



## Speaker Summary Note

**Session:** **Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health—Where are we now, where are headed, and where do we want to be?**

**David Nabarro**

**Speaker:** Special Representative on Food Security and Nutrition  
United Nations, Switzerland

### Key Messages

**We need to :**

- **fully understand the links between agriculture – food – health – diets – environment;**
- **develop policies to comprehensively, and jointly, address food and nutrition insecurity that deliver real outcomes for people;**
- **foster movements and common actions by the wide range of actors involved;**
- **encourage and support action at the national level especially and widely communicate the results achieved by communities and nations.**

My focus is on Where Are We Headed, and Where Do We Want to Be? with regard to the Health and Nutrition dimensions of these links. I write from the perspective of a medical person who for nearly 10 years worked on nutrition and development in Asian and African communities, and who now serves as an international bureaucrat focusing on the linkages with a particular responsibility for food and nutrition security.

### **Where are we Headed?**

We are in a world that is severely affected by nutrition insecurity. This is not because of an absolute lack of food in our world. Those most likely to be nutritionally challenged usually are at the end of the line. They would benefit from fairer social policies and governance that takes account of the interests of the most vulnerable people. National decision makers struggle to prevent the numbers of hungry and malnourished from increasing as a result of volatile and rising food prices, and—till recently—declining investment in agriculture and social safety nets. They are anxious about the potential of hunger to fuel social unrest and political instability.

We are not headed to a good place. Our world is under threat with food systems that generally do not work in the interests of the food insecure; there are more than 22 countries affected by long term food insecurity; continuing high levels of under-nutrition; climate changing and an ever growing population—9 billion by

2050. And food prices are on the rise again as we speak. Within many communities the production of grains, meat and fish, especially by smallholders, is not keeping pace with demand. If not properly managed, increasing livestock production creates risk of major disease outbreaks at the animal-human-ecosystem interface. And trades in food are being financialized as those with funds to invest seek new ways to help their cash grow.

Action is being taken now to address these risks and make food systems work better. New Governance is provided by the revitalized Committee on World Food Security. The African Union and other regional bodies are engaged. Links between work on food, nutrition, health, water, environment and climate are being actively addressed—through the coherent work of governments, civil society groups and farmers’ organizations, global initiatives like the UN sustainability panel, the UN system High Level Task Force on Food Security and its Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action, and the work of the G20 and G8, and the World Economic Forum.

### **Where do we want to be?**

We want to get the linkages right (based on people’s realities and good science), to pursue comprehensive strategies in an integrated way, to focus—always—on equitable nutrition and health outcomes, and not just on average wealth, (a) in a manner that is responsible to the needs of people (and not the needs of specific authorities, agencies or professions), and (b) in a way that is continually accountable for what is being achieved.

### **How to get there? Eight lines of thought and action.**

*First, making sense of the links* between agriculture, food systems, diets, climate, environment and sustainability. Applying an understanding of ways in which these links interact with people’s lives. Fusing our sectoral perspectives so that they are fully integrated—and focusing on the ultimate results of (a) livelihood resilience and (b) people’s empowerment. This is only possible if we put people’s nourishment and autonomy at the centre of our work.

*Second, incorporate joined-up thinking and action within our work as bureaucrats and decision makers.* Focusing on good and poor nourishment: recognizing that poor nourishment in pregnancy, breastfeeding and early childhood increases the risk of chronic disease associated with excess consumption in later life. Recognizing the importance of an intake that contains the right mix of energy and nutrients (including micronutrients ) for good health.

*Third, devising and implementing the right policies.* This means a focus on optimal policies and on the environments (e.g., regulatory) within which these policies are being implemented. Encourage a pattern of agricultural growth and food system development that not only influences the overall quantities of food produced but also:

- has positive implications for nutritional intake and health;
- minimizes the risk of zoonotic disease;
- avoids creating new burdens on women’s time;
- avoids driving smallholders off their land;
- does not undermine the sustainable of the planet’s resources.

*Fourth, focus on ensuring that policies yield outcomes.* Specific health outcomes should feature in agriculture policies, and thought should be given to pursuing these outcomes through transformations in agriculture and development. This means linking policies to

- improved nutritional status in pregnancy, breastfeeding and childhood (including reductions in deficiencies of micronutrients like Vitamin A, Iron or Zinc);
- reductions in chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular diseases,
- a lower incidence of injuries,
- a reduced risk of infectious diseases (including the zoonoses).

Fifth, engaging all stakeholders in our thinking about these issues, particularly those who are most at risk. People tend to lead whole lives and we need approaches that bring social and economic objectives together. The agriculture-health value chain is central and should be viewed as more than the absence of disease where value can be assessed using measures of diet and nutrition.

Sixth, involving a range of actors in implementing the policies. Civil society and private sector are key partners in supporting the implementation of pro-health nutritional policies and pro-health and pro-nutrition agricultural policies. There are common values and the potential for mutual trust among many public and private actors working for equity in health and nutritional outcomes.

The joint work to operationalize these concepts has to be advanced at national level. When the focus is on the poorest and most vulnerable, solutions need to be designed with care and this may call for the investment of public funds to help cover the costs (and time) needed for relationship-building among critical stakeholders. The continual focus must be on results—now and in the longer term. Selective investments will be needed to encourage disparate professional groups from agriculture, nutrition and health to work together at country and international levels. Training matters.

Seventh, foster movements that will bring a range of actors together on a platform that encourages common actions and results. There are 3 main reasons for encouraging movements for food and nutrition security NOW: Firstly, the renewed international focus on human rights and equity as the basis for economic, social and human evolution, and the value given to rights-based “self” development that is country and community led. Secondly, the evidence on the impact of under nutrition on infant and young child mortality is extraordinary. And thirdly, there is a widespread recognition that we have a series of well tested and low cost interventions to address food and nutritional insecurity.

On Food Security we have a Global Partnership, backed by the Committee on World Food Security, and engagement of researchers, civil society, businesses and more. This concerted effort is evolving into a social network that is based on the Right to Food. On Nutrition there has been further progress through the Scale Up Nutrition movement.

Eighth, tell the story and make sure it is heard. There is really no excuse for our inability to share the good news. Most of us here know this but our message is just not getting across. We are not awaiting a new miracle cure for hunger. We are saying that tackling hunger and malnutrition can be done—it just requires the right policies and incentives in the right place at the right time.