

# ROSA Newsletter



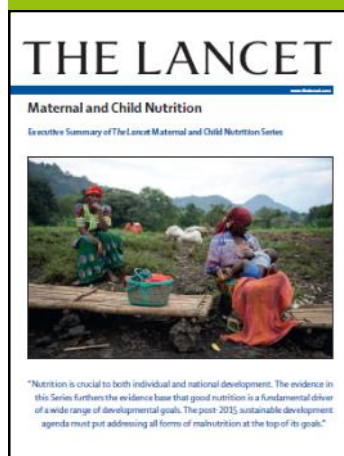
## OPERATIONAL FOOD SECURITY NETWORK

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Number 45 | July 2013

**SUMMARY:** Launch of The Lancet Series > Agenda > ROSA News

### VIEW ON CURRENT ISSUES



### Launch of The Lancet maternal and child nutrition series: Increasing evidence for action

Five years after its first series on maternal and child undernutrition, the Lancet published a major second series (see box below for the presentation of the series). The landmark 2008 Lancet series was a critical catalyst for increasing awareness around maternal and child undernutrition and improving policy and practice responses. The new series comes at a key point in time when international attention on nutrition has never been higher and when country-level priorities are dominating the discourse. The 2013 series assesses national progress in reducing undernutrition and international efforts towards previous recommendations. It presents new evidence on effective interventions and provides new policy recommendations to accelerate and sustain progress in nutrition.

In advance of the G8 annual summit, the series launch took place on June 6th at a full day symposium in London. Similar launch events are being hosted in more than a dozen countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. **Lola Gostelow, team member of the EC Nutrition Advisory Service (NAS)**, participated at this event. In this interview, she provides her insights on the new series and considers its contribution for enhancing evidence-based policy making. She insists on the need to strengthen that evidence base, however, and to expand our knowledge around what works in preventing and addressing undernutrition. For we won't be able to achieve the impact we desire (a 40% reduction in stunting worldwide by 2025) unless we go beyond the proven set of nutrition-specific interventions.

**The first Lancet series contributed to an increasing understanding of the problem of maternal and child undernutrition in developing countries, what works and what to do at the national and international levels. What is the new evidence presented in the 2013 series and how does it contribute to accelerate progress in reducing undernutrition?**

The 2008 series represented an important move forward and a major development in the nutrition field. It helped put nutrition high on the political agenda and increase commitment to the reduction of undernutrition. It made recommendations to overcome some of the most important problems. It showed that the nutrition system was dysfunctional and fragmented. One of the key challenges was therefore the development of a new international architecture. The emergence of the SUN Movement has been critical in this regard, encouraging increased commitment to support country leadership and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships to do this. There has also been a gradual evolution in donor positioning, adopting new or adapting existing nu-

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trition strategies. The 2008 Lancet series also provided evidence-based guidance and identified effective interventions and the need to focus on the first 1.000 days of life as a key “window of opportunity” to address and preventing undernutrition.

Five years on, there was a need to assess progress and strengthen the evidence-based guidance, in particular on nutrition-sensitive interventions. The new series partially addresses these needs, and is helpful in reinforcing the on-going process. A new conceptual framework is introduced that combines both the physical and developmental aspects of nutrition and the benefits across the “life course” (which includes adolescence that was not addressed in the 2008 series). The framework depicts the nutrition-specific interventions to address the immediate causes of suboptimal growth and development; the nutrition-sensitive interventions to influence the underlying determinants of malnutrition; and the investments needed to build an enabling environment within which such nutrition interventions can have effect. The series continues to focus on the crucial window of opportunity during pregnancy and the first 2 years of life, but it also places a major emphasis on preventive actions from the pre-pregnancy period (both for the health of the mother and foetal growth and development). The series remains focused on undernutrition, but gives more attention to the emerging issue of obesity.

Another key contribution of this publication is the analysis of the benefits and costs of scaling up proven interventions in 34 high-burden countries: a reduction of 15% of deaths in children under five, a decrease of at least 20% of stunting and of 61% of severe wasting. This would cost \$9.6 billion per year, to save over a million lives. But it would mean increasing coverage of these interventions to reach over 90% of those in need. The discussion at the launch event revealed widespread unease about the feasibility of this, and pointed, once again, to the need for a more balanced approach whereby nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions are combined.

### Presentation of the new series

The first article, **Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries**, is an overview of the prevalence and the consequence of nutritional conditions during the life course from girl’s adolescence through pregnancy to childhood. >>>

The second article, **Evidence-based interventions for improvement of maternal and child nutrition: what can be done and what cost?**, provides a comprehensive update of interventions to address undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in women and children. It shows evidence around nutrition-specific interventions, health outcomes and costs associated with expanding reach and impact of interventions. >>>

The third one, **Nutrition-sensitive interventions and programmes: how can they help to accelerate progress in improving maternal and child nutrition?**, deals with the nutrition-sensitive interventions (notably agricultural interventions) and approaches and their impact on improved nutrition and health status. >>>

And the fourth, **The politics of reducing malnutrition: building commitment and accelerating progress**, details the characteristics of an enabling environment where nutrition programs can yield the desired impact. >>>

There is also a **set of comments** that examines current nutrition efforts and responses, along with what should be done moving forward to address the needs of women and children in the LMICs. >>>

**The 2013 series did attempt to focus more on nutrition-sensitive policies and programmes in areas such as agriculture, social safety nets, early childhood development and schooling. What are the main findings and key policy messages to inform future investments and enhance cross-sectoral interventions?**

Understood as interventions that address underlying determinants of malnutrition, nutrition-sensitive interventions are potentially significant contributors to improved nutrition outcomes. However, evidence as to their effectiveness is still scarce. This is

mainly due to weaknesses in programme design and implementation as well as a lack of rigour in impact evaluation. An interesting perspective on this dilemma is put forward by one of the commentators to The Lancet series<sup>1</sup>, highlighting two critical constraints: firstly, nutrition is simply not important enough in agriculture, and goals linked to economic and political gains take precedence; secondly, the nutrition community is “fixated” on the need for evidence derived from randomised control trials which are simply unworkable in the agriculture and food security sector: interventions cannot be randomised and the effect pathway is too long to attribute impact directly. Instead, other bodies of evidence, such as analysis of the pathways through which food systems can affect nutrition, should be used with greater confidence and conviction to influence policy guidance on nutrition-sensitive approaches. Building a stronger body of evidence in the next 5-10 years will be a key challenge and a crucial element to bring about better outcomes for nutrition through a cross-sectoral approach.

Another important issue raised regarding the impact of nutrition-sensitive interventions is that there are other constraints to nutrition such as infectious diseases and environmental enteropathy that may not be addressed by the interventions and that limit impact. These are key blockages on the nutritional impact and need to be better addressed by linking different nutrition-sensitive programmes (such as social transfers with hygiene investments). Finally, during the discussions in London, it was highlighted that cross-sectoral understanding and strategies are weak. This is a serious problem and effort needs to be made to resolve it. So that different groups can work better together to promote food and nutrition security.

**The series also examines the political economy of nutrition, with paper 4 focusing on the enabling environment for nutrition. What has changed since 2008? What are the key challenges that different stakeholders need to focus on in the next five years?**

A lot of progress has been made since 2008. There is a stronger mobilisation and political commitment for nutrition. The official development aid for basic nutrition has increased by more than 60% from 2008-2011, though it remains very low. To scale up support, it will be important to create an enabling environment for nutrition and ensure that commitment is translated into outcomes. The series highlights three factors that shape enabling environments: knowledge and evidence, politics and governance, and capacity and resources. I would like to insist on the need to strengthen capacities at different levels. Nutrition needs more leaders (individual capacity) for increasing effectiveness of nutrition action. Accelerating and sustaining progress in nutrition will not be possible without strengthening organisational and systemic capacities. The series also calls for a more collective approach to tackling undernutrition, a “whole-society” approach that includes not only governments or civil society but also the private sector. But here again, we need more evidence-based approaches and the development of solid mechanisms to monitor the benefits of private sector action.

Finally, for me, one of the key messages from the 2013 Lancet series is the need to fill the nutrition-sensitive gap. We need a new approach to determining the boundaries of what works and what does not, and we need to be bolder in securing nutrition-relevant responses by other sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> Per Pinstrup-Andersen, *Nutrition-sensitive food systems: from rhetoric to reality*, The Lancet, June 2013  
[>>>](#)



## Upcoming events

**4-11 November 2013:**  
ICT4Ag : the digital springboard for inclusive agriculture , Kigali (Rwanda) [>>>](#)

**3-7 May 2014:** Nexus 2014: Water, Food, Climate and Energy Conference, The Water Institute, North Caroline [>>>](#)

**Don't hesitate to post events on Rosa collaborative platform** [>>>](#)

## Past events

- **Nutrition for Growth: Beating Hunger through Business and Science – London, 8 June 2013:** The UK government, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), and the Government of Brazil co-hosted Nutrition for Growth: Beating Hunger through Business and Science on 8 June to bring together business leaders, scientists, governments and civil society to make the political and financial commitments needed to prevent undernutrition, enabling people and nations to prosper. In London's Hyde Park, thousands of people (private and public sector) gathered to urge G8 leaders to tackle hunger, ensure greater transparency over land deals, and close loopholes that allow companies to dodge paying tax in poor countries. Meanwhile, the UK prime minister presided over a summit that resulted in donors committing \$4bn to address nutrition and hunger. [>>>](#)
- **Geography of food: reconnecting with the origin in the food system, Brussels rural development briefings n°31, CTA – Brussels, 15 May 2013:** More than 120 participants discussed traditional agricultural products (geographical indications or "GIs") and other origin marketing tools in the context of ACP countries. The event touched upon important topics such as: existing global and regional frameworks for protecting geographical indications and traditional products, the Caribbean experience in protecting agrifood products, or the leverage of GI potentials in the use of underutilized species. The first panel discussed the various frameworks and tools to secure value for producers by protecting and preserving the attributes of origin and tradition of agricultural and food products. Panel 2 reviewed the potential of origin-linked tools for ACP producers based on successes, including looking at sustainability factors. And the third panel identified the promising avenues for future actions, especially in support of ACP countries. [>>>](#)

## ROSA NEWS



## EC's latest news

- **EU honoured by FAO for its response to the food crisis:**



On 15th June, the European Union (EU) was honoured by the FAO with the Jacques Diouf award. The prize was shared with Indian NGO Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), honoured for its innovative and dedicated efforts to lift extremely poor women out of poverty and hunger. The EU was awarded especially for the food facility, an initiative that has helped people in 49 developing countries by improving agricultural production of small farmers in response to high food price. This initiative, launched in 2008, has benefited more than 59 million, especially small farmers. The prize of the award will be used to top up funding for EU projects on food resilience and nutrition, European Commission president Barroso declared at the acceptance of the FAO award.

At the beginning of June 2013, the Commission announced that between 2014 and 2020 €3.5 billion would be spent on improving nutrition in some of the world's poorest countries. See the EC report on the food facility: [>>>](#)



## New online resources



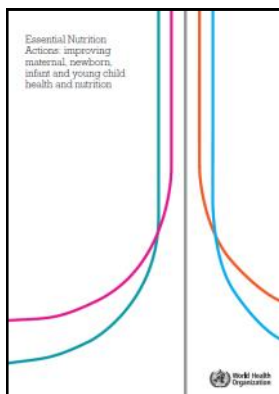
● **Investing in small holder agriculture for food security, High level panel of expert on food security and nutrition – June 2013:** Smallholders constitute the majority of farm families in the world and their contributions to household, national and global food security are monumental. 2014 has been declared by the UN as the International Year of Family Farming. Smallholding offers great opportunities for sustainable intensification. This report advocates to extend to smallholders a new deal comprising the following five components: 1/ conservation and enhancement of soil health, 2/sustainable management of all water sources and launching a “more crop and income per drop of water” movement; 3/extending appropriate technologies and inputs, 4/providing the needed credit and insurance and 5/ensuring assured and remunerative marketing opportunities. All these programmes should be engendered, in order to ensure that the support systems that women farmers need. >>>

● **The state of food and agriculture 2013, FAO – June 2013:** The FAO has recently launched its flagship annual publication The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) on “Food systems for better nutrition”. Malnutrition in all its forms – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity – imposes unacceptably high economic and social costs on countries at all income levels. The SOFA report argues that improving nutrition and reducing these costs must begin with food and agriculture. The traditional role of agriculture in producing food and generating income is fundamental, but agriculture and the entire food system – from inputs and production, through processing, storage, transport and retailing, to consumption – can contribute much more to the eradication of malnutrition. >>>

● **First line of defence. Assessing the potential of local food reserves in the Sahel – July 2013:** Food stocks are back to the center of the debate as instruments potentially capable of responding to the challenges posed by the volatility of food prices and the recurrence of crises. The purpose of this study is to analyze the potential of proximity food stocks in the Sahel. The authors reviewed the factors that may determine or condition their failure or success, and evaluate some innovative instruments (such as the articulation with national stocks, index insurance and stabilization funds) which could also contribute to their improvement. >>>

● **Promoting Local Food Security Reserves in the Sahel. The case of AAAE in Burkina Faso – July 2013:** Burkina Faso relies on subsistence agriculture to meet the basic needs of a large part of its population. Environmental challenges such as land degradation and desertification particularly affect the northern semi-arid provinces, where the most vulnerable groups struggle with food security. Increasing food prices since 2007 mean that improvements in food access and availability are even more important. Local food reserves can make a significant contribution to community-based food security strategies. This case study describes the experience of a community-based organisation (Association Aidons l'Afrique Ensemble) in the establishment and management of local food security reserves in the department of Rambo, Burkina Faso. >>>

● **How can the operating environment for nutrition research be improved in Sub-Saharan Africa? The views of African researchers, Plos – June 2013:** The authors of this research paper have collected data on the barriers and requirements for conducting nutrition research in sub-Saharan Africa through semi-structured interviews with 144 participants involved in nutrition research in 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In conclusion, African nutrition researchers argued how research priorities need to be identified by African stakeholders, accompanied by consensus building to enable creating a problem-driven national research agenda. In addition, it was considered necessary to promote interactions among researchers, and between researchers and policymakers. Multidisciplinary research and international and cross-African collaboration were seen as crucial to build capacity in sub-Saharan nutrition research. >>>



- **Essential Nutrition Actions: improving maternal, newborn, infant and young child health and nutrition, WHO – 2013:** This paper is one of the documents developed by WHO as a background for the Comprehensive Implementation Plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, endorsed by the World Health Assembly in its 65th meeting on May 2012. It provides a compact of WHO guidance on nutrition interventions (undernutrition, overweight/obesity, micronutrient deficiencies) targeting the first 1,000 days of life. The report argues that by focusing on this package of essential nutrition actions (ENA), policy-makers could reduce infant and child mortality, improve physical and mental growth and development, and improve productivity.

[>>>](#)

## External resources

- **New discussion on the Global forum on food security and nutrition:** A discussion on “Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems” was launched on the Global forum on food security and nutrition. It is open for contributions until 29th July.

[>>>](#)

- **The CaLP expands to Asia:** The Cash Learning Programme was launched after 2005 Tsunami emergency to improve the quality of monetary transfer programmes. In June, it has expanded to Asia, as the third of four planned Regional Offices (East Africa, West Africa and possibly the Middle East soon), with a base in Bangkok Thailand. See [CaLP website](#) for more information on the training programmes.

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**This bulletin was written by the GRET team in charge of animating ROSA.**

The network is an initiative of EuropeAid (Unit C1 – Rural development, food security and nutrition in collaboration with Unit R7 – Training, knowledge management, internal communication, documentation).

The points expressed do not reflect the official position of the European Commission.

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