

## Original Article

# Making the achievement of zero hunger and malnutrition a policy priority: A critical assessment of recent national Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews from Asia and the Pacific

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**Background and Objectives:** Through Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews, national governments articulate how they can achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal targets of zero hunger and zero malnutrition by 2030. To suggest how such strategic reviews might accelerate progress towards those goals, an in-depth critical assessment was undertaken of Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews carried out between 2015 and 2019 in 13 countries in Asia and the Pacific. The appraisal focused on the conceptual frameworks used to guide the content of the processes and, secondly, on how well those involved understood the factors that drive or block policy change in their respective countries. **Methods and Study Design:** The qualitative study involved a desk review of: (1) all reports produced for the 13 strategic reviews; (2) guidance notes for their implementation; and (3) conceptual frameworks pertinent to them. **Results:** More explicit use of globally accepted conceptual frameworks would strengthen the national strategic reviews. More importantly, none considered closely the challenges that would arise as efforts are made to obtain approval for policy reforms and increased allocations of public resources to address hunger and malnutrition more effectively. **Conclusions:** Any recommendations from such strategic reviews will need to be assessed against competing development priorities and then planned, coordinated, and implemented effectively. While accurate technical understanding is necessary to take strategic action, the best plans to eliminate hunger and malnutrition will flounder if efforts are not also made to advocate for policy change, to build political leadership, and to hold accountable those responsible for the actions required.

**Key Words:** malnutrition, policy processes, conceptual frameworks, Sustainable Development Goals

## INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the world's countries committed themselves to achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2) to End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030 or, in short, to achieve Zero Hunger and Malnutrition. Through national Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews (ZHSR), the World Food Programme (WFP) has supported national governments to articulate what they need to do to achieve the SDG 2 targets. The reviews are designed as government-led, independent, analytical, multi-sectoral, and consultative exercises to identify the key hunger and malnutrition-related challenges in each country and recommend how progress towards achieving SDG 2 by 2030 can be accelerated. These efforts began even before the official adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Globally, over 70 such reviews were done between 2015 and early-2019.

To take stock of what was achieved through these many national processes and to identify how the design of the ZHSR processes might be strengthened to accelerate sustainable progress towards achieving Zero Hunger in each country, WFP commissioned in late-2018 a critical

assessment of all national ZHSRs that had been completed by countries in the Asia and Pacific regions – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste. The assessment had two principal elements:

1. An examination of the conceptual frameworks on the determinants of food security and improved nutrition that were used to organize the content of the ZHSR reports and to identify strategic actions needed to significantly advance a country toward achieving SDG 2. This was done by examining the factors highlighted in the national ZHSRs as relevant to food insecurity and malnutrition in a country, the technical approaches suggested as necessary to address the problems, and the government ministries or agencies and other stake-

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Manuscript received 17 December 2020. Initial review completed 26 January 2021. Revision accepted 29 March 2021.

doi: 10.6133/apjcn.202106\_30(2).0017

holder institutions that, in consequence, were identified as critical to the success of any SDG 2-focused efforts.

2. An evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed policy changes and institutional reforms recommended in the various strategic reviews. Along with the technical understanding that motivates the policy recommendations, the soundness of the recommended policy changes is dependent on how well the factors that drive or block policy change in a country are understood. An incomplete appreciation of policy processes and the complexity of decision-making within them will result in recommendations that are little more than aspirations.

This article describes the critical assessment that was done of the 13 national ZHSRs and suggests how future national strategic reviews focused on achieving Zero Hunger and Malnutrition might accelerate progress towards those goals.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### *The national Zero Hunger Strategic Review*

Although each national ZHSR differs on points of emphasis and approach to reflect each nation's specific food security and nutrition challenges, their different institutional frameworks, and the varying nature of their policy processes, the strategic reviews were designed to address five issues:

- Develop a comprehensive current situation analysis on food security and nutrition in the country based on evidence and inclusive consultations.
- Link the food security and nutrition situation to the policies, programs, institutions, and resource flows implicated in efforts to improve food security and nutrition; assess their efficacy; and identify deficiencies in their design, coordination, and implementation.
- Develop projections of the likely cost of specific areas of inaction and the benefits of specific actions in terms of achieving SDG 2.
- Provide evidence for prioritizing investments to achieve SDG 2.
- Provide recommendations for high-level strategic actions needed to achieve SDG 2 over the medium to long term, assigning responsibilities for specific actions to relevant stakeholders.

At their core, the national ZHSR processes contextualize for each country the hunger and malnutrition challenges it faces and what resources might be used and what actions might be taken to attain the SDG 2 targets.

The Lead Convener for the ZHSR process in a country, a prominent, well-respected, and impartial thought leader, guides the effort. The Convener relies on a Research Team to generate evidence to inform the ZHSR consultations and to develop recommendations. Guided by the Lead Convener and incorporating insights gained from consultations and discussions held under the strategic review process, the Research Team produces a report for the ZHSR. This provides a situation analysis on food security and nutrition in the country; examines how government and its partners are acting and organizing themselves to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition; identifies any gaps in policies, programs, resources, and institu-

tional capacity that are impeding progress; and proposes a set of a recommendations to improve the effectiveness of these efforts and to accelerate progress towards the SDG 2 targets.

The critical assessment of the 13 national ZHSRs reported on in this article was chiefly based on a desk review of three sorts of documents.

- All reports produced by the ZHSR Research Teams from the 13 countries were the principal inputs to the study (see Supplementary table 1).
- Internal guidance notes provided by WFP staff on the design of national ZHSRs and terms of reference for the Lead Convener and the Research Team members. These included both generic guidance documents<sup>1-3</sup> and those specific to several national ZHSR processes.
- A range of documents centered on the conceptual frameworks used to assess the ZHSR reports.

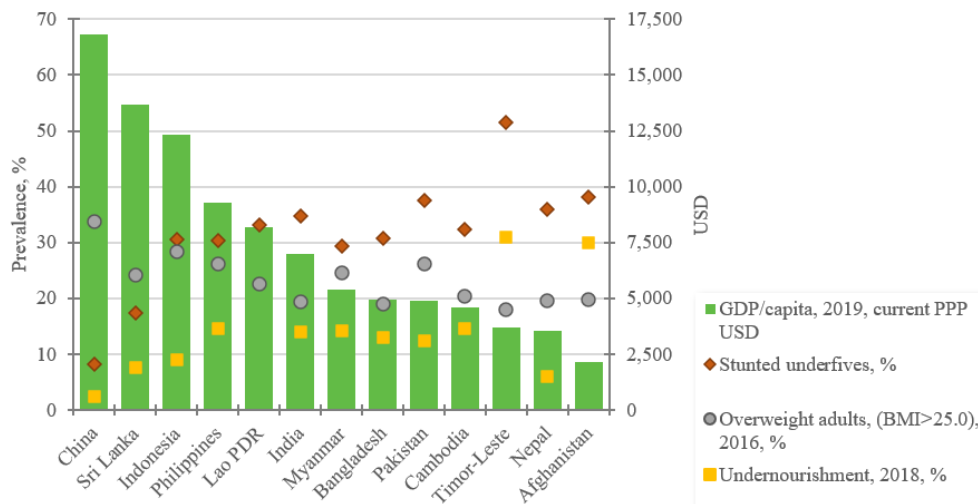
The countries examined vary in their nutrition and food security indicators, levels of economic development, and, hence, the economic and institutional resources upon which each currently can draw upon to achieve Zero Hunger (Figure 1). However, the focus of the critical assessment was on the ZHSR processes in each and how those could be strengthened. High quality, insightful, and pragmatic national ZHSRs can be done, regardless of the development level of the country. As such, the insights obtained from the critical assessment here should prompt and inform debate on motivating effective action to eliminate hunger and malnutrition by any country.

### *Conceptual frameworks to assess the applicability of Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews*

As noted, the critical assessment focused on two aspects of the national ZHSRs. For the first component on how the development challenges related to hunger and malnutrition were conceptualized in each ZHSR report, globally validated conceptual frameworks on the determinants of food security and improved nutrition served as the standards against which the conceptual foundations of each report were assessed. For food security, the 1996 World Food Summit definition of food security was used,<sup>4</sup> while for nutrition, the UNICEF conceptual framework of the determinants of improved nutrition in young children was employed.<sup>5</sup>

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".<sup>4</sup> This widely accepted definition from the 1996 World Food Summit Plan of Action has as a corollary that food production alone does not equal food security. Rather, food security is concerned with reliable access to food and how it is used to meet dietary needs. There are four distinct dimensions central to the attainment of food security.<sup>6</sup>

- Availability – Sufficient quantities of appropriate foods from own production, domestic production, or imports are available within reasonable proximity to all individuals.
- Access – Individuals have adequate incomes or other resources to purchase, barter, or otherwise obtain sufficient appropriate foods to maintain an adequate diet.



**Figure 1.** Recent economic and nutritional indicators for the 13 countries for which Zero Hunger Strategic Review reports were examined. GDP: gross domestic product; PPP: purchasing power parity; USD: United States dollar; BMI: body mass index ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ). Stunting estimates are for latest year available. Undernourishment estimate for Lao PDR not available. World Bank's World Development Indicators (GDP/capita; undernourishment); World Health Organization's Global Health Observatory data repository (overweight; stunting).

- Utilization – “Food is properly used; proper food processing and storage techniques are employed; adequate knowledge of nutrition and childcare techniques exists and is applied; and adequate health and sanitation services exist”.<sup>7</sup> This dimension is closely linked to the UNICEF framework on nutrition discussed below.
- Stability – Dependability in the availability of food supplies and access to those supplies. This is a temporal and risk-related dimension of food security that reflects the ability of the food systems in a country and the household and individuals that rely on them to mitigate any reduction in access to food so that adverse nutritional outcomes are avoided.<sup>8</sup>

Achieving food security is an intermediate outcome to achieving good nutritional status for all. Attention must also be given to a broad range of issues beyond food alone. The UNICEF conceptual framework of the determinants of nutritional status in young children (Figure 2) provides a generalized understanding of how proper nutrition (or conversely, malnutrition) is the outcome of specific development conditions related directly to a young child's level of dietary intake and health status, the immediate determinants of nutritional status. The quality of these immediate determinants, in turn, is determined by several underlying determinants. The food security status of the child's household is one such underlying determinant. However, the availability of health services, a healthy local environment, and the quality of care the individual child receives are equally important. Food security alone will not achieve sustained improvements in nutrition. Consequently, food-centered government agencies alone will not be able to take all the actions needed to realize the SDG 2 target on improved nutrition. A coordinated approach across multiple sectors will be needed.

The UNICEF framework links the availability of nutrition resources to a set of basic determinants that reflects a society's economic structure, political and ideological expectations, and the institutions through which activities within society are regulated and social values are met. Consequently, achieving good nutritional status is an is-

sue of concern to any national development strategy, such as those to which national ZHSR processes are to contribute.

For the second focal issue of the critical assessment on the feasibility of the recommended policy and institutional reform, the Kaleidoscope model of the drivers of policy change around agriculture, nutrition, and food security issues was drawn upon.<sup>9, 10</sup> All the ZHSR reports reviewed include recommendations for changes in policy, programs, or institutional architecture to better ensure that the dietary and broader nutritional needs of a country's citizens are met. The Kaleidoscope model, while it could not be used to guide the policy recommendation emerging from the national ZHSR processes since the model was not yet fully formulated when those processes were underway, does allow us to retrospectively evaluate how realistic those recommendations might be.

The Kaleidoscope model identifies 16 factors (or drivers) related to the policy formulation and implementation cycle that can impede or advance policy reform efforts.<sup>9</sup> The model is not prescriptive. Rather, it is of value for understanding why policy change may fail to occur by considering where gaps or hurdles among the necessary drivers of reform and change may exist at various points in the cycle. The model is organized around five policy cycle components: agenda setting, design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation and reform. For each component, three or four drivers of policy change are considered (Table 1).

The rationale for using the Kaleidoscope model in this critical assessment is not to propose that a particular policy reform model be adopted in ZHSR processes. Rather it is used to demonstrate that consideration of the barriers to policy change will make future ZHSRs more sensitive to and strategic about the competing policy priorities and political economy factors that drive national decision-making on government priorities, resource allocations, and institutional arrangements.

Prior to reading and closely reviewing the ZHSR reports, a matrix was developed to systematically capture

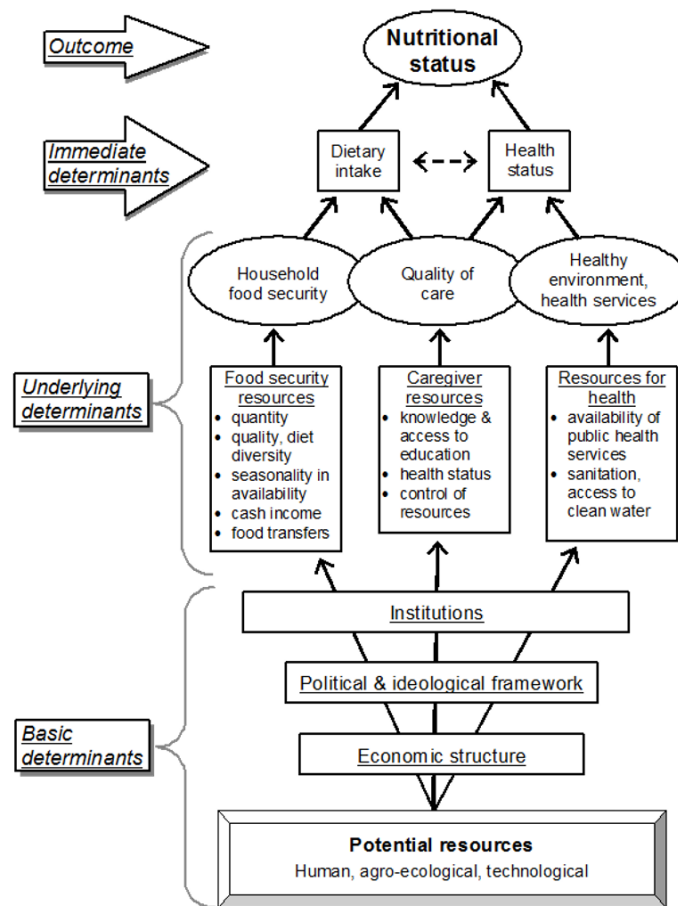


Figure 2. UNICEF conceptual framework of the determinants of young child nutritional status. Adapted by author from UNICEF (1990).<sup>5</sup>

from each information on both the conceptual underpinnings used in each national ZHSR process and how well those involved considered barriers to policy change. Elements from the World Food Summit definition, the UNICEF framework, and the Kaleidoscope framework were incorporated into the matrix. As the national ZHSR reports were read, the matrix was filled in for each. Table 2 provides a synthesis of the information compiled using the matrix from the principal ZHSR report for each country.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Critical assessment of the Zero Hunger Strategic Review Reports*

The scope of the assessment was on the quality, comprehensiveness, and strategic orientation of the analyses done for the national ZHSR reports. There were two elements to the study. First, the use of conceptual frameworks around hunger and malnutrition in guiding the analyses for the reviews was assessed. Second, the critique considered the degree to which the reports offered guidance for surmounting the challenges within the domestic political context that any recommended policy or institutional reforms around food security and nutrition would face. The strategic review was primarily a desk study of the reports and some supporting or associated documents and, so, limited in its scope. In consequence, the resultant impact of the ZHSR reports on policy priorities, strategic planning across the sectors implicated, and the level and allocations of resources to address challenges around food security and nutrition issues in any of the

13 countries could not be gauged in detail.

### **Use of conceptual frameworks to guide the content and policy recommendations emerging from the ZHSRs**

In discussing food security, most of the ZHSR reports used dimensions of the WFS definition, although they did not necessarily identify or describe them explicitly. For nutrition, most but not all used elements of the UNICEF conceptual framework. Given that policy process considerations were not included in the design of the national ZHSR processes and in the terms of reference for those involved, it was not expected that any of the Research Teams would draw on conceptual frameworks on policy change, such as the Kaleidoscope model, and none did.

However, it was clear that more consistent explicit use of these globally accepted frameworks would have strengthened the ZHSR analyses. Among the ZHSR Research Teams, that for the Pakistan process made the most effective use of a conceptual framework to structure their analysis and presentation. At the outset, they described the UNICEF framework and how it was used to determine what drivers of food security and nutrition would be examined under the national ZHSR process, to guide their data analyses, and to serve as the outline for the Pakistan ZHSR report.

Other reports made less effective use of the conceptual frameworks that they referenced. Several examined nutrition solely as a food issue, ignoring other underlying determinants of improved nutrition, such as proper care, good public health services, and access to health care.

**Table 1.** Drivers in the Kaleidoscope model of policy change

Policy cycle component	Drivers of policy change	Comments
Agenda setting	Recognized relevant problem	Only certain problems will resonate with policy leaders and decision makers
	Focusing event(s)	Event(s) to raise the profile of the issue—food crisis, economic setbacks constraining access to food, elections
	Powerful advocates	Policy change difficult if no one is pushing the issue inside or outside of government
Design	Knowledge and research	Evidence of policy or program features that work best to achieve particular goals
	Norms, biases, ideology, and beliefs	Policymakers' personal characteristics and understanding affect the degree to which evidence drawn from empirical research will influence their decisions
Adoption	Cost-benefit calculations	Typically done on financial sustainability, but can do various political calculations
	Propitious timing	Changes in policy or institutions more or less likely depending on fiscal year milestones, the timing of elections, or other events
	Government veto players	Key leaders in government (and in society in general, e.g., religious leaders) whose concurrence is needed for policy adoption to proceed
Implementation	Powerful opponents versus proponents	If opponents to a policy or other change have access (or better and more effective access than proponents) to veto players, policy change likely will be blocked
	Implementation veto players	For any number of reasons, those responsible for leading implementation may act against the intent of the revised policy or hinder it entirely
	Institutional capacity	Skills and other abilities among staff involved, technical support and infrastructure for staff, intersectoral and vertical (to other government levels) institutional linkages
	Requisite budget	Sufficient funding for revised policy, program, or institutional structure
Evaluation and reform	Commitment of policy champions	Continued attention by those championing the policy, program, or institutional reform make it more likely that the capacity, institutional, and financial challenges in implementation will be overcome for a successful rollout
	Changing information and beliefs	May lead to small changes to the reform process or to a totally new approach in order to address the policy issue more effectively
	Changing material conditions	Changing conditions may reduce the salience of the problem within the policy arena or may render the approach originally taken to address it no longer viable
	Institutional shifts	New government or sectoral leadership may result in a change in priorities

Sources: Resnick et al. 2018;<sup>9</sup> 2015.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2.** Aspects of contents of national Zero Hunger Strategic Review reports for the 13 countries, ordered by date of Strategic Review

Country	Principal focus	Motivation for making efforts to achieve ZHM	Conceptual frameworks used	Policy & institutional reform recommendations	Any policy process considerations?
Indonesia, Jan. 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition and food security (predates SDG 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to food is a human right</li> <li>• Also make human capital argument</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of World Food Summit (WFS) food security definition and parts of UNICEF nutrition framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish food security and nutrition (FSN) institutions at central and local levels</li> <li>• Enforce accountability</li> <li>• Improve implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a pressing policy problem, so insufficient leadership</li> <li>• Do not consider competing policy priorities</li> </ul>
China, Feb. 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food systems strengthening for Zero Hunger (predates SDG 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Both economic and moral reasons”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No conceptual framework described, but WFS definition of food security implied</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt nutrition-focused food security strategy</li> <li>• Dietary quality, food safety</li> <li>• Nutrition-sensitive social protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No discussion of the ‘how’ of bringing about the recommended policy reforms</li> </ul>
Lao PDR, Jul. 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All five targets of SDG 2</li> <li>• Focus on policy coordination institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An investment in human capital to advance human and economic development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not explicitly. Implicit use of WFS, as focus on food availability and access. Some UNICEF framework elements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand economic and livelihood options</li> <li>• Improve social protection</li> <li>• Fund, implement Nutrition Multi-Sectoral Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many strategies, action plans and sectoral policies, “but their implementation lags”</li> <li>• Sees leadership on FSN issues emerging at highest levels</li> </ul>
Bangladesh, Sep. 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDG 2, but strongly focused on addressing malnutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principally on human rights grounds</li> <li>• -But also economic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not explicit, but WFS definition of food security and UNICEF nutrition framework underlie review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture</li> <li>• Women central to Zero Hunger &amp; Malnutrition</li> <li>• Better social protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees food security policy as reasonably well addressed</li> <li>• But nutrition policy processes, while now improving, have been deficient</li> </ul>
Philippines, Jan. 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDG 2, primarily on food dimensions of nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human capital and economic arguments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid framework that incorporates food system functioning with UNICEF nutrition framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open rice trade policy to reduce consumer prices; establish policies for more competitive food markets</li> <li>• Establish FSN accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good nutrition policies; poor implementation. Particularly at local government level.</li> <li>• Leaders not accountable around FSN issues</li> </ul>
Sri Lanka, Feb. 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDG 2, primarily on food dimensions of nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition improves welfare &amp; economy. But limited justifications for why attain SDG 2.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid framework effectively combines WFS and UNICEF frameworks. Explicitly described.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align agricultural policies with FSN policies</li> <li>• Strengthen social protection systems</li> <li>• Strategic food reserve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve coordination and collaboration around FSN</li> <li>• Establish high-level leadership</li> <li>• No discussion of FSN issues relative to other policy issues</li> </ul>
Timor-Leste, May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All five targets of SDG 2, focus more on malnutrition than on food insecurity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-nourished population needed to achieve vision of a knowledge-based economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not explicitly described. Amalgam of dimensions of WFS definition and UNICEF framework elements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve coordination and accountability</li> <li>• Build human capacity</li> <li>• Increase investment</li> <li>• Range of technical actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop political support for FSN issues</li> <li>• Emerging, but incomplete, gov’t commitment to FSN</li> <li>• Engage civil society on advocacy</li> </ul>

FSN: food security and nutrition; WFS: World Food Summit (1996); ZHM: Zero Hunger and Malnutrition.

Source: Review of ZHSR reports.

**Table 2.** Aspects of contents of national Zero Hunger Strategic Review reports for the 13 countries, ordered by date of Strategic Review (cont.)

Country	Principal focus	Motivation for making efforts to achieve ZHM	Conceptual frameworks used	Policy & institutional reform recommendations	Any policy process considerations?
Pakistan, Aug. 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition &amp; food security, loose links to SDG 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to safe and nutritious food an implicit basic right under Constitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize situation analysis using UNICEF framework. Looks at immediate, underlying, and basic determinants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand social protection</li> <li>• Manage food price volatility</li> <li>• Strengthen nutrition coordination institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasonable policies in place, but insufficient institutional or technical capacity and funding</li> <li>• Food insecurity &amp; malnutrition have important political costs</li> </ul>
Afghani-stan, Oct. 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All five targets of SDG 2, mostly on nutrition &amp; food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that all Afghans reach their potential; benefits for peace and development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not described. Implicitly draw on the WFS and UNICEF frameworks, using elements of each.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen FSN multi-stakeholder coordination</li> <li>• Create nutrition-sensitive and resilient safety nets</li> <li>• Strategic grain reserves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overarching challenge is deficiencies in governance and accountability. FSN issues cannot be effectively addressed without better governance.</li> </ul>
Cambodia, Dec. 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily on food systems</li> <li>• Three volumes – 3rd is an SDG 2 roadmap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not stated clearly</li> <li>• Mention human rights, but no discussion of government's duties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relies on WFS food security definition. UNICEF framework used in discussion on food utilization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform policies &amp; programs on food, care and health</li> <li>• Food access needs focus, rather than food availability alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good identification of where strategic efforts needed, particularly technical action</li> <li>• No discussion of how FSN policy reforms might be done</li> </ul>
Nepal, Mar. 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All five SDG 2 targets, but primarily food systems focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Constitution (2015) states that “every citizen shall have the right to food”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use WFS's four dimensions of food security</li> <li>• But also use one on the food system of Nepal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve policy coherence on agriculture, food, and nutrition</li> <li>• Improve vertical coordination to local levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FSN policies in place. But, coherence &amp; implementation poor.</li> <li>• Discuss budget for FSN. But no consideration of how FSN uses stack up against other priorities.</li> </ul>
India, mid-2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last of the three ZHSR reports is an SDG 2 roadmap focused on improving FSN institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State obliged to ensure all have access to food</li> <li>• Malnutrition hinders human development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WFS definition of food security and UNICEF framework. Both used without explicit discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on nutrition education and awareness</li> <li>• Increase access to nutritious meals through social safety net programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No discussion of how policy choices are made</li> <li>• Policies, programs, &amp; agencies in place assumed as optimal for meeting citizens' FSN needs</li> </ul>
Myanmar, Jun. 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDG 2, but focused on improving access to food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily a human capital concern for both social and economic development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food centered, so WFS definition used</li> <li>• UNICEF framework also used in discussion on utilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build up FSN coordination body with authority across implementing ministries</li> <li>• Localize FSN strategies - work into local gov't plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on poverty reduction in policy framework; provides opening for food access issues</li> <li>• Transition to political system responsive to citizens' needs</li> </ul>

FSN: food security and nutrition; WFS: World Food Summit (1996); ZHM: Zero Hunger and Malnutrition.  
Source: Review of ZHSR reports.

The reports from China, India, Lao PDR, and Sri Lanka focused on agriculture or on food-based social programming. The quality of the discussion in these reports on food availability and improved access were good, but food-focused approaches alone are insufficient for eliminating malnutrition. This more restricted focus in these ZHSRs may have stemmed from the specific expertise of the Research Team members or from considerations of the policy priorities of the specific national governments associated with their relative levels of socio-economic development.

In future ZHSR processes, Research Teams should be strongly encouraged to explicitly, if succinctly, describe the conceptual frameworks used in the national ZHSR process that they are supporting to enable stakeholders to better understand why the factors and issues related to food security and nutrition that were raised were judged important. Repeatedly referring to those frameworks in the ZHSR reports, as far as possible, would result in a more coherent, practical, and strategic report. If this is not done, there is a risk that some stakeholders who may not be familiar with the conceptual frameworks used may view the reports as a jumble of facts and opinions. Such readers will miss some of the logic underlying the recommendations on policy setting and program implementation to reduce hunger and malnutrition that emerged from a country's ZHSR process.

Participants in future ZHSR processes also reports need to determine at the outset whether frameworks centered principally on the problems of food insecurity and undernutrition are the best choices to conceptually focus those processes. Although the WFS definition of food security and the UNICEF conceptual framework can be applied broadly, they generally are employed in contexts in which dietary shortfalls are significant constraints to achieving good nutrition for all. However, particularly in the dynamic emerging middle-income national economies of Asia, future nutritional challenges increasingly will be linked to poor dietary choices and consequent rising levels of obesity and nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases and not to undernutrition. Based on the data presented in Figure 1, this is already seen in China and to some degree in Sri Lanka. The ZHSR report for China made a strong case that undernutrition was no longer the significant constraint to human development that it was for previous generations. The issues affecting many Chinese citizens' nutritional well-being have changed in consequence.

In developing approaches to broadly address malnutrition (not only undernutrition), globally attention is now increasingly being paid to how local food systems operate to support broad access to the components of nutritious diets. Conceptual frameworks around food systems for nutrition consider the production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food from the perspective of how the overall food system might better support healthy dietary choices by individuals to eliminate malnutrition. Such frameworks include, for example those of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition<sup>11</sup> and the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security.<sup>12</sup> These both critique and expand the dominant

development perspective around food and malnutrition focusing on hunger and undernutrition, which are the development perspectives which primarily motivate SDG 2 and the ZHSRs, if not entirely. The frameworks recognize that the nutritional challenges associated with deficient food access, poor food utilization, or insufficient dietary diversity are present both in economically developed and in poorer countries. The burden of malnutrition is heavy, whether it involves undernutrition, obesity, or a high prevalence of diet-related noncommunicable diseases.

For countries in which increasing access to food is no longer a dominant policy concern, conceptual frameworks that more broadly examine food system functions should be used to complement the WFS definition and the UNICEF conceptual framework used in this review and in many of the national ZHSR reports. The food system focused frameworks will provide important insights for planning actions to address a broader range of malnutrition challenges that strongly complement and expand those provided by frameworks centered around undernutrition that were used in the national ZHSR processes reviewed. As many more countries in Asia and the Pacific realize strong economic growth, rising consumption levels, changing diets, and, in consequence, new nutritional challenges, incorporating conceptual approaches centered on food systems will improve the design of actions to address the multiple burdens of malnutrition now emerging than will solely relying on the WFS and UNICEF frameworks that center on food insecurity and on undernutrition.

#### **Adopt a strategic approach to policy change**

All ZHSR reports reviewed were silent on how policy priorities are set and on how public resources are allocated within their countries. The ZHSR reports were expected to list recommendations for how progress toward Zero Hunger and Malnutrition could be achieved. Among the recommendations in all reports were changes in policy priorities or institutional structures around food or the determinants of improved nutrition, but it is unlikely that momentum can be built around these reforms without a realistic assessment of whether such changes are politically viable. None of the reviewed ZHSR reports provided a systematic discussion for their particular national policy environment on how policy change, particularly on food security and nutrition issues, could be motivated to accelerate efforts around eliminating hunger and malnutrition to achieve SDG 2 by 2030. Without considering how these domestic policy processes operate, how policy priorities are set by a country's leaders, how public resources are allocated, and how conflicting perspectives among stakeholders as to what those priorities should be are resolved, these recommendations for policy or institutional change within a country are somewhat aspirational, not strategic.

To motivate progress on SDG 2, future ZHSRs should pay better attention to how any recommended policy reforms around hunger and malnutrition will be realized and what enabling factors need to be in place to make progress in these policy processes. The matrix used to guide this review included consideration of the 16 policy formulation and implementation cycle drivers of the Ka-



leidoscope model of policy change. It was found that few of these were discussed, even in passing, in any of the ZHSR reports. Insufficient finances and capacity were the most commonly noted constraints to effective policy implementation. The ZHSR reports had little discussion of any of the other policy change drivers highlighted in the Kaleidoscope model.

The Philippines and Pakistan reports showed the greatest awareness of challenges in policy formulation. Both highlighted policy stances of their respective governments that work against the interest of the hungry and malnourished – for the Philippines, the adverse impact of trade policies that result in significantly higher prices for rice in the country than elsewhere in southeast Asia; for Pakistan, wasteful agricultural subsidies with significant opportunity costs that exacerbate the nutritional challenges facing poor individuals. However, even though these two reports are notable among the 13 examined for identifying specific policies that need to be changed, the authors do not diagnose why these adverse policies obtained political support.

Most telling is that none of the 13 reports discussed whether hunger and malnutrition are recognized as relevant priority problems that foster government action. Most of the ZHSR reports state or otherwise imply that the government has a duty to ensure that all citizens have access to food and are well-nourished. The authors of the reports point to global statements on human rights and the vision laid out in national constitutions as giving government this responsibility. However, none of the reports critically considers how effectively governments are fulfilling this duty through committing public resources and taking needed actions to achieve Zero Hunger.

Members of the Research Teams in several countries contacted for the critical assessment reported that, as the strategic reviews in each country were being completed, political feasibility reviews were conducted of the recommendations being considered. This was done, they said, to ensure that the recommendations were realistic and relevant to the policy perspectives of their country's leadership. However, what defines a recommended policy change as "feasible" or "realistic" was not specified in any of the reports. Nonetheless, this is a critical exercise that should be done in all future national ZHSR processes. By inserting specific expectations around the quality of policy processes around SDG 2 and how choices are made in these policy processes, those involved in national ZHSRs can better ensure that their efforts will motivate needed policy and institutional reforms. An objective examination of any deficiencies in how well a country's leaders and the institutions responsible for food security and nutrition are meeting the needs of the hungry and malnourished and protecting their rights to food and proper nutrition is a critical input in designing policy reform efforts and more effective SDG 2-focused programs.

An underlying unstated assumption of the ZHSR approach seems to be that sound objective evidence is sufficient to motivate policy processes. Although policy processes should be guided by broadly understood and accepted objective evidence, it is not enough to merely supply such evidence to participants in them in order to motivate policy changes around the issues examined. In a

context of limited public resources, governments cannot address all welfare-related or development issues. Just as there may be passionate champions and advocates for government investing significantly more of its resources in efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, champions and advocates for different, ostensibly equally important development challenges are compiling objective evidence and otherwise working to ensure that those resources go to address their issues of concern. Advocacy efforts, political positioning, management of opposition to proposed policy reforms, and cultivation of political leadership on the issues, in addition to knowledge about the issues and their importance, all come into play if a country is to scale up its efforts to achieve SDG 2. None of the ZHSR reports acknowledged that politics and somewhat messy policy processes are how competing important policy priorities are managed and prioritized.

In conducting future national ZHSR processes, those involved should be prodded to develop empirical arguments as to why, among a government's competing development priorities, more public resources should go to enhancing nutrition and food security. Drawing on the results of domestic or international analyses on the returns to a range of development interventions, it should be demonstrated in a contextually-sensitive manner why the political, welfare, and economic returns to increased public investment to reduce hunger and malnutrition are superior to greater investment in alternative policy objectives. (This proposal builds on the Copenhagen Consensus approach – <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/>.) Otherwise, the ZHSR reports will find an audience only among those who already accept that food security and improved nutrition are important development priorities. Future ZHSR reports should be directed toward political leaders and senior government officials who do not yet champion efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition.

In a context of limited public resources, choices are needed. While synergistic solutions that are win-win should be looked for across competing development challenges on which government should act, such solutions will be more the exception than the rule. The allocation of government resources is more typically a zero-sum game that involves winners and losers. Zero Hunger and Malnutrition should be among the principal development objectives that countries with significant hunger and malnutrition burdens prioritize. However, how such a priority is advanced as a central component of any development vision must be done through national policy process and decision-making mechanisms. These procedures will not necessarily respond solely to clear, objective evidence on why reducing hunger and malnutrition should be central to the country's development vision. Rather, significant engagement in advocacy, in cultivating leadership on the issues, and in political give-and-take may be needed if sufficient public resources are to flow to support effective action to achieve the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

### **Advocacy**

There was limited evidence of effective political commitment to food security and nutrition issues in any of the 13 countries examined based on the content of their ZHSR reports. In consequence, the ZHSR processes are

at risk of being characterized as supply-driven planning exercises. In some of countries assessed, the ZHSR processes can be characterized as having been a case of putting the planning “cart” before the “horse” of political leadership on food security and nutrition issues. Nonetheless, even in these countries, the ZHSR processes had a relatively high profile within policy circles, involved national leaders who commanded broad attention, and engaged national experts on the issues. In consequence, the processes helped to generate greater political commitment to make the achievement of Zero Hunger a policy priority. The policy profile of these issues in most of the ZHSR countries reviewed was reported to be higher now than before the strategic reviews were done.

However, continuing efforts are needed to build political leadership at high levels around food security and nutrition. Without such leadership, the best efforts to plan policy reforms and implement technical programs, such as those emerging from the ZHSR process, are likely wasted. Advocacy is about building political demand and leadership around issues or policy problems—in this case, hunger and malnutrition. The ZHSR processes have an important advocacy role, but strategies are needed for maintaining attention to the issues after the reviews conclude. Without advocacy, these issues likely will only become pressing problems that government feels compelled to act on following a focusing event, such as a food crisis that causes significant human suffering or raises questions about the government’s legitimacy. Advocacy is necessary so that policy actions can be taken to prevent challenging food security and nutrition situations from becoming worse.

The ZHSR reports reviewed are silent on advocacy; they should not be. The recommendations laid out in the reports will only be operationalized following decisions by the political leadership of the country, so the attention of these leaders must be captured. As future national ZHSR processes are designed, the development of advocacy strategies in support of achieving SDG 2 over the medium to long term should be one new element of these processes.

To be clear, it is the political leadership of a country, as well as its cultural and social leaders, that such advocacy efforts need to reach. Targeting advocacy efforts around achieving Zero Hunger to leaders of specific sectors of government alone is insufficient. As was observed in all the ZHSR reports and is made particularly clear in the UNICEF framework, food security and nutrition challenges in any country will need to be addressed with actions across several sectors. Sectoral solutions to food insecurity and malnutrition, without coordination, are not enough. Any coordination function for such efforts requires endorsement from the highest levels of government, with all public agencies involved being accountable for their coordinated actions to those senior leaders.

Models for reaching the highest political leaders in a country on human development issues, including food security and nutrition, typically involve cultivating policy champions. These are trusted individuals who have access to and regularly engage with the political leadership and have a significant public profile. To be effective, champions for food security and nutrition need to be well in-

formed about why Zero Hunger and Malnutrition are important human and economic development objectives, what actions are needed to achieve them, what leadership the government must provide, and how best to communicate these points. In several Asia and Pacific countries in which ZHSRs were done, the Lead Convener of the process fits this mold. Other citizens with similar access to national leaders also can be recruited in an advocacy strategy to engage with these leaders on the need to incorporate Zero Hunger and Malnutrition as a key part of the nation’s development vision. Such champions also can be useful for outreach to the public, going beyond national leaders alone.

### Accountability

Following effective advocacy and strategic engagement for addressing food security and malnutrition in national policy processes, accountability mechanisms must be established to ensure that the quality of subsequent program implementation at national and subnational levels is equal to the policy ambitions. In the absence of such mechanisms, the policy and institutional commitments that national ZHSR processes foster may be empty, with either no resources allocated to address hunger and malnutrition or ineffectual action taken. Several ZHSR reports alluded to accountability as central to making any progress toward achieving SDG 2, but none discussed what a strong system of accountability on these issues would look like.

The ZHSRs should consider how those responsible in the various sectors implicated in actions toward achieving SDG 2 can be held to account for their performance. These might include:

- Within a system of mutual accountability, drawing up and using assessment standards to regularly assess the performance of the agencies involved in efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition. The Joint Sector Review model now commonly employed by line ministries and their partners in many developing countries could be used for nutrition and food security as a part of the institutional coordination framework for the issues. (Joint sector review guidance documents have been developed, for example, for the health,<sup>13</sup> agriculture,<sup>14</sup> and education<sup>15</sup> sectors.)

However, this suggestion is easier to propose than to implement. It is common to find that food security issues in a country are seen as the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture and nutrition issues as that of the Ministry of Health. Consequently, many sectoral representatives will regard a separate Joint Sector Review on SDG 2 issues as duplicative of existing reviews. If existing sectoral review mechanisms can assess performance toward improved food security and nutrition outcomes and hold those responsible accountable for that performance, then these existing mechanisms should be used.

- To hold elected leaders to account for the quality of their leadership in alleviating hunger and malnutrition, political accountability through elections would likely be most effective. However, at least compared to politicians taking credit for building roads, schools, or health clinics, or implementing subsidy or social pro-

tection programs that provide direct tangible benefits for their constituents, progress on such issues are somewhat hidden and longer-term. Consequently, food security and, especially, nutrition issues do not fit neatly into election cycles and are less likely to sway votes from an electorate insufficiently informed about the centrality of good nutrition to human and economic development. Nonetheless, as part of an advocacy strategy for realizing Zero Hunger, candidates for elected office should be asked to explain how they will move the country toward the SDG 2 targets.

- Again, cultivating champions for food security and nutrition can ensure that such issues are on the table whenever strategic planning is done and policy decisions are made, particularly in countries where electoral politics are not so salient in deciding policy priorities.
- Any human rights to food and good nutrition enshrined in a country's constitution or development vision should be given a high profile in political discourse, and this was noted in several ZHSR reports. Even if household decisions and actions ultimately will determine how food security and nutritional outcomes will be realized for individuals, the government should be a facilitator and the duty bearer for such rights. Many national constitutions or national development vision statements make this explicit.

### Concluding comments

The critical comments here on the ZHSR reports from the 13 countries are made to focus attention on how and where future national ZHSR processes can be improved to better inform, guide, and motivate actions to achieve Zero Hunger and Malnutrition in each country implementing one. Four principal points emerge:

- Consistent and explicit use of globally accepted conceptual frameworks around food security and nutrition would strengthen the ZHSR analyses and enable stakeholders to better understand the importance of the factors considered and the issues raised. While undernutrition and low-quality diets remain the dominant food security and nutrition challenges globally, ZHSRs in countries that have seen strong economic growth, sharp reductions in poverty, and, hence, are seeing changes in the drivers of malnutrition away from undernutrition should use conceptual frameworks that broadly examine food system functions to complement the World Food Summit definition of food security and the UNICEF framework of the determinants of child nutritional status on which many of the national ZHSR reports drew.
- None of the ZHSR reports examined how their countries set policy priorities. Any recommendations for policy or institutional change to help achieve SDG 2 must explicitly consider the context within which such changes would be made. Strategic consideration is needed of domestic policy processes, the ways in which decisionmakers set policy priorities, public resource allocation, and how conflicting perspectives as to what those priorities should be are resolved.
- Based on the ZHSR reports, most of the countries examined have only limited political commitment to food

security and nutrition issues, even if such commitment is growing. High-level political leadership must be built around these issues through dedicated advocacy efforts. Otherwise, efforts at policy reform or to design technical programs to eliminate hunger and malnutrition likely will be wasted.

- If a country establishes malnutrition and hunger reduction as policy priorities, accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that the quality of policy and program implementation at both national and subnational levels is equal to those ambitions.

The principal criticisms that emerge from this review of the ZHSR reports relate to the policy processes within which any recommended actions from the ZHSRs will need to be assessed, compared to competing priorities for public investment, planned, coordinated, and implemented effectively. Future ZHSR processes should be done in a manner that requires close examination of the political context within which any recommended policy reforms are made or programs implemented. In doing so, attention must be paid to how advocacy might most effectively be done to build action to sharply reduce hunger and malnutrition and to ensure that those responsible for acting are accountable for doing so.

However, an important limitation of the recommendations drawn from this critical review of the ZHSRs in the 13 countries is the context-specificity of both the hunger and malnutrition challenges a country faces and the policy processes that it uses to address its key development challenges. While general guidance is offered here on specific dimensions of national ZHSR processes, how discussions are conducted on how to more firmly establish achieving Zero Hunger and Malnutrition as a central policy priority and how leadership is organized around the achievement of such an objective will necessarily be decisions made by the citizens of each country and their representatives and leaders alone.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges the attention to the design and findings of the critical assessment provided by Kimberly Deni, Adam Jaffee, and Christopher Hopwood, all of WFP. Tara Shyam kindly supplied a broad range of information on the national ZHSR processes across many of the 13 countries examined. Details on how ZHSR Research Teams worked in selected countries were provided by Akhter Ahmed, Stephen Davies, Amna Ejaz, and Rebecca McLaren. Thanks to all.

### AUTHOR DISCLOSURES

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

This independent critical assessment of national Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews from countries in Asia and the Pacific was funded by the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific of the World Food Programme (WFP ref: THA18NF019-ITB).

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**Supplementary table 1.** The Zero Hunger Strategic Review reports reviewed

Afghanistan	Ghani S, Fanzo J, McLaren R, Davis C. <i>Afghanistan – Zero Hunger Strategic Review</i> . Kabul: WFP-Afghanistan office. October 2017.
Bangladesh	Osmani SR, Ahmed A, Ahmed T, Hossain N, Huq S, Shahan A. <i>Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Bangladesh</i> . Dhaka: WFP-Bangladesh office. September 2016.
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD). <i>Mid-Term and Strategic Review of the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition 2014–2018 (NSFSN) – Progress Inventory 2016</i>. Phnom Penh: CARD. December 2017.</li> <li>• CARD. <i>Mid-Term and Strategic Review of the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition 2014–2018 (NSFSN) – Situation Update 2017</i>. Phnom Penh: CARD. December 2017.</li> <li>• CARD. <i>Mid-Term and Strategic Review of the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition 2014–2018 (NSFSN) – Strategic Directions Towards 2030</i>. Phnom Penh: CARD. December 2017.</li> </ul>
China	International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Chinese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and WFP. <i>China’s Food Security and Nutrition under Rapid Transformation: Enhanced Strategic Partnership with WFP</i> . Beijing: MOA. February 2015.
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athreya VB. <i>A Strategy Paper on Food Security and Nutrition for India</i>. Chennai: M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. June 2015.</li> <li>• Sharma J, Chaturvedi A, Kumar R, Sen Gupta S. <i>Policy Review and Situational Analysis to Prepare SDG-2 Goals</i>. New Delhi: Public Health Foundation of India. May 2018.</li> <li>• Anand, PK, Kumar K, Gupta SP, Rajendaran TP, Nanda N, James TC, Saha S, Pandey B, Khanna S, Shaw P. <i>SDG 2 Roadmap Framework</i>. New Delhi: RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries). 2018.</li> </ul>
Indonesia	SMERU Research Institute. <i>Food and Nutrition Security in Indonesia: A Strategic Review</i> . Jakarta: SMERU Research Institute. January 2015.
Lao People’s Democratic Republic	Bouapao L., Insouvanh C, Pholsena M, Armstrong J, Staab M. <i>Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People’s Democratic Republic</i> . Vientiane: WFP-Lao PDR office. July 2016.
Myanmar	Young P, Robertson B, Kristensen J, Cho KM, Thwe HM, Pannchi M, Sung TC. <i>Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Myanmar: “In support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – Roadmap to 2030.”</i> Nay Pyi Taw: Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development. June 2018.
Nepal	Birendra B, Ojha GP, Poudel A, Fanzo J, McLaren R. <i>Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Nepal</i> . Kathmandu, Nepal, Baltimore, MD, USA, and Washington, DC, USA: Narma Consultancy Private Limited & Berman School of Bioethics of the Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. March 2018.
Pakistan	Davies, S, Soofi S, Turab A, Zaidi Z. <i>Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Pakistan</i> . Islamabad: IFPRI and Agha Khan University. August 2017.
Philippines	Briones R, Antonio E, Habito C, Porio E, Songco D. <i>Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in the Philippines</i> . Manila: Brain Trust, Inc. January 2017.
Sri Lanka	Thibbotuwawa M, Samarasinghe P, Hirimuthugodage D, De Silva G, Jayatissa R, Kumara A, Deepawansa D, Bandara S, Hewage S. <i>National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition: Towards Zero Hunger</i> . Colombo: Institute of Policy Studies, South Asia Policy and Research Institute, Medical Research Institute, Ministry of Health, Department of Census and Statistics, Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute, and WFP-Sri Lanka office. 2017.
Timor-Leste	Fanzo J, Boavida J, Bonis-Profumo G, McLaren R, Davis C. <i>Timor-Leste Strategic Review: Progress and Success in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 2</i> . Dili, Timor-Leste and Baltimore, MD, USA: Centre of Studies for Peace and Development and Johns Hopkins University. May 2017.

All the national ZHSR reports reviewed are listed here. Many are available from the WFP website (<http://www1.wfp.org/zero-hunger-strategic-reviews>). However, others are not yet in the public domain.