

Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021: an opportunity to accelerate the efforts towards achieving the SDGs



Nutrition is fundamental for the health and wellbeing of individuals and a basis for sustainable development and economic growth. Investing in good nutrition is an opportunity to positively impact health, increase individual potential and productivity, and support the economic development of nations. The Government of Japan will host the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021 on Dec 7–8. This is the third Nutrition for Growth Summit following London in 2013 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016. The Tokyo Summit aims to review the current status and challenges in nutrition improvement worldwide and to promote global efforts towards better nutrition. At the Tokyo Summit, malnutrition in all its forms will be addressed, including undernutrition, overnutrition, and the double burden of malnutrition, as part of accelerating efforts to achieving global goals and targets, such as the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–25), the WHO Global Nutrition Targets 2025, and the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The world is facing the complex problem of malnutrition. As of 2020, approximately one in ten people globally were undernourished,¹ while about 13% of adults were obese in 2016.² The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to lead to a considerable increase in malnutrition in all its forms.³ Stunting and wasting, particularly in children, affect not only their physical and mental development,⁴ but can also lead to overweight and obesity later in life and become a major risk factor of developing non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.⁵ Food systems are becoming more vulnerable than ever to the impacts of climate change; therefore, sustainable food systems to nourish a growing population while protecting our planet are crucial. It is also important to recognise that nutrition is an issue linked to all 17 SDGs,⁶ and according to the UN, nutrition together with food systems are considered one of the six key entry points for the transformation required to achieve the SDGs.⁷ Therefore, tackling malnutrition is an important challenge for any country or region towards sustainable development. Furthermore, the importance and urgency of taking action to address malnutrition are heightened by the estimated increase in the world's malnourished population with the COVID-19 pandemic.³

Against this backdrop, the Government of Japan hosts the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021, where we will reaffirm the importance of human security and food security related to nutrition. Japan is one of the countries with the longest life expectancy in the world, and one of the reasons is that the government has invested in nutrition improvement for the past decades, even though people had severely suffered from undernutrition especially after World War 2. In addition to the establishment of universal health insurance in 1961, nutrition has had an essential role in building the foundation of the health of Japan's population.⁸ Japan has established nutrition services throughout the life-course with nutrition specialists based in various sectors and areas across the country.⁹ This approach is something we could consider as one of the models of the integration of nutrition into universal health coverage (UHC). Also noteworthy, Japan has made efforts to continue its support for healthy diets even under difficult situations caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis.¹⁰ The Government of Japan will continue its concerted efforts to create a caring and resilient society where no one is left behind through comprehensive and inclusive nutrition policies, which is in line with the principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021, we will focus on five main themes in our discussion. The first is health. Nutrition is fundamental for health, including the prevention and control of diseases. Nutrition services must be in health-care systems and services, thereby integrating nutrition into UHC. The second theme is food systems, which sustainably promote healthy diets and nutrition. It is crucial to build food systems that are resilient to climate change and emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases while ensuring access to healthy diets. The Summit will discuss the transformation of our food systems, reaffirming the achievement of the UN Food Systems Summit held in September, 2021. The third theme is resilience. Malnutrition is particularly challenging in fragile settings such as conflicts and large-scale disasters. There is an urgent need for effective measures



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to address malnutrition among the most vulnerable people in such settings. The fourth theme is data-driven accountability. Quality data collection and evidence-based progress measurements and reporting are key to facilitate nutrition improvement. There have been several examples across the globe, such as the cost-benefit analysis of direct nutrition interventions for stunting in low-income and middle-income countries.¹¹ By strengthening such evidence-based measurements, the global community is able to accelerate investment to further drive results for nutrition. The fifth theme is financing. Steady nutrition improvement requires innovative and catalytic financing models while securing and sustaining financial resources. We look forward to ambitious and robust commitments related to any of these themes from all relevant stakeholders at the Summit, including governments, international organisations, businesses, and civil society organisations.

The Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021 takes place at a critical time and can provide the momentum needed to accelerate global and multistakeholder efforts to improve nutrition. The Government of Japan is determined to galvanise global commitments to the nutrition improvement movement to truly leave no one behind at the Summit.

I am the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, which is acting as the host of the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021. I declare no other competing interests.

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