

Title: Fostering greater investments across food systems for better nutrition and healthy diets: the case of the State of Palestine.

Introduction

According to official numbers by the State of Palestine, nutrition situation can be characterized with the double burden of malnutrition. The prevalence of undernutrition, in particular, wasting (low weight for height) and stunting (low height for age) at the population level is lower than the global average and many other countries in the region. The wasting prevalence rates in children under-five is estimated at 1.2%, underweight at 1.4% and stunting at 7.4% (Palestinian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2014).

However, overweight and obesity and micronutrient deficiencies (also known as hidden hunger) pose significant challenges to the health and well-being of people, *see Table 1*. Overnutrition (classified as body mass index between 25 and 30) and obesity rates (classified as body mass index equal to or higher than 30) have been on an upward trend over the last two decades. The adult male overweight prevalence in the State of Palestine is 64%, which is higher than the Western Asia and global average, of 61.5% and 24.8% respectively (Development Initiatives, 2018). Similar trends are seen for adult female overweight rates. The female adult overweight prevalence in the State of Palestine is 69.5%, which is higher than the Western Asia and global average, of 66.3% and 28.4% respectively (Development Initiatives, 2018).

Table 1: Overview of micronutrient deficiencies in the State of Palestine (data from 2013). Source: Palestinian Micronutrient Survey (2013) and MAS (2017).

Micronutrient deficiencies	Pregnant women (18-43 years)	Lactating women (18-48 years)	Under-five children (6-59 months)
Vitamin A	54.8%	28.7%	72.9%
Vitamin B12	62.80%	20.60%	10.90%
Vitamin D	99.3%	98.7%	60.1%
Vitamin E	21.6%	44.1%	64.3%
Zinc	71.1%	90.7%	55.6%
Iron-deficiency anaemia	30.9%	29.0%	26.5%

Policy environment for nutrition

In the context of deteriorating nutrition situation in the State of Palestine, there is a need to think holistically about approaches that effectively reach nutritionally vulnerable groups and address the underlying causes of malnutrition. In the State of Palestine, eradicating malnutrition in all its forms – as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goal #2 – requires multi-sectoral planning and actions, spanning through agriculture, health, education, social protection, labour, social development, local government, environment, energy and water. Nutrition plays a key role in the attainment of Agenda 2030 and the State has already begun to translate and operationalize SDGs to its local context, cognizant of the role of sustainable agriculture and food systems in promoting healthy diets and better nutrition. Moreover, food and nutrition security is fully reflected in the National Policy Agenda (NPA) 2017-2022 and in its specific sectoral strategies (PMO, 2016). The creation of technical committees covering the SDGs, especially the technical committees on SDG 1 and 2, provide an innovative mechanism to fostering greater collaboration and synergies across various line ministries and departments for achieving zero poverty and zero hunger, eliminating malnutrition, improving food security and promoting sustainable agriculture. The result of the

work of these committees has been the drafting of the SDG 2-specific National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (NFNSP) 2019-2030.

Food systems investments for better nutrition

In the State of Palestine, improving nutrition through multisectoral approaches faces financial challenges, and issues pertaining to operational and technical capacities at the national level. Previous discussions with the nutrition, food and agriculture counterparts in the country by the FAO-EU FIRST Policy Facility have led to the identification of specific capacity-development needs (FAO-EU, 2018). Some of the identified needs include integration of food security, agriculture and nutrition programming, coordination of nutrition actions, nutrition situation analysis and indicators for monitoring and evaluation, and sensitization on key approaches and tools to build resilience. To start addressing the identified gaps and challenges on nutrition, in line with the national policies and the SDG2-specific NFNSP 2019-2030, FAO has facilitated the development of a National Investment Plan for food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture 2020-2022 (NIP) with relevant stakeholders in the country.

The development of the NIP (2020-2022) such that it improves nutrition and healthy diets analysed the following key supply and demand questions:

- I. How can the State of Palestine enable modern transformation of agriculture and food systems for improving accessibility, availability and stability of safe, diverse and nutritious foods?
- II. How can the State of Palestine enhance the national demand and consumption of healthy and sustainable diets to improve nutrition and well-being, with a focus on nutritionally vulnerable groups (*children under two years of age, pregnant and lactating women and adolescents*).

Results

Nutrition activities in the National Investment Plan were designed such that they comply with available evidence on pathways which connect food and agriculture interventions with nutrition and draw from available guidance on mainstreaming nutrition in investment plans. For the purposes of the investment plan, three pathways were prioritized: (a) the production pathway, (b) income pathway and (c) women's empowerment pathway, with increasing attention placed to nutrition education. In addition, nutrition is mainstreamed in other components of the investment plan along the lines of available guidance on mainstreaming nutrition in agricultural investment plans.

References

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