



**LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND:  
MAKING THE CASE FOR **ADOLESCENT GIRLS****

**IFAD Headquarters**  
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Via Paolo di Dono, 44  
00142 Rome, Italy



# CONCEPT NOTE

## BACKGROUND

Despite significant progress made over the last decade, malnutrition remains pervasive throughout the world and current trends indicate that there will still be 129 million children under five worldwide with stunted growth in 2030. In 2013, the Lancet nutrition series called for an increased focus on adolescent nutrition to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition. In addition, an estimated 16 million adolescent girls give birth every year, representing 11% of births globally.

Adolescents compose the future generation of any country. Their nutrition needs are therefore critical for the well-being of the society. Adolescent girls, especially if undernourished and stunted, are more likely to die in childbirth, at great risk to be left nutritionally depleted and exposed to give birth to malnourished children, affecting the latter's development and future productivity. Their babies are also more likely to die or be born with nutritional deficits. The infants who survive have a greater risk of growing up to be stunted mothers or fathers. In order to prevent malnutrition from being passed to the next generation, there is need to improve the nutritional status of adolescent girls. This cannot just be done through better nutrition alone, but by employing a number of multi-sector interventions in areas such as education, water, sanitation and hygiene, increasing their access to resources and empowering them with economic

independence in order to delay marriage and pregnancy.

In order to improve adolescent nutrition there is a need to work on several complex determinants of malnutrition such as poverty, a lack of resources, barriers to education and livelihoods, and social, economic and political factors. Supporting and empowering girls is essential in order to positively influence the nutrition of future generations – reducing stunting by 40 per cent by 2025 and eliminating all forms of malnutrition by 2030.

This international conference will build upon on-going dialogue on adolescent nutrition, the most recent international meeting being the June 2018 consultation “Adolescents: Agents of change for a well-nourished world” hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in Geneva and the priorities of Canada's 2018 G7 Presidency on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **Purpose of the conference**

The aim of this conference is to maintain the high momentum generated by ongoing dialogue on adolescent girls as a target group to achieve global nutrition goals, advance progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, which focuses on eradicating hunger and preventing all forms of malnutrition.

The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to increase the visibility of nutrition action at the highest levels, ensure coordination, strengthen multi-sector collaboration, create synergies and measure progress towards sustainable food systems and food and nutrition security for all. Progress on reducing undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies has been far too slow and uneven across regions, countries and population groups. Most critically, nutrition among adolescent girls has not been sufficiently addressed, although it is one of the recommended actions in the Second International Conference on Nutrition Framework of Action to address stunting.<sup>1</sup>

This conference, organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Save the Children Italy, and supported by the Government of Canada, will serve as a platform for various organizations to take stock of ongoing interventions and policies in support of better nutrition and healthy diets for adolescent girls, and identify gaps that need to be filled to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition. The conference will underscore the importance of tackling challenges to adolescent girls' good nutrition and empowering them throughout the life cycle. Looking beyond health-focused interventions, a wide-range of issues faced by adolescents – and especially adolescent girls – will be discussed.

The discussions will highlight the importance of nutrition-sensitive interventions and holistic approaches. Among them, special attention will be placed on the importance of preventing early marriage and pregnancy, and on

implementing youth empowerment initiatives through the nutrition lens. The conference aims to examine the multiple determinants of malnutrition and how interventions addressed at empowering girls can influence their nutritional status by supporting physical and cognitive health – to positively influence the growth of the next generation.

Special topics to be addressed include:

- setting the scene: adolescents – a window of opportunity to tackle malnutrition in all its forms;
- interventions and activities to address adolescent nutrition and empowerment, with a focus on adolescent girls;
- youth voices: building inclusive processes to listen and learn from youth;
- economic opportunities and youth empowerment, child marriage and early pregnancy;
- investing in adolescent girls to ensure that they are educated in a healthy and safe environment to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition, food insecurity and poverty;
- adolescent nutrition and gender, with a focus on governments' commitments to support adolescent development and nutrition, and their contributions to global movements and frameworks; and
- developing frameworks for tracking progress and gathering evidence to support them.

### **Audience**

Institutions, practitioners, technical specialists, academia and civil society organizations will join the conference and contribute to the debate.

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 36: Establish policies and strengthen interventions to improve maternal nutrition and health, beginning with adolescent girls and continuing through pregnancy and lactation (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>)

