

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Role of Dietitian-Nutritionists in Contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL #8

Target: To promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work (1).

GLOBAL TARGETS

- ▶ By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
- ▶ Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms
- ▶ Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in

particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

- ▶ By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
- ▶ Promote a sustained per capita growth with at least a 7% Gross Domestic Product per annum in the least developed countries
- ▶ Decrease development-oriented policies that support productive activities and decent job creation, achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities
- ▶ Achieve equal pay for work of equal value (2)

This brief will cover how nutrition and food systems are related to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal #8, and how dietitian-nutritionists can help achieve it. Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work, is an essential step to the eradication of poverty. Nearly 2.2 billion people live at or below the US \$1.90 poverty line (2), and unemployment is increasing by 1 million every year (13). Decent work is achieved when everyone has the opportunity to obtain work that is productive, ensures fair income, and provides security and social protection (2). Decent work dramatically improves personal development and social integration (2). Global labour productivity rates have increased and unemployment rates have decreased to levels before the



financial crisis 2008. However, this progress is slow and things must move more quickly to increase employment opportunities, reduce informal employment and the gender pay gap, promoting safe and secure working environments and decent work for all [3].

2 billion people have informal employment ⁽¹³⁾

It is a priority of the UN to ensure that such economic growth is decoupled from environmental degradation to guarantee that the growth is sustainable. This is in accordance with the 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production (2).

How Does Decent Work and Economic Growth Impact Nutrition and Vice Versa?

When food insecurity rates increase economic growth and employment decrease, and when economic growth and employment decrease food insecurity rates increase (4). Undernourishment and malnutrition at all points in life affect employment and work productivity. At childhood, malnourishment affects cognitive development and intellectual capacity (5) and can compromise a child's school attendance. In some countries, schools use physical size as an indicator of school readiness. Children with stunted growth start school later, receiving less education and lowering their expected lifetime earnings (6). Even without stunted growth, hunger impedes one's ability to learn, and so malnourished children are academically

disadvantaged, both short and long term (6). This impacts employability in the future and restricts income-earning potential (4). A 1% increase in caloric intake (e.g., a simple snack) results in a 2.27% increase in general labor productivity (7).



People who are iron-deficient have a **30% lower** work capacity ⁽⁷⁾

A healthy population contributes to the growth of the economy, and unhealthy populations impede it. Poor diets of workers cost nations up to 20% in productivity loss either due to undernutrition or excess weight (7,8). An unhealthy population is a massive financial burden on the economy. Malnutrition alone costs the global economy \$3.5 trillion per year (9). Financial investments into nutrition programming, policies, and supports provide an incredible return, contributing to a population that is better equipped to work and meaningfully contribute to society.

The state of the economy affects health and nutrition, particularly by impacting food security. When the economy grows, malnutrition rates drop, both within and across countries (6). A 10% increase in income results in a ~5% reduction in malnutrition rates (6). Negative consequences of a failing economy also affect nutrition. For example, one of the impacts of the economic turndown in 2008 was volatile food prices. When they spiked, 105 million people were pushed below the poverty line, affecting low-income countries most dramatically (4). In countries with already existing food insecurity, a 30% increase in the price of food leads to the poverty rates increasing by 3% (4).

SAN PEDRO DISEÑOS TEXTILE COMPANY MEAL PROGRAM⁽¹²⁾

San Pedro Diseños, a textiles company in Guatemala City, saw massive workplace and financial changes when they implemented a meal plan for their employees. Many families in Guatemala experience food insecurity, and so San Pedro Diseños provided a nutritious breakfast and lunch daily. Production increased by 70% and annual earnings increased by 20%. Employees' morale also improved and absenteeism, illness, and medical costs dropped. San Pedro Diseños' investment into their employees' health and nutrition was well worth the cost.

The principle cause of household food insecurity are incomes that are too low to ensure adequate access to food (11). Growth of the economy is essential for raising incomes and achieving sustainable long-term food security (11). Evidence suggests that the most efficient way to reduce extreme poverty is to grow the agricultural sectors in low-income countries (11). This has been found to be three times more effective than growth in other sectors, and can buffer shocks in global markets (11). When household incomes are resistant to changes in the global market they are more resistant to food insecurity (11).

Framework for Action

Academic Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can support economic growth through nonexperimental investigative research. Designing instruments that collect data on income, earning, wealth, and other dimensions of socio-economic status is needed to identify relationships between the economy, income and nutrition (6).

Policy Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can work across sectors with policy makers to advocate for investment in policies that lead to both better nutrition and economic growth. As described, investing in nutrition has a beneficial economic return due to the increase in worker health and productivity. Supporting policies and programs such as school lunch programs, workplace nutrition programs, nutrition education policies and supplementation and fortification policies, will support economic growth through increased productivity of workers (6). Policies that improve population health and nutrition benefit the economy not only by enhancing productivity, but also by decreasing healthcare costs for nutrition related diseases.

Health-Systems Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can assess the nutritional needs of individuals and discuss how physical work environments and requirements affect their nutritional intake. Properly educating clients and their employers about the nutrition they need to successfully complete their tasks at work gives them the opportunity to work to their full capacity.

Community Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can also work with schools, training centres, and employers to ensure that workers are provided with nutritious food on the job. This could be through income supplements, raises, or direct meal programs; all which decrease the risk of malnutrition-related injustices and productivity losses (5). Increasing the quality of offered food is key. It is common in these settings for the food options to be low in variety and nutrient density (8). Dietitian-nutritionists can positively impact the workforce also by advocating for dietitian services to be included in employee benefit plans (14). Both employers and employees benefit. Inclusion of nutrition services in employee benefits decreases cost-related barriers for individuals, and employers have healthier and more productive employees (14).

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program⁽¹⁵⁾

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, is a nutrition assistance program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It provides low-income American families with monthly electronic debit cards called 'SNAP benefits' for purchasing food at authorized retailers nationwide. 9.5 million families use SNAP across America. In 2015, SNAP kept 8.4 million people, including 3.8 million children, above the poverty line. Beyond individual impact, the SNAP generates \$9 in economic activity for \$5 worth of SNAP benefits used. Each \$1 billion of SNAP benefits creates 8,900-17,900 full-time jobs.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Poor diet and malnutrition reduce employee productivity by up to 20% (8).
- ▶ Economic growth is linked to reductions in malnutrition across and within countries (6).
- ▶ The growth of the economy and job opportunities are essential for achieving sustainable, long-term food security (11).

Key Roles for Dietitian-Nutritionists

- ▶ Support and advocate for policies that create equal job opportunities for men and women that will allow them increased access to nutritious food
- ▶ Create and support programs that integrate healthy meal options into workplaces
- ▶ Collaborate with organizations to incorporate nutritious food, meal plans, and financial resources that increase food security and decrease malnutrition-related productivity losses

Recommendations for Further Reading:

United Nations

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>

Decent Work and Economic Growth.

<https://sdgacademy.org/goal/decent-work-and-economic-growth/>

SDG Atlas 2018: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgateas/SDG-08-decent-work-and-economic-growth.html>

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