such striking inequities are often referred to as the urban paradox. This paradox explains why urbanization presents several specific challenges and opportunities for tackling all forms of malnutrition, especially in low- and middle-income countries and among the most disadvantaged.

Cities lead the way, but also struggle with capacity

From a governance perspective, cities and local governments are gaining importance, not merely as implementers of national policy frameworks, but as policy makers in their own right, catalysts of change and the level of government best placed to link global goals with local communities. There is a growing opportunity for cities and local governments to play a more important role in tackling malnutrition, but to do so they require greater capacities in terms of policy-design, planning, budgeting and financing. Many large cities, often capitals, are already lighthouses of innovation and show leadership in addressing national and even global challenges. Yet, smaller cities typically have weak governance capacity to plan, finance, and cope with the pace and complexity of urbanisation that we increasingly observe in lower-income countries. They typically lack key delegated competences, data, expertise or tools that are fundamental to managing public goods and shaping an urban agenda. Responding to this challenge, several alliances of mayors, city networks and local government associations have emerged to invest in peer-to-peer learning, direct assistance, research, and urban data observatories for monitoring and evaluation.

Cities are young

Urban populations around the world are becoming younger. By 2030, the majority of the world’s urban population will be under the age of 18. Therefore, local government authorities should be increasingly concerned with developing policies and programs that respond to the needs of children and adolescents and ensure they not only survive but thrive. Cities should be supported to understand children’s needs and specific malnutrition challenges so that they can design urban food and nutrition approaches that are fit for children. Using their advantage of proximity to communities, local governments should also invest in effective participation and empower children to be agents of change within their communities. Putting children and young people at the center of designing urban solutions will help ensure healthy diets and healthy lifestyles for all children, accelerate the Sustainable Development Agenda and guarantee that children’s rights are fulfilled.
KEY FACTS ON NUTRITION

Undernutrition continues to exert a heavy toll globally. In 2018, almost 200 million children under 5 suffered from stunting or wasting while at least 340 million suffered from hidden hunger. At the same time, 38 million children under 5 are affected by overweight. Among older children (5 to 19 years old), the world has seen a dramatic increase in overweight from 10% to 18% from 2000-2016, so that nearly 340 million children of this age are now affected by overweight.

The triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, hidden hunger, and overweight – threatens the survival, growth and development of children, young people, economies, and nations. It is driven by the poor quality of children’s diets. To illustrate, only 2 in 5 infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed, as recommended, while 2 in 3 children are not fed the minimum recommended diverse diet for healthy growth and development. Many school-going adolescents have unhealthy diets that include frequent consumption of highly processed foods such as carbonated soft drinks and unhealthy fast foods.1

How many countries face a triple burden of malnutrition?

Number of countries with overlapping forms of childhood stunting, wasting, overweight and anaemia

Note: A medium stunting prevalence is defined as >10%; a medium overweight prevalence is defined as >5%; a medium wasting prevalence is defined as >5%; a moderate anaemia prevalence is defined as >20%. Analysis is based on 134 countries with recent estimates for at least three indicators.

Understanding the urban food and nutrition landscape

The goal of UNICEF’s work on nutrition is to protect and promote diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth, and development for all children, adolescents, and women. This requires context-specific programming that understands the unique nutrition priorities in any given country or setting. Though the goal of achieving good nutrition has some universal characteristics that appear across both urban and rural contexts, urban populations face specific challenges:

► Food and nutrition insecurity in cities
In general, urban dwellers have more access to basic goods and services, including food. However, unlike their rural counterparts, families in cities typically buy their food, which makes income a key factor in what they eat. For poor families, the cost of nutritious food is a real obstacle. In some countries, the minimum price of a daily adequate nutrient intake can cost as much or even more per person than the average daily food budget of a whole household.³ Cities are also more disconnected from the supply chain, making them dependent of an external food system. This increases the vulnerability of urban children and their families to unreliable food provision or sudden surging prices, especially when taking into account new health pandemics and climate change.⁹

► Unequal access to essential nutrition services
Too many children and families that live in informal settlements, impoverished, and remote neighbourhoods of the city do not have access to basic services, such as health care, nutrition services, safe water and sanitation. Not only do they lack the space and infrastructure, but the absence of legal land rights makes it extremely difficult to properly monitor, register, and provide adequate services and care to children. This has consequences. In many countries, the poorest quintile in urban settings fares worse regarding the prevalence of stunting than the rural population as a whole, and sometimes worse than the poorest rural population.⁵

► Unhealthy diets are widespread and start at an early age
The consumption of unhealthy foods is increasingly widespread in urban contexts. Foods that are high in fats, salt, and sugars are cheap and readily accessible, while healthy options such as fresh fruits and vegetables are often expensive or unavailable. Consumption of commercially produced snack foods is also increasingly common among young children in urban areas of low- and middle-income countries.³ Urban dwellers are exposed to unhealthy food marketing and advertising, which is often designed to appeal to children and adolescents.¹⁰ With a higher proportion of urban women in the workforce, time constraints often lead to less time spent on preparing foods for children and an increased reliance on take-away foods. Street food, which is often high in fat, salt, and sugar, accounts for about a quarter of household food spending in low- and middle-income countries.¹¹ These foods can increase the risk of overweight, obesity, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases.¹²

► Built urban environments exacerbate the situation
Man-made urban environments have mostly prioritized economic development. As a result, urban planning policies rarely focus on how the built environment can determine health outcomes. Minimal space is foreseen in cities to grow nutritious food. Streets are car-oriented and decrease the walkability of neighbourhoods. Many schools are surrounded by an obesogenic environment, with nearby shops offering mostly processed, readily available foods to youth who are just gaining financial independence.¹³ The lack of public spaces for adolescents to convene also drives them to meet at fast-food chains instead. In addition, due to the lack of playgrounds and recreational green spaces in cities, the increasingly sedentary lifestyle of urban children encourages the prevalence of overweight and obesity.¹⁴
KEY FACTS ON URBANIZATION

As of 2018, 55 per cent of the world’s population — 4.2 billion inhabitants — lives in urban areas. Based on current trends, by 2030, approximately 60 per cent of the global population — 5.2 billion people — will live in urban areas. By 2050, that number will increase to 68 per cent, or 6.7 billion people.

This ongoing urbanization goes hand in hand with a growth of the number of cities of all sizes. Low-income countries saw their number of cities triple between 1975 and 2015, compared to a doubling in middle-income countries and an increase of 50% in high-income countries. Asia is currently adding 48 million people annually to its urban population, more in absolute terms than all other regions combined. Africa’s urban population is the fastest growing, with an average annual rate of urban growth of 3.7 per cent from 2015-2020 – adding around 19 million persons to its urban population every year.

Despite efforts to upgrade slums and informal settlements, the world’s slum population has increased by 44 per cent, from 690 million in 1990 to more than 1 billion in 2018. An estimated 350 million of the global population of slum dwellers are children, who suffer from multiple deprivations, live without a voice, and have no access to land, housing, nutrition and other basic services.15

All children, without exception, have a right to healthy food and adequate nutrition. Yet millions of children living in cities are not developing to their full potential because of malnutrition in its multiple forms. Understanding how children and their caregivers experience urban environments – and urban food environments in particular – is thus a key starting point for designing actions that will work in the context of their lives to prevent malnutrition and will help pinpoint pain points in the urban system that need to be addressed.

Placing children’s lived experience and child rights at the center of the urban food agenda

The foods that are available, affordable and considered appealing in urban settings interact with the realities of children’s lives, such as the environments in which they eat, study and play, their socioeconomic status, as well as learned social and cultural norms (e.g. feeding practices). Collectively this influences what they eat and their risk of malnutrition.

Despite this, caregivers and children themselves are often unfairly blamed for being “irresponsible” and making poor dietary “choices”. In order to respond to this disconnect, public policy must play a greater role in shaping the urban food environment for children and youth and in driving systems-level change; public authorities have clear responsibilities and obligations to take actions that ensure a healthy environment where children have access to sustainable, affordable, and healthy nutrition. But in determining the right course of action, policymakers need a better understanding of how children are experiencing the problems they are trying to address; obtaining evidence of this lived experience is thus “a starting point for exploring systemic issues that lie beneath people’s perspective on their own realities”.16

Children’s best interests must be at the center of the efforts of cities and all urban stakeholders in order to create a healthy urban food environment fit for every child. Once this core concept of a child rights approach is introduced in policymaking, the rationale for acting no longer derives merely from the fact that children have needs but also from the fact that they have rights.

The following six groups of articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) can help frame a comprehensive strategy and to identify programmable components for city-based action:

- the right of all children, without any discrimination (article 2)
- the responsibility of adults to ensure children’s best interests and protect children’s rights (article 3 and 4)
- the right to survive and thrive, with access to the best health systems and a clean environment (article 6 and article 24)
- the right to participation (article 12)
- the right to protection (article 17, 19, 36)
- the right to leisure, rest, and play (article 31)
Shaping urban food systems fit for children

Today’s food systems are failing children and adolescents and their nutritional needs are seldom prioritized. To compound matters, current narratives on food systems transformation seldom consider the potential of children and young people as change agents.\(^\text{17}\)

The Innocenti Framework on Food Systems for Children and Adolescents, developed in 2018 by UNICEF and partners, identifies some of the key points in food systems where action can be taken to increase both the supply of, and demand for, nutritious foods for children and young people.\(^\text{18}\) It is a strong conceptual framework that, when applied to an urban context, can help break down the complex urban food system into clear components and highlights the challenges, gaps, and hurdles to ensuring the access of children and their families to improved nutrition. Using the same components (supply side; external and personal environments; behaviors of caregivers) it is also possible to add a built environment perspective.

Coordinating multiple sectors for the needs of urban children

As elaborated in detail in the State of the World’s Children 2019 and UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020 – 2030, malnutrition challenges can only be met by working across all relevant systems and sectors. Food systems need to better serve children’s needs, but other systems – notably, those for health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection – also have crucial roles to play as part of a coordinated systemic approach that addresses diets, services and practices. This need for a multi-sector approach is even more essential in urban contexts, where the spatial urban system is also at play. For instance, inadequate land use planning, zoning regulations, and city-regional coordination can often lead to a lack of physical and economic access to healthy and sustainable foods. In addition, this roadmap recognizes that the spatial system, and the characteristics of urban settings and local planning mechanisms, influence children’s level of physical activity which in turn influence risk of overweight and obesity.
Drivers of food systems

Demographic drivers

Urbanization drivers

Innovation and technological drivers

Social and cultural drivers

Political and economic drivers

Biophysical and environmental drivers

Personal environments

(Individuals and households)

- Behaviours of caregivers, children and adolescents

Actions for Urban Contexts

- Ensure vulnerable urban families with young children have access to nutrition-sensitive social protection schemes;
- Investigate and act on factors in day-to-day life that influence household decisions around food and nutrition (i.e. time poverty; convenience; lack of attractive alternatives);
- Use physical design interventions within local communities to make physical activity convenient and accessible for all.

External environments

(Retail and commercial markets, schools, informal food vendors)

- Actions for Urban Contexts

Diets and physical activity in children

- Actions for Urban Contexts

- Support retailers of multiple forms to provide healthy food that is affordable for all in all parts of the city (e.g. supermarkets, fresh markets, corner stores, informal vendors);
- Scale up healthy food procurement and food environments in schools;
- Shift incentives for the purchase of unhealthy food and beverages through use of zoning restrictions, taxes and bans on marketing of unhealthy foods;
- Invest in urban design of streets and public spaces to improve physical activity, walkability, bikeability, road safety and social safety.

Caregivers

Children and adolescents

- Actions for Urban Contexts

- Invest in literacy and skills around healthy food preparation and nutrition;
- Promote food hygiene and food waste reduction;
- Encourage children and young people to move, play sport, meet for recreation and eat and drink healthily.

- Behaviours of caregivers, children and adolescents

- Actions for Urban Contexts

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03.

How can cities shape a healthy environment for children?

Ensuring that urban environments support good nutrition is challenging and requires governments at all levels to coordinate efforts and innovate. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all relevant government entities can help ensure a comprehensive response, combining national and local action, through improved coordination and planning, adequate financing and budgeting, and effective policies, programs and regulations.

The division of responsibilities and powers between local and national governments is constantly evolving in almost all countries as part of a process of decentralization and is highly context dependent. In many countries, local governments have only recently gained responsibilities for parts of the urban food puzzle. However, local governments are already proving they are hotbeds of innovation and can play a key role in developing city-level action to reduce malnutrition, based on a multi-sector approach (horizontal coordination), while continuing to support national governments in strengthening their policies and regulatory frameworks (vertical coordination). The table below provides a schematic overview of how responsibilities and powers are sometimes allocated between the local and national level.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>What a city government can do</th>
<th>What national governments need to do</th>
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| Good governance for children’s access to nutrition and health | • Support data systems and invest in evidence that outlines the situation for children’s access to nutrition and health;  
• Support the implementation of national frameworks and adapt them to local needs and conditions;  
• Develop innovative programs within the local governance powers and limitations;  
• Promulgate results and findings to other local governments, the national government and partners;  
• Develop opinions and advocacy shared by multiple local governments;  
• Recommend adaptation of governance limitations and better supra-local frameworks, including international and regional regulations;  
• Establish and participate in healthy city networks. | • Develop legislation, regulatory frameworks and incentive systems that ensure data and evidence collection, facilitate local implementation, allow local contextualization and improve impact for all children, in particularly the most disadvantaged;  
• Conduct public nutrition and health risk assessments, supported by evidence;  
• Foster consultation with the international and regional institutions to allow and facilitate better regulations that allow stronger promotion of healthy food and of restriction of unhealthy food and its marketing. |
| Commitment to Child Rights | • Promote the healthy city, healthy food environments and other sustainable urban development policies;  
• Include a nutrition and health scope in the responsibilities of city-level child rights focal points;  
• Proactively involve nutrition advisory committees, public health organizations, child rights and other civil society organization;  
• Ensure governments are reflecting the voice of children and youth, investing in child consultation at local level for local decision making. | • Strengthen the role of the national child rights bodies to give advice on health and nutrition related children’s rights;  
• Establish mandatory child rights impact assessments in nutrition and health policies;  
• Involve pro-actively nutrition advisory committees, public health organizations, child rights and other civil society organizations. |
<p>| Social protection | • Where appropriate, ensure that any food transfers, school feeding programs, healthy food vouchers or cash transfers and other social protection measures are nutrition-sensitive, guide caregivers and ensure children’s access to sustainable, healthy, nutritious and diverse diets. | • Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks that ensure wide accessibility to social protection, discourage consumer-facing subsidies on unhealthy foods (e.g. subsidy on sugar) |
| Participation and engagement | • Develop activities and approaches that foster community engagement and children’s participation, in settings such as communities, schools, sport clubs, families, churches or workplaces. | • Develop frameworks for health promotion and disease prevention based on wide consultation with affected communities. |</p>
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| Food and nutrition in public institutions | • Develop local regulations, policies for public procurement, and financial incentives that guarantee healthy and sustainable nutrition in local public institutions (e.g. city departments, municipal schools, youth and recreation organizations);  
• Support local school gardens and urban farming programs, including through local regulations or policies;  
• Explore feasibility of using “zoning” or local planning laws to restrict availability of unhealthy food in vicinity of schools. | • Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks to expand public procurement and the provision of financial incentives to provide food in all school environments;  
• Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks for school gardens to be included in school building regulations and financing;  
• Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks for foods available in and around schools and other public institutions (e.g. museums, government buildings). |
| Free and safe water              | • Provide free and safe drinking water in public schools and public spaces;  
• Develop local regulations that accommodate children’s access to free and safe drinking water in private spaces (shops, commercial centers). | • Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks and financing mechanisms to support public institutions and local governments to install free and safe drinking water and to impose free access to drinking water in private spaces. |
| Physical activity                 | • Develop local regulation, planning policy and financing to improve walkability, to provide spaces for play and movement, and to integrate urban food production in public and greens spaces. | • Develop supportive national frameworks to ensure physical activity in school curriculum.  
• Support investments in public transportation and active transport infrastructure projects |
| Food retail                       | • Implement location regulations and zoning policies that promote the availability and affordability of healthy and sustainable food (e.g. sufficient food outlets selling fresh fruit and vegetables; preventing an overabundance of fast-food outlets in areas);  
• Conduct research on the location and distribution of unhealthy and healthy (food) businesses;  
• Promote and foster alliances of healthy and sustainable food businesses and vendors, including fresh food markets. | • Introduce national regulations around the promotion of unhealthy foods in retail setting  
• Establish food business and retail investment agreements, based on public nutrition and health risk assessments, that that drive change in products and promotions;  
• Explore opportunities for cross-border initiatives, e.g. via regional and international bodies, to improve food retail practices. |
| Food standards and labeling      | • Explore whether the city has legal jurisdiction to implement a policy around menu labelling and posting of calorie information. | • Establish mandatory, evidence-based, consumer-friendly front-of-package food labelling (that is prominent and easily readable) for all packaged food products;  
• Implement mandatory nutrient declarations with information on all nutrients, including fats, salt and sugars;  
• Develop food composition standards or food reformulation targets that support a healthy diet for children (e.g., reduce unhealthy fats, salt and sugars), through regulation or co-regulation, for packaged foods as well as out-of-home foods and meals (street vendors, delivery). |
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<tr>
<td>Health and nutrition related taxes</td>
<td>• Explore whether the city has legal jurisdiction to implement a tax incentive to lower demand for unhealthy foods and ring-fence the funds for health promotion.</td>
<td>• Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks for tax incentives to lower demand for unhealthy food (sugar tax) and to encourage the supply of healthy and sustainable foods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing (incl. sponsorship)</td>
<td>• Develop local regulation to restrict marketing of unhealthy food to children, including on transportation, at public transport stops/stations, in and around schools, other settings where children gather;</td>
<td>• Develop supportive national regulatory frameworks to restrict all forms of unhealthy food marketing to children.</td>
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<td>• Develop local regulation to forbid sponsoring and promotion by unhealthy food brands for all sporting and leisure events for children (and other events that are likely to be attended by children), in public and private spaces, on territory of the city.</td>
<td>• Explore opportunities for cross-border regulatory initiatives that restrict all forms of unhealthy food marketing to children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts of interest</td>
<td>• Strengthen procedures to prevent and manage conflicts of interest in policy making;</td>
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<td>• Ensure transparency in local policy development processes, regarding dialogue and consultation with food industry representatives.</td>
<td>• Ensure transparency in national policy development processes, regarding dialogue and consultation with food industry representatives.</td>
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City-level practices

Several promising city-level practices now exist to illustrate how a city can initiate work on food and nutrition, and these can be instructive and inspire further action around the world.

Amsterdam

The Amsterdam Healthy Weight Approach (AHWA) is a city-wide, local government led initiative aimed at achieving a healthy weight for children in a healthy environment. It was set up in 2012 to address the complex problem of childhood overweight and obesity, that at the time was much more prevalent amongst children living in the city of Amsterdam than the national average. It demonstrates the capacity of, and the need for, local authorities to take initiative in tackling “wicked” problems such as childhood obesity.

AHWA has four crucial elements that might serve as an inspiration for other cities, governments, private parties and other relevant stakeholders in the fight against childhood overweight and obesity:

1. Apply a child rights lens to reach all children
2. Invest in innovative city-level programming
3. Enhance partnership models for allocation of resources
4. Support professionals and priority groups to co-design solutions
Quezon City

Quezon City is another champion of the urban food systems agenda, taking an integrated approach to food- and nutrition-sensitive programming spanning multiple sectors in collaboration with various stakeholders.

With its Food Security Task Force—a multi-stakeholder, interdepartmental team working under the Office of the City Mayor— the city is building a portfolio of work on food and nutrition security and resilience.

Four recurring themes are present throughout all of Quezon City’s efforts to achieve a better food system and can inspire action in other urban contexts:

- Leadership—at all levels
- Integrated collaboration for a systems approach
- Innovative partnerships, from concept to implementation
- Strong narrative on equitable and sustainable food systems

Driven by the need to mitigate hunger and assist those in COVID-19 high risk groups, the Food Security Task Force rallied community leaders and other local actors to establish food aid delivery networks city-wide.
UNICEF’s contribution to the urban food and nutrition agenda

As an agency with long-standing expertise in nutrition, working across various sectors, UNICEF can rely on a strongly developed nutrition program and effective coordination with other child-relevant sectoral programs (e.g. ECD, WASH, Health, Social Policy, Child Protection). Its work is also driven by context-specific evidence and technical expertise that supports on-the-ground advocacy, multi-stakeholder engagement, and children’s participation.

Five key principles guiding future contributions

UNICEF has identified five key principles that are central to designing a successful program with cities and local governments on urban food and nutrition. These principles need to be tailored to the contexts of different cities, depending on their level of economic development, the level of local government capacity, the scale and pace of urbanization and migration, and the vulnerability of slum conditions.

• a child-rights approach helps to translate principles of universality and equity, emphasizing the right of all children to not only survive and thrive, but also to be protected, to be invited to participate, and to have undisturbed access to leisure, rest, and play.

• a multi-sector approach ensures that action looks beyond the issue of healthy food and nutrition, in its narrow sense, to design clusters of activities that focus on the improvement of all nutrition-sensitive urban services, including health care and prevention, water and sanitation, education, social protection, and urban planning.

• an area-based approach translates this multi-sector approach to the neighborhood level, including place-based interventions that improve local food and built environments. This allows interventions to purposely focus on children within vulnerable communities who often live in specific urban districts.

• a governance approach relies on the principles of subsidiarity and both vertical and horizontal coordination. It helps to support cities and national governments coordinate so that action is as efficient and effective as possible and plays to the strength of each actor.

• a learning approach recognizes that there is often a scarcity of urban data, evidence, and limited knowledge on what works. An emphasis on continuous learning will ensure a focus on routine cycles of data collection, monitoring, evaluation and course correction. It will also detect gaps in knowledge, signaling the need for capacity building for different
stakeholders, professionals, and communities. It is within this learning mind-set that cities and partners can feel confident to set up innovative city pilots that can continuously adapt in order to get meaningful results.

**Areas where UNICEF can contribute to an urban food agenda for children**

UNICEF has learned from the expertise, platforms, tools, and pilots that already exist amongst key stakeholders. This roadmap builds upon that dynamic landscape and sees it as an opportunity for UNICEF to contribute via a small set of actions that play to its comparative advantage. These actions will be developed with existing and new partners:

- **Evidence generation**
  Investment in data and evidence collection will allow UNICEF and country partners to examine situations that have been understudied. Tools and methods are needed to understand the current state of play, to assess current programs and policy coverage, and to identify gaps, major challenges, and priorities. UNICEF can harness existing instruments such as rapid appraisals, landscape analyses and food environment mapping, and adapt them accordingly.  

- **Pilot implementation**
  Since programming around an urban food and nutrition agenda will be new for many UNICEF teams and partners, it is key to begin the program through pilots. These pilots will allow UNICEF to gain experience, test out innovative approaches, and build new collaborations.

- **Advocacy**
  By highlighting the lived experiences of urban children and young people, UNICEF can incorporate a child-specific food and nutrition lens within partners’ programs and call upon local city actors to better address children’s needs. This will help elevate actions to protect and promote diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition for children. UNICEF will help shape clear narratives to promote children’s voice and capacities to co-design solutions towards major policy milestones.

- **Knowledge sharing and capacity development**
  Strong knowledge networks and city-level platforms allow cities and stakeholders to share experiences, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and develop localized capacities. UNICEF will contribute by developing case studies, supporting knowledge sharing platforms, and developing training packages.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**
  Monitoring and evaluation enables teams to monitor progress, compare situations between cities and assess the impact of activities. UNICEF will seek to build upon its existing data collection methods and monitoring approaches to gather new insights about the nutritional situation in urban populations, while also digging deeper into those that are developed specifically at city levels. At the same time, pilot activities will integrate a core component of continuous learning.

### What guidance is needed for UNICEF teams and partners working on this topic?

As work on this topic grows, UNICEF teams and partners will require further guidance in the following programmatic dimensions:

- Data and evidence generation (what are the food and nutrition issues in urban areas; who is affected; what are the consequences)
- System strengthening (planning, budgeting and financing)
- Policy development and support (legislation, regulation, management)
- Program implementation including service-delivery of core-servies and functions
- Community engagement and children’s participation

Support will also be needed to design effective programs:

- Guidance on stakeholder mapping and engagement with local governments, children and communities
- Guidance on conducting landscape analyses
- Guidance on developing a theory of change, tailoring action to different types of urban settings, and designing context specific strategies and approaches
- Guidance on bottleneck analysis and country-level program design
- Overview of existing tools
- Training and capacity development
Endnotes


12 United Nations Children’s Fund, Advantage or Paradox?: The challenge for children and young people of growing up urban, New York, 2018


Further reading


Acknowledgments

This work was coordinated by UNICEF Programme Division Nutrition Section to inform its efforts to address all forms of malnutrition including in urban contexts. It also intends to support the contribution of the Nutrition Section to UNICEF’s wider work on urban programming.

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Nutrition Section, Programme Division
3 United Nations Plaza
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Email: nutrition@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org