

1 Introduction

1.1 The Food Foundation is an independent think-tank that tackles the growing challenges facing the UK's food system through the interests of the UK public. We provide analysis of the problems caused by the food system and inform and generate demand for new and better public and private sector policy and practice.

1.2 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are for all countries of the world, with high income countries expected to take the lead. Our response to this enquiry predominately regards SDG #2, 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' (with a focus on SDG #2.1). However, 12 of the 17 SDGs contain indicators for which food security and good nutrition is a pre-requisite (cf. Figure 8.1 of the [2016 Global Nutrition Report](#)).

1.3 The Food Foundation has been working to build support for implementation of SDG 2 in the UK. In 2015/2016, we worked to generate parliamentary support for the second *Nutrition 4 Growth* (N4G II) summit. The first N4G summit and the preceding *Olympic Hunger Event*, convened in the UK in 2012 and 2013, saw heads of state make development spending commitments of \$4.15 billion. It was hoped that the second pledging summit would take place in the margins of the Rio Olympics, convened by the Government of Brazil, but the political context in Brazil prevented this. Now it is hoped that this will take place in the margins of the 2017 G7. The Food Foundation, along with a group of national and international civil society organisations is asking the UK Government to commit to SDG 2 in the UK as well as supporting its implementation in developing countries through the international aid programme. In April 2016, over 20 parliamentarians and ministers attended a parliamentary event convened by the Food Foundation, Results UK and four all party parliamentary groups to highlight what role the UK should take in helping drive forward the implementation of SDG2 in the UK and abroad.

2 What are the potential costs, benefits and opportunities to the UK of delivering the Goals domestically?

2.1. The cost of hunger and food insecurity (i.e. insufficient or insecure access to food due to resource constraints) has not been fully quantified in the UK, due to a lack of data on the scale of the problem (see paragraphs 3.1). However, evidence from the UK and abroad suggests food insecurity limits national productivity and widens socio-economic inequalities. Recent [evidence](#) from Canada suggests that people who have experienced severe food insecurity have 121% higher annual healthcare costs than those who are food secure. There is a demonstrable link between hunger and educational performance, and food insecurity is known to adversely affect children's physical and intellectual development. In Canada, children who experience two or more episodes of food insecurity during their early years have a three times [higher chance of having a chronic health condition](#) as a young adult. In the UK, children in the most deprived parts of the country [do not grow as tall](#) as those in the least deprived.

2.2 In contrast to food insecurity, the cost of poor nutrition - evidenced by the scale of the UK childhood obesity crisis - is well known. [Poor diet is now the biggest risk factor to death and disability in the UK](#). Almost [one in four children start school already overweight or obese](#), with children in the most deprived areas experiencing double the rates of obesity than children in the least deprived. Since 2000, adolescent Type II diabetes has emerged for the first time. Tackling obesity could deliver economic benefits worth £17bn per year, including an £800m annual saving to the NHS.

2.3 Food insecurity, under-nutrition (including deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals) and overweight and obesity co-exist. [Calorie for calorie healthy foods are three times more expensive than unhealthy foods](#), and households with limited food budgets may purchase less healthy products as a coping strategy. The harmful health outcomes of this *double burden* of over- and undernutrition leads to increased costs across the economy: days lost without pay, low school achievement, and increased social security costs.

2.4 The opportunity offered by seriously tackling poor diets, particularly in childhood, is mammoth. Rapidly developing scientific knowledge is pointing to the critical pathways of child development in utero and during the early years of life. These pathways provide the foundation for health and development. Good nutrition

during this period is critical for optimal brain development and developing food preferences that have lifelong impact. If the UK government were to take seriously its obligation under SDG 2, it would require a comprehensive, systems based approach to supporting healthy diets during pregnancy and childhood. A systems based approach to supporting healthy diets in childhood can perform a *double duty*, mitigating both against under- and over-nutrition. For example, the Healthy Start voucher scheme (see paragraph 4.1) bolsters families' purchasing power while simultaneously exposing young children to healthier food, helping to foment healthier dietary patterns. This would deliver multiple economic and social benefits, as well as promoting equality of opportunity amongst our youngest citizens.

3 Which Goals are the most relevant to the UK? Where is UK domestic performance believed to be strongest and weakest?

3.1 SDG 2 is directly relevant to the UK. The United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organisation (UN FAO) recently measured food insecurity in the UK in its multi-year [Voices of the Hungry project](#). Provisional data from the 2014 edition suggests [8.4 million people in the UK live in households where at least one adult experienced food insecurity in the previous year](#). Based on this preliminary estimate, the UK ranks in the bottom half of all European countries. However the small size of the UK sample ($n = 1000$) means that researchers are unable to use this data to assess differences between the UK's nations or different socio-economic groups, or use the data to assess the impact of public policies and targeted health interventions. Furthermore, the UN FAO's measurement exercise will not be continued beyond 2016; instead member states are encouraged to incorporate the measurement into national statistics. This lack of data means that the UK is currently unable to adequately assess its performance against SDG #2.1. Data on levels of hunger and food insecurity is not collected through National Statistics or other mechanisms. It was last measured by UK authorities more than 10 years ago, but even then only among very low income households. It is therefore clear that the UK has a household food insecurity problem, but the specifics of who and how many are affected is unknown.

3.2 In contrast, the UK has well developing monitoring systems for childhood obesity. [These show](#) that childhood obesity increased between 1995 and 2004, after which a slowing (but no reversal) in the rate of increase occurred.

3.3 A vital repository of data for policy makers concerned with SDG #2 is the annual [Global Nutrition Report](#) (GNR). GNR, part-funded by DFID, is described by the United Nations (UN) as the 'report card on the world's nutrition'. However, the UK currently fails to present nutritional data in a internationally standardised format, and does not collect the full suite of data needed to assess performance against many of the GNR's primary indicators: including, for example, exclusive breastfeeding rates and other measurements contained within the WHA's *Global Targets 2025* (see paragraph 7.1). This blind spot prevents UK policy makers from benchmarking the UK's nutritional performance against others, and the international community from identifying areas of UK best practice worthy of international attention.

4 What structures, governance mechanisms, resources and lines of accountability are required within Government nationally and locally to ensure that efforts to deliver the Goals will be meaningful and achieve real change? Who should be providing leadership on this agenda?

4.1 Currently, public policy affecting food and nutrition security is developed and implemented in an uncoordinated manner across multiple departments and agencies. For example, the Department for Health is responsible for Healthy Start (UK-wide voucher scheme available to low-income and young parents to purchase basic foods like milk and fruit) while the Department for Education is responsible for overseeing the implementation of Universal Infant Free School Meals. No structure is currently in place to ensure policy coherence between such policies. To make progress on SDG #2 and other nutrition-sensitive SDG targets, and as is recommended in the 2016 Global Nutrition Report, the UK government should convene an inter-ministerial taskforce to help plan, coordinate and resource a joined up approach to food and nutrition policy by 2018.

Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK Response from the Food Foundation

4.2 In order to best coordinate and monitor cross-departmental activity, this taskforce – involving delegates from but not limited to DH, DfE, DEFRA, and DCLG - should sit within the Cabinet Office. A dedicated ministerial lead should be assigned to allow for parliamentary and extra-parliamentary scrutiny. With external advisory support (see paragraph 4.3), the taskforce should determine short-, medium- and long-term national food and nutrition targets against which individual departments would report progress. These should be based on the SDGs and other sustainable development indicators (see paragraph 7.1). A parliamentary committee should be formed (or an existing Committee tasked) to scrutinise the work of the taskforce and its progress towards meeting these targets.

4.3 As per the recommendations of the 2016 GNR, a national advisory council on nutrition should be convened, to allow public health professionals, medical practitioners, civil society and other interested parties to scrutinise governmental processes and feed into policy development. A national council should be granted an explicit mandate and budget to advise the work of the inter-ministerial taskforce (see paragraphs 4.1 & 4.2). By creating interconnected advisory councils at the devolved and council level, local responses to tackling food insecurity could be bolstered, and lessons from existent work – such as that of the Scottish Government's Independent [Short Life Working Group](#) on Food Poverty – could be disseminated across the country. Lessons from the Brazilian CONSEA system should guide the development of this council (see paragraph 5.2).

5 How are other countries implementing the SDGs domestically? What examples of best practice are there that the UK can learn from?

5.1 Brazil is one of one of only a few countries worldwide to have made significant progress in tackling hunger in recent decades. Between 1990-2015, the percentage of the population suffering from hunger dropped from 14.8 per cent to 1.7 per cent, and in 2014 Brazil was removed by the UN from the FAO's annual Hunger Map. While much of Brazil's approach to hunger reduction was implemented prior to the global adoption of the SDGs, much can be learned from the nation's approach.

5.2 *Regarding public participation and democratic oversight of food policy:* Brazil's National Council for Food Security (CONSEA) brings together all the different ministries, departments and sectors involved in food and nutrition policy to sit around the same table as the health community and civil society actors. CONSEA includes both representatives from civil society (38 members) and government (19 members). The national CONSEA sits within the Office of the President and has a budget and explicit mandate to give advice on issues related to food and nutrition security. Brazil's central government engages with state and municipal governments on food and nutrition policy, and there are further CONSEAs at these levels: maximising democratic oversight of a decentralised approach to food policy. CONSEA is internationally considered as an exemplar of how inclusive governance structures can deliver successful policy responses to highly complex issues such as hunger.

5.3 *Regarding an interdepartmental approach to eliminating hunger:* Brazil's central government works to develop and implement food policy through the Inter-sectoral Chamber for Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN). Composed of the same ministers that attend the national CONSEA, CAISAN has been assigned the role of elaborating on a 4-yearly National Plan for Food and Nutrition Security, and the monitoring of its implementation. The Chamber is also responsible for the management of food and nutrition security monitoring systems.

5.4 *Regarding the monitoring of food insecurity levels and other dietary trends:* Brazil collects a range of national indicators related to diet, covering access to adequate food and health alongside: production and availability of food; income and expenditure with food; and health, nutrition and access to related service. This grants policy makers a granular view of food insecurity and the social determinates of hunger in Brazil. The National System for Food and Nutritional Surveillance (SISVAN) is driven by data supplied from municipal administrations. The system collects health and anthropometric (height, weight, BMI etc.) data and some data on food consumption. It monitors the nutritional status of certain segments of the population – generally those on a lower-income who use the public health system – and together with a range of other surveys (Family Budgets Survey, Chronic Disease Surveillance Survey) produces diagnostic information which informs the design and delivery of local and national health and social policies and programmes, such as the national

Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK Response from the Food Foundation

obesity prevention strategy. It is also an important instrument in terms of monitoring whether citizens are able to realise their human right to food.¹

5.5 World Cancer Research Fund International's [NOURISHING Framework](#) is an interactive tool designed to help policymakers, researchers and civil society organisations worldwide identify appropriate actions to tackle unhealthy diets. The framework contains international examples of public policies – and where available, evidence of their impact – covering ten policy areas across three domains which impact on healthy diets and food security. Many of the policy examples contained within the NOURISHING Framework have been designed to concurrently mitigate against both under- and over-nutrition (see paragraph 2.4).

6 How can performance against the Goals be measured and communicated in a way that best engages policy makers, local government, businesses and the public and allows effective scrutiny of the Government's performance by Parliament and civil society?

6.1 In the first instance, the UK needs to address critical data gaps in measurement of SDG 2, specifically the measurement of household food insecurity. In January 2016, the Food Foundation convened a food insecurity workshop in partnership with the Food Research Collaboration, Sustain, Oxfam and the Sociology Department of Oxford University. The workshop, attended by >25 academics and expert representatives from civil society organisations, [concluded the UK would benefit from using a standard measure of household food insecurity to monitor the problem at both national and devolved levels](#). On 12/09/2016, the Department of Health's Minister of State [indicated](#) that due to the UK's inclusion within the UN FAO's Voices of the Hungry dataset the Department had no immediate plans to independently monitor food insecurity. However, this ignores the fact that the UN expects member states to incorporate such a measurement into national statistics from 2017 onwards, and that the small UK sample size does not allow policy makers to disaggregate the currently-available data on food insecurity so as to allow for evidence-led policy creation and assessment (see paragraph 3.1).

6.2 There are a number of well-tested, internationally recommended ways to measure food poverty, based on the FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) and Canada's Household Food Security Survey Module. The latter has been in use for more than 10 years and has yielded data which have 'transformed the debate' on food poverty in Canada, and have led to targeted policy responses in some provinces.

6.3 A measurement of food insecurity could easily be incorporated into national statistics, through the insertion of a short list of questions into an existing survey instrument (such as the Health Survey for England and equivalents in devolved nations, or the UK wide Living Costs and Food Survey) at marginal cost (approx. £50-75,000 per year). The FAO and Canadian methods involve asking a series of questions about people's experience in getting enough food to eat. The questions have a run-time of 1-4 minutes. They allow you to gather information on severity of food insecurity, as well as child food insecurity.

6.4 In order to ensure that the UK's wider performance on nutrition is readily comparable with the rest of the world, the Office of National Statistics should ensure that the UK routinely collects and publishes data in an so as to fully contribute to the GNR. This action would help the UK meet SDG #17 and its targets concerning data, monitoring and accountability.

6.5 Progress against the SDG indicators should be published annually in an online dashboard, as well as being the basis of parliamentary review. This dashboard could support a range of digital communications with local

¹ Please note: Paragraphs 5.1 to 5.4 are based on two policy briefing notes commissioned by the Food Foundation, currently being prepared by the Institute of Development Studies: which has conducted an evidence review incorporating much Portuguese-language material. These briefing notes will be made available on the Food Foundation's website once published in November 2016. Any errors contained are the Food Foundation's own.

Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK
Response from the Food Foundation

government, businesses and civil society which would help to build demand and support for the implementation of the SDGs.

7 How should measurement against the SDG indicators be integrated with existing measures of sustainable development performance, such as the Sustainable Development Indicators and the Well-being measures?

7.1 It would make sense to review the full list of indicators from the SDGs, Sustainable Development Indicators and Well-being measures to align these and develop a single reporting framework.

8 How can performance best be communicated in a way that involves businesses, the public and local government in achieving the SDGs within the UK?

8.1 Through its public affairs work, the Food Foundation has observed that awareness of the SDGs and the UK's political commitment to them is low within Westminster/Whitehall. Parliamentary groups (including the Environmental Audit Committee) should engage in awareness raising work targeting the national policy community. This should include the convening of transnational parliamentary forums (North-North and South-North), to allow for the exchange of knowledge across borders and the generation of awareness of the global reach of the SDGs.

8.2 See also paragraph 6.5.

End



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