

Context

In support of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, the UN Special Envoy invited all sectors of society to share their perspectives and solutions via a global dialogue process. Dialogues were conducted around the world both before and after the Summit, effectively crowdsourcing sustainable solutions to strengthen local and global food systems. CARE country offices engaged in the dialogue process by connecting marginalized communities in food systems to program and policy conversations happening locally, nationally, and globally. This document serves to report on the findings from the dialogues held in Ecuador and highlight the key policy takeaways for Country Offices to advocate to their governments to achieve food systems transformation. The convened dialogues found three multi-sectoral themes for action for the government to combat the cross-cutting causes of malnutrition, they are: ensuring the rights of vulnerable populations, improving nutrition, and increasing climate resiliency and sustainable food production. This set of actions evidenced the need to act with a sense of urgency in the face of the high levels of chronic child malnutrition that affects 1 in 3 girls and boys under two years of age in Ecuador. The severeness of the situation determines the need to unleash simultaneous responses at various levels and in different areas to guarantee a systemic approach. There is a need to enact inter-institutional, inter-sectoral, and comprehensive policies, that allow the different levels of government to be involved, while giving space for civil society to hold the government to account.

To improve the country's nutrition, Ecuador must strengthen the economies of women and indigenous communities. This would require the improvement of the living conditions of peasant and indigenous families through access to basic services and the generation of employment opportunities complementary to agriculture. Policies should have a specific focus on young people who, despite having training, face unemployment. At the community level, women's associations and leadership must be supported through strategies that improve their decision-making capacities, economic autonomy, and self-affirmation. A central aspect must be training women on their rights, fundamentally from a perspective of enacting improvements for the next generations.

The non-participation of women in local spaces of exchange and commercialization exacerbates their economic dependency and reinforces gender inequality. Women assume care activities, which is not formally recognized work, and this labor burden prevents them from pursuing paid work opportunities. Due to limited employment opportunities, both men and women are forced to migrate to cities in pursuit of reliable incomes. This has resulted in the growing abandonment of children who are now in the care of their older sisters or grandparents. Increasing poverty and the reorganization of family structures is further increasing malnutrition and intrafamily violence.

The deterioration of health conditions because of the COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the need for health policies that expands the coverage of health and nutrition services while prioritizing primary and preventive health care. Health policies for pregnant and lactating women are particularly important. Adequate nutrition and regular medical check-ups need to be guaranteed towards women to contribute to reducing the correlation between women's deteriorating health in childbirth and postpartum with malnutrition in newborns.

The impacts of climate change are most greatly felt by women which is further exacerbating gender inequalities. Faced with the loss of vegetation cover, prolonged droughts, and soil erosion, women must walk increased distances to get water, firewood, and fodder. Due to limited available time, women have reduced productivity, especially in agriculture. Women and indigenous economies face low perceived prices in markets, which further deteriorates the quality of life in vulnerable populations. It is urgent that policies be put in place that both protects ecosystems from agricultural encroachment, and the needs of vulnerable groups who rely on those same ecosystems for their livelihoods.



Dialogue Background

In 2021, CARE Ecuador with support of the Civil Society Alliance against Child Malnutrition, comprising of 11 organizations from civil society and the private sector, hosted a dialogue based on the urgent need to combat child malnutrition. Conversations also focused on the expressed work of CARE Ecuador and the provincial governments of Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, and Bolivar, and how these networks can improve the production and living conditions of rural women in these provinces. The dialogue considered the National Plan to Combat Chronic Child Malnutrition, which was launched in June 2021.

Policy Actions



Rights of Vulnerable Populations

- Ensure all people, especially peasant and indigenous families, have access to sufficient living conditions, universal basic services, and access to decent work opportunities, with a focus on the agriculture sector.
- Ensure Indigenous Peoples and women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.



Nutrition

- End all forms of childhood malnutrition
- Expand the coverage of health services and prioritize primary and preventative health care, with particular focus on the needs of pregnant and lactating women.
- Guarantee all people can access adequate nutrition and regular medical care check-ins.



Food Production and Climate

- Enact public policies that stimulate and facilitate sustainable, diversified, and organic agricultural production, with particular focus on providing indigenous peoples with the necessary infrastructure and favorable conditions to invest (such as agricultural insurance, low-interest loans, and access to financial information) as well as market circuits that makes healthy and nutritious foods more available and favorable for producers and consumers.
- Enact policies that regulate the prices of local products to ensure they remain competitive in markets.
- Enact policies that protects the moorland and prevents the ecosystem from being converted for agriculture use.
- Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters