Advancing national multi-sectoral nutrition policies and programming can greatly benefit from an assessment of opportunities and challenges for meeting nutrient requirements of key target groups, as this is a prerequisite for preventing malnutrition. Malnutrition has two direct causes: inadequate dietary intake and disease. The FNG assessment focuses on gaps in dietary intake to inform national policies and actions that can be taken across food, social protection, and health systems to improve nutrition, with a focus on the most vulnerable populations. The FNG considers whether nutritious foods are available, accessible, and affordable in a specific context, and identifies the barriers that lead to gaps in nutrient intake. The analysis focuses on the extent to which vulnerable people have choices in the foods they consume and how those choices are made. The FNG process identifies and models the impacts of context-appropriate interventions to improve diets and nutrient intake across food, health, education, and social protection systems. The results are used to identify entry points across systems, to refine programmes, and to make recommendations to policymakers (Figure 1).

The assessment comprises two components:
1. A country-specific review of secondary data and information on factors that reflect or affect dietary intake.
2. An assessment of the extent to which economic barriers prevent adequate nutrient intake. This uses the Cost of the Diet (CotD) linear programming software developed by Save the Children (UK), and includes modelling of the economic impact of possible interventions to increase nutrient intake and fill nutrient gaps.

Preventing malnutrition, including through improved access to nutritious foods, cannot be achieved by one sector alone. FNG is designed to inform multisectoral decision making and therefore engages stakeholders from all sectors including food, health, agriculture, education, and social protection. It is the stakeholders who define the scope and focus of the assessment. They contribute data and sources of information for identification of context-specific barriers and entry points and together with the analytical team develop a shared understanding of the issues and possible solutions. They then identify appropriate nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions that can be implemented by different sectors using their existing delivery platforms (e.g. social safety nets, food processing and markets, antenatal care, school feeding programmes).

**Figure 1:** Fill the Nutrient Gap Framework for situation assessment for multi-sectoral decision making on the prevention of malnutrition

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**Secondary Data Analysis**
Are nutritious foods available, accessible and chosen for consumption?
- Information about Food Systems
- Database, reports, peer-reviewed articles, grey literature

**Cost of the Diet Analysis**
What does a nutritious diet cost and is it affordable?
- Food prices: Prices for at least 60 foods across different food groups, for subnational (and urban/rural) areas
- Household expenditure and food habits: Household food expenditure data for the same subnational areas

Identify possible interventions and entry points
Estimate minimum cost nutritious diet and economic accessibility

1. Understand the challenges
2. Model interventions to improve access and affordability of nutritious diets
3. Inform a prioritization of interventions across sectors
The FNG analysis and decision making process are requested by countries, e.g. the SUN Focal Point, Ministry of Health or Ministry of Social Protection. The ‘country champion’, together with a technical working group and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. SUN networks) engage in the FNG process, recommend data sources, validate and review the findings and formulate policy and strategy recommendations. The FNG analysis itself, including the Cost of the Diet analysis and modelling, is conducted in partnership with the WFP’s Systems Analysis for Nutrition team that also guides the in-country process. The technical working group often includes representatives of the bureau of statistics, key nutrition stakeholders from government, UN, academia, civil society, private sector (e.g. SUN business network) and the WFP country office.

How does the FNG analysis help nutrition decision making?

The FNG situation assessment provides a better understanding of the need for nutritious foods and which these are. It considers the role of the food system and the social protection system to increase availability and physical and economic access to nutritious foods, in addition to the health system and education system that can increase awareness, demand and provide distribution platforms for nutritious foods and supplements. Stakeholders from different sectors participate in the identification of data sources and the review of the findings, which they then use for decision making for policies, strategies and programmes. As such, the FNG is a systems-focused situation analysis that brings nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive sectors together for multi-sectoral decision making towards prioritization of policies and strategies to improve nutrition (Figure 2).

What are the data needs?

The FNG analysis is based on secondary data on factors that directly or indirectly relate to availability, access and demand for nutritious foods and trends of malnutrition indicators over time, disaggregated by for example geographic area and wealth quintiles. Typically, 100-200 sources of information and data are identified per country and much of the value of the FNG analysis lies in the triangulation of information that is not typically brought together. For the Cost of the Diet analysis, food prices for at least 60 foods from a range of food groups is required, which come either from secondary sources such as household expenditure surveys or food price monitoring or are collected through market surveys. Household food expenditure data is also required.

What technical resources are necessary to implement the FNG analysis?

The FNG analysis and decision making process are requested by countries, e.g. the SUN Focal Point, Ministry of Health or Ministry of Social Protection. The ‘country champion’, together with a technical working group and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. SUN networks) engage in the FNG process, recommend data sources, validate and review the findings and formulate policy and strategy recommendations. The FNG analysis itself, including the Cost of the Diet analysis and modelling, is conducted in partnership with the WFP’s Systems Analysis for Nutrition team that also guides the in-country process. The technical working group often includes representatives of the bureau of statistics, key nutrition stakeholders from government, UN, academia, civil society, private sector (e.g. SUN business network) and the WFP country office.

How long does an FNG analysis take?

The FNG analysis takes approximately 6 months, but it can be extended over a longer period in order to be aligned with key policy formulation processes and engagement opportunities.

What are the FNG analysis strengths and limitations?

**Strengths:** By focusing on improving nutrient intake, the contribution from both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions can be reviewed and compared. The systems approach together with the review of context specific data, ensures that the focus is on interventions that address the main challenges faced by consumers/households in terms of being able to source nutritious foods, as opposed to educating them to optimize what they do within the boundaries of their constraints (such as lack of market access, low crop yields, nonavailability of adequately nutritious foods for young children).

**Limitations:** The FNG analysis uses secondary data and sources of information which limits it to what is available. This also applies to the expenditure data used to calculate the affordability of a nutritious diet. The FNG and Cost of the Diet analysis take a household/consumer perspective to identifying which options are most cost-effective in improving access to required nutrients and do not estimate the costs of providing the interventions.

**Learn more at:**
https://www.nyas.org/NMC and www.wfp.org/fillthenutrientgap