



**NUTRITION:  
CORNERSTONE OF  
GENDER EQUALITY**

**LA NUTRITION:  
ÉLÉMENT FONDAMENTAL DE  
L'ÉGALITÉ DES GENRES**

## “NUTRITION: CORNERSTONE OF GENDER EQUALITY” CONFERENCE REPORT SUMMARY & CALL TO ACTION

Ottawa, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

On November 21st, 2017, a collective of eleven Canadian organizations, convened by Action Against Hunger, came together to host the *Nutrition: Cornerstone of Gender Equality* conference in Ottawa, Canada. The conference was attended by approximately 100 participants with high-level attendance and participation by the offices of the Minister of Development and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada, Every Woman Every Child, World Food Program, UNICEF, the Global Financing Facility (World Bank) and Women Deliver.

Hunger, malnutrition, and poverty result from, and reinforce, injustice and inequality. These injustices take place at every level, from the household to the global, and rooted in power imbalances, with perhaps the most pervasive and universal being on the basis of sex and gender. Gender inequality limits who has access to food and the resources to grow it and buy it, who eats first and who eats last. More gender equal societies have better nutritional and health outcomes for women, men, boys and girls, irrespective of the overall wealth of the country.

This clear correlation between nutrition and gender was the heart of the *Nutrition: Cornerstone of Gender Equality* conference, underpinning the fundamental premise behind our discussions: **How do we break the silos gender and nutrition typically operate in, to strengthen both and better recognize that the successes and failures of one are intricately linked to the other?** Panelists and participants brought some answers to this question through three different sessions that gave an overview of the existing evidence on the gender and nutrition nexus,

The following summary of the event presents a **call to action** encouraging and providing recommendations to continue Canada’s leadership and momentum in addressing gender inequality and malnutrition in all its forms. It also provides an overview of the **key outcomes, discussion points and ideas** that emerged from the conference, which focused first on the existing evidence on gender and nutrition nexus (panel 1), before exploring how to move faster and to go further, through either programmatic (panel 2) or political solutions, or through the mobilization of funding (panel 3).



## CALL TO ACTION

On November 21, 2017, a collective of eleven Canadian organizations, convened by Action Against Hunger, came together to host the **Nutrition: Cornerstone of Gender Equality conference** in Ottawa, Canada.

Gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of malnutrition. Similarly, the health and vitality of women and girls is essential to actualizing and advancing women's political, social, cultural and economic rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. A rights-based approach is therefore critical for transforming the social norms and practices that hinder women's decision-making power and nutritional status, and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With the SDGs, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, the World Health Assembly's Global Nutrition Targets, and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, we have the commitments. Now we need the leadership, the action and the funding to make these commitments reality.

### **WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA TO:**

1. Ensure that funding for nutrition remains a key priority, that increased funding for nutrition is aligned with a commitment to increasing the overall funding for the Canada's international assistance aid envelop, and that innovative financing mechanisms such as the Global Financing Facility are mobilised for nutrition.
2. Further link gender equality and nutrition through Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy's (FIAP) implementation strategies that respond to both the immediate and underlining determinants of malnutrition, and encourage gender transformative approaches within nutrition programs.
3. Invest in nutrition systems and policies to consistently collect, use and disseminate quality quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by sex, age and ability, and support capacity building for nutrition related data collection, analysis and interpretation for public policy planning among governments in high burden countries.
4. Leverage its sustained leadership on nutrition and gender equality to encourage other donors and governments to prioritize nutrition within their SDG and gender equality strategies and policies, to adopt a lifecycle approach that prioritizes both the first 1000 days and adolescents and to mainstream gender-sensitive nutrition interventions across multiple sectors.
5. Champion the link between nutrition and gender equality and promote the involvement of women and youth in the design and delivery of all nutrition-related initiatives at local, national and global forums (including at the G7, Women Deliver, SUN and the GFF).

### **WE CALL ON CIVIL SOCIETY TO:**

1. Promote a human rights and empowerment approach, ensuring gender equity in nutrition programming.
2. Prioritize women's voice, choice and participation, including in the design and implementation of programming and advocacy initiatives, and engage men and community leaders as ambassadors for fostering sustainable, community-driven shifts in attitudes and behaviours.
3. Promote greater collaboration and partnerships between actors and across sectors, including with a view to incorporating nutrition and gender equality considerations and objectives across policies and programming.
4. Advocate for the consistent collection, use and dissemination of quality quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by sex, age and ability, throughout project cycles, in all programming and across sectors.

## PANEL 1: WHEN EVIDENCE SAYS YES

### Progress and challenges

- Understanding the mechanisms linking gender equality, women's empowerment and nutrition, although still limited, has greatly improved thanks to increased scientific and programmatic evidence.
- There has been significant progress with the development of innovative and mixed approaches for research on gender that use both quantitative and qualitative data including in M&E.
- We do have enough evidence to act, but there are still gaps in how we can address the issue. We need more sex- and age-disaggregated data, and we need flexible and long-term funding to better support evidence collection. We need more evidence on the nexus between gender equality, nutrition and nutrition-sensitive sectors.
- We also need greater awareness of how to implement our evidence-based interventions, how to adapt to the context, with people-centered research to identify local drivers and solutions, and how to engage men effectively in maternal, neonatal, and child health outcomes.
- Evidence is not always well-shared (both within the nutrition community and even less so across sectors) and well-used, especially for programming.
- Women's decision-making doesn't happen in a vacuum, but is typically dependent on power dynamics within the household, community, and cultural context. It is complex and context-specific. We need to understand these dynamics, to adapt to the context and to find multiple ways of defining success to make sure we're moving in the right direction.

### Lessons learned and good practices

- A mixed approach with quantitative and qualitative data as well as context specific evidence on the links between gender and nutrition allows us to look more deeply at the cultural background and the community's opinion and needs.
- Listening to communities' voices (in the collection of evidence, the definition of indicators, etc.) and working with local NGOs enhance programs' effectiveness and sustainability.
- A gender transformative approach engaging men and boys, with a holistic understanding of male engagement as a change in attitudes, values and relationships leads to better nutrition outcomes.
- A human rights approach is essential. Gender inequality is one of the key barriers to women being able to exercise their right to proper food and nutrition, and poor nutritional and health outcomes severely limit women's ability to exercise their rights in other areas.
- To make sure that the right evidence is available and put to good use, every stakeholder has an important role to play in ensuring we have as complete a picture as possible.

### Looking ahead – How to go further and move faster

- Commit to dedicate funding for research and programming on equality and nutrition.
- Have a REAL focus on gender in research, collection of evidence and monitoring and evaluation. In other words, commit time and resources, adopt a realistic timeframe, identify a clear gender equality/gender transformative goal, define specific gender transformative indicators and collect evidence that can show progress in the long run; create a monitoring tool for the whole length of the project cycle.
- Use a mixed-method approach (both quantitative and qualitative data) to build a strong evidence base and ensure that it nourishes programmatic decisions, as well as advocacy.
- Ensure that the existing evidence is well shared but also repackaged for the targeted audience, and especially visible to the community.

## PANEL 2: THE WAY TO MOVE FASTER – PROGRAMMATIC SOLUTIONS

### Progress and Challenges

- The world is not on track to achieve any of its nutrition targets. A significant scale up is required, especially on reducing rates of anaemia in women of reproductive age (the most off-track target).
- There is growing recognition that adolescent girls are a key neglected group in current research and programming.
- There are significant opportunities in recognizing the importance of multi-sectoral approaches in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and of the universality and interdependency of gender equality and good nutrition.
- Most programs treat women as targets. We need to make sure that women are considered agents of change and programs are truly gender transformative.
- Work is still needed with regard to FIAP to make sure that this policy is more gender transformative and pairs policy with action.

### Good Practices & Lessons Learned

- Poor nutrition is not a problem that can be solved by one sector alone – it is large-scale and requires cooperation across governments, donors, NGOs, and the private sector
- Age (with a specific focus on adolescents) and sex-disaggregated data is essential for capturing inequalities within households.
- A gender equity approach to nutrition-specific and sensitive programs is vital to ensure that the benefits of such programs are experienced equally by men, women, boys and girls. Action across multiple sectors is critical to address the underlying determinants of undernutrition and to drive even greater results for women and girls.
- Women’s empowerment needs to be a standalone goal of nutrition programs and should go beyond technical interventions, mainstreaming gender throughout to increase effectiveness and sustainability.
- Nutrition programs can accelerate women’s and girls’ empowerment by involving them, and especially adolescents, in design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Tapping into the Indigenous approach and traditional practices around food and land use, typically held by women, is a powerful lever to improve nutrition, health and education for vulnerable children, especially girls, in Canada and internationally.
- Business opportunities for women along agri-food value-chains have great potential.

### Looking Ahead - How to go further and move faster

- Break down the silos by developing innovative partnerships to scale up nutrition-sensitive interventions.
- Develop multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders partnerships to conduct joint research and collect data; use the findings to define programs and implement them and to develop joint communication and advocacy strategies. Enhance learning across sectors, with a better use of cross-learning platforms.
- Think more about what programming success looks like in the context of these multi-sectoral approaches, always keeping in mind the “do no harm” principle.
- Ensure that sex-disaggregated data is captured in programming and elevated to country governments
- Involve women and adolescents in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programs to vastly increase their effectiveness and appropriateness.

## PANEL 3: THE WAY TO MOVE FASTER – POLITICAL SOLUTIONS & MOBILIZATION OF FUNDING

### Progress and Challenges

- Nutrition has managed to mobilize increased attention in recent years (Scaling Up Nutrition, G7 commitments, Nutrition 4 Growth), but this has not always translated to increased action or substantial impact. The push for nutrition has recently lost momentum. Canada needs to step up and be a strong advocate for nutrition, food security and women's empowerment, through both actions and words.
- At country level, there are also countless interests competing for attention of government decision-makers and policy-makers.
- Canada's financial commitment to nutrition specific interventions has been on a steady decline since 2012

### Good Practices & Lessons Learned

- We've seen stronger successes in our programs and policies where we have promoted a multi-stakeholder approach, and strengthened our dialogue with key players both within program countries and at the global level.
- We benefit from sharing our successes (and challenges) through publishing evidence, case studies, and other knowledge sharing activities. We need to continue creating a culture of knowledge exchange for mutual growth and innovation.
- Improvements in nutrition outcomes can only be made with bigger and better financial commitments – more innovative funding mechanisms, more flexible investments, partnerships with private industry, and longer-term, sustainable programming. The Global Financing Facility (GFF) is a great opportunity to funnel a greater share of existing donor and country resources to nutrition.
- The implementation of Canada's FIAP is an opportunity for Canadian leadership in ensuring equitable, evidence-driven programs and policies that support the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable contexts.

### Looking Ahead – How to go further and move faster

- Encourage Canada to take the lead on nutrition, through Canada's 2018 G7 Presidency, as well as other significant upcoming events such as Women Deliver 2019, by advocating for durable, long-term, evidence- and equality-driven policies.
- Exit the echo chamber and build partnerships with sectors to develop joint advocacy on women's empowerment and women's right and nutrition
- Advocate to governments at all levels, from grassroots to global, to put nutrition on top of the political agenda with dedicated funding
- Strengthen governance at the local level through mentorship and empowerment, to ensure that delivery of health services is strengthened and sustainable, even through shocks or disruptions to a country's stability.
- Work with other sectors to push at all levels for bigger and better investments to nutrition with a gender equality lens, through ODA, innovative financing mechanisms and domestic resources; ensure accountability of funds used at national level.
- Reinforce the need to support women's organisations at all levels.
- Work with SUN countries and with the SUN Movement Secretariat and networks to push governments to include gender equality in their national nutrition plans.