



United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition

Economic and Social Council 2017 Coordination and Management Meeting

PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND NUTRITION

20 April 2017

INFORMAL SUMMARY

During the 2017 ECOSOC Coordination and Management Meeting, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), in collaboration with the Secretariat of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN), organized a panel on "Climate Change and Nutrition". The meeting was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Marie Chatardova (Czech Republic), who delivered remarks at the opening, stressing the global nature of the climate change problem and the need for concerted actions by all nations and at all levels. The panel began with a presentation on the findings and conclusions of the study by the UNSCN on climate change, diets, nutrition and health. This was followed by a panel discussion, moderated by the Deputy Executive Director of WHO New York Office, with the participation of the Chair of the Committee on the World Food Security, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Dutch Climate Envoy.

The panel explored the inter-linkages between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, particularly through the climate change and healthy diets nexus. The panel also discussed policies that help promote sustainable and healthy diets while providing climate solutions. The need for coherent public policies across relevant sectors for sustainable and health food systems and diets was emphasized.

Climate change, healthy diets and nutrition

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing all nations today leading to not only environmental but also economic and social consequences. Climate change has increased the risk of weather-related natural disasters jeopardizing livelihoods, food security, clean water and sanitary conditions, which are essential for good nutrition. FAO warns that unless action on climate change is taken, 35-122 million people could fall into poverty due to its negative impact on incomes in the agriculture sector.

The Committee on World Food Security previously explored the linkages between climate change and nutrition, which revealed that projected temperature increases, changes in precipitation

patterns and the frequency of extreme weather events would lead to reduced agricultural productivity.

As a result of climate change, droughts have become more frequent and intense. The recent famines in South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen are examples of how climate change is already affecting countries drastically. These are also the countries that are least responsible for contributing to climate change and also least prepared to cope with it. It was also underscored that three of these countries were conflict-affected countries.

Famines should not come as a surprise given that scientists have been warning about the imminent droughts due to the effects of climate change. Therefore, while saving lives is the utmost priority, developing long-term resilience to extreme weather events will be key for the future. This long-term resilience can only be achieved if an integrated approach is taken to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. There is a need for smart policy and regulatory guidelines to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

A human rights approach is needed to address the nexus between climate change and nutrition. Biofuel production could negatively impact food production, leading to food insecurity. Food security measures should focus on ending discrimination, increasing public participation and holding Governments accountable.

Climate change also has health implications. Areas with weak health infrastructure, mostly in developing countries, will be least able to cope with and respond to extreme events and ecosystem changes that pose health risks. These areas are also prone to malnutrition and undernourishment. Nutrition cuts across several sectors from agriculture to education, water, sanitation, and social protection. Women and children bear more severe consequences. The nexus of climate change, nutrition and health impacts not only communicable diseases but also non-communicable diseases, linked with unhealthy diets.

The link between climate change and nutrition has not received adequate attention by the international community. Only about one per cent of the total financing available for climate change is allocated to health and, no information is available on how much of it is used in addressing nutrition.

Today's global food system is not sufficient, leaving about 800 million people hungry, 2 billion micronutrient deficient, more than 600 million people obese and 2 billion overweight. It is also one of the main contributors to climate change and environmental degradation. Food production and consumption is responsible for 19-29 per cent of all human caused greenhouse gas emissions, up to 70 per cent of the freshwater use and, over 60 per cent of the terrestrial biodiversity loss, with animal-based foods being major contributors to these environment changes. Dietary changes towards more animal-based diets and highly processed food can increase agriculture and food greenhouse gas emissions by up to 80 per cent by 2050.

Climate change, in turn, can impact nutrition and health by putting aggregate production at risk, due to changes in temperature and rainfall. This could lead to food price inflation. Not only the quantity,

but quality of food could also suffer as increased amount of carbon dioxide in the environment leads to diminishing levels of micronutrients in food. These effects could result in increased food insecurity. Higher consumption of calorie-rich and nutrient-poor food, that are often cheaper, would lead to undernourishment, micro-nutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity. The current food system, therefore, could be both a victim and a perpetrator of climate change.

Addressing climate change is no easy task. There are trade-offs involved and innovative approaches are needed to effectively promote environmental sustainability while pursuing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Making food systems sustainable is an important step. At the national level, governments should strengthen local food production; encourage diversification of crops to promote healthy diet as well as well to increase resilience against climate change. More traditional crops, that are generally more climate resistant and nutritious, are needed. Food storage and transportation need to be improved to reduce food waste. Governments need to strengthen institutions, policies and programmes and; develop and properly adopt international guidelines on healthy diets.

In addition to a sustainable food system, there is a need to promote sustainable and healthy diets. A healthy diet refers to a diet that prevents malnutrition in all its forms, provides sufficient energy, balance intake, and prevents against non-communicable diseases. Sustainability component emphasizes that diets that have low environmental impact, contribute to food and nutrition security and ensures healthy life to current and future generations. This would entail limited meat consumption, balanced energy intake and reducing food waste, choosing seafood from non-threatened stocks and eating more plants and plant-based products. These guidelines have to be put in the local context during implementation. Currently only few countries, including Sweden, Brazil, Germany and Qatar, have included sustainability criterion in their food-based dietary guidelines. More countries need to adopt such guidelines to reap its benefit. Market regulations and economic incentives could be effective in steering dietary patterns.

Some success in sustainable agriculture has been achieved through agroecology in countries such as Brazil and Cuba. Agroecology is a technique that harnesses the local ecosystem and uses minimal resources from outside, to increase productivity while not threatening sustainability. This kind of agriculture system produces less greenhouse gas emissions. Experiences of countries —that have been applying agroecology through local production, empowering gender equality and using the local knowledge and technology together—could provide useful insights for other countries. To this end, investments in scientific research and development projects would be helpful. Many countries have also used and applied the guidelines for efficient use of land, fisheries and forests endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security 2012, which has directly benefitted about 2 million people worldwide to date.

Greater synergy and cooperation between climate and nutrition efforts is critical for translating policies into concrete actions by stakeholders at all levels. Some countries are taking initiatives to promote awareness, innovation and action by the local communities by bringing together businesses, civil society, local governments and all other interested parties through various forums. The Netherlands has organized a National Climate Summit in 2016 and National Food Summit in

2017, and established the Alliance for Sustainable Food. The estimated reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from the deals signed during the 2016 summit was around 17.6 mega tonnes. Similarly, during the 2017 summit, commitments were made to become climate-neutral agriculture sector, eliminate human rights abuses and environmental damage in supply chains, etc. The Alliance brought together all parties in the food sector to set goals in order to maximize resource efficiency, reutilize food residue and waste and remove inefficiencies in value-chain. This kind of concerted actions by all actors has proven to be much more successful than top-down approaches. The production sector has been particularly helpful in identifying gains and efficiencies in their value chains.

Recommendations

Strong coordinated action is required at the international level to address the interlinkages between climate change and nutrition. The following recommendations emerged from the discussion:

- Coherent public policies across relevant sectors, from production to consumption, are needed for sustainable healthy food systems and diets.
- Food security and nutrition issues, including sustainable and healthy diets, need to be included in climate change agenda discussions. Climate actions should support sustainable healthy food systems and diets, while food-based dietary guidelines should include sustainability criteria.
- A human rights approach to food security and nutrition should be adopted. This requires looking at the food security issue with the perspective of indiscriminate, introducing public participation and accountability by the government and the international community.
- The promotion of sustainable and healthy diets should be one of the priority areas for climate financing in order to achieve both nutrition and environmental objectives.
- More investments in agroecology are needed to harness its potential for addressing food security while reducing the adverse impact of climate change.
- The public and private investments as well international aid boosting climate change adaptation and mitigation measures need to increase.
- Partnerships with the food sector need to be harnessed. Inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms, empowerment of stakeholders and strong political engagement are also needed.