



COMPACT  
2025



## RWANDA

**ENDING HUNGER & UNDERNUTRITION**  
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

MARCH 2016

SYNOPSIS OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

## Synopsis of Compact2025 Roundtable Discussion in Rwanda

Compact2025, launched in November 2015, is a bold new initiative for ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025. It brings stakeholders together to set priorities, innovate and learn, fine-tune actions, build on successes, and synthesize sharable lessons in order to accelerate progress.

Compact2025 and partners organized a roundtable discussion in Kigali, Rwanda, on March 24, 2016 to set the critical groundwork for assessing how to end hunger and undernutrition in Rwanda by 2025. The roundtable identified key knowledge, policy, and implementation gaps as well as opportunities, potential synergies and priority areas for action. This synopsis summarizes the roundtable discussions, recommendations, and next steps.

### Rwanda's food security and nutrition situation

Rwanda has made significant gains in reducing hunger and undernutrition and in addressing some of the underlying issues that hold back progress. While agricultural production and incomes have been rising and poverty has been steadily decreasing over the last two decades, hunger remains a challenge and child undernutrition is still high.

Rwanda has made great strides in reducing hunger. From 1990 to 2015, prevalence of undernourishment fell by nearly half, from 56 percent to 32 percent—a sign of strong, yet incomplete progress. Yet child undernutrition, in the form of stunting or low height for age is still high. The proportion of child under 5 years of age affected by stunting in Rwanda dropped from 45 to 38 percent between 1996 and 2015. Prevalence of child stunting is higher in rural areas (41 percent) than urban areas (24 percent), and across regions is most prevalent in the Western region (45 percent).

Undernutrition results in severe human and economic costs. For example, in 2012, Rwanda lost an estimated 11.5 percent of GDP due to undernutrition. In order for Rwanda to meet its goals, including reducing prevalence of child stunting to 18 percent by 2018 and ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025, progress must be accelerated.

### Roundtable discussions

The guest of honor was the Right Honorable Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda Anastase Murekezi, who offered his commitment to ending hunger and undernutrition. Also offering remarks were IFPRI director general Shenggen Fan and Honorable Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) of Rwanda, Gerardine Mukeshimana. Permanent Secretary for MINAGRI of Rwanda Innocent Musabyimana presented on Rwanda's current food security and nutrition situation and recent trends. This presentation set the stage for a series of panel and roundtable discussions.

Participants discussed questions of (1) which new or different policies/programs are needed to accelerate progress; (2) what data, information, and knowledge gaps must be filled; (3) what innovative approaches can be used to break down silos; and (4) what roles should different stakeholders play. They discussed these questions in two sessions, first on agriculture and nutrition, and the second on nutrition and health. A third discussion occurred around how to better coordinate policies and programs across sectors and stakeholders, and how to use innovative approaches to enhance synergies between sectors. A final panel on accelerating process included reflections from development partners.

## Five major recommendations

Recommendations resulting from the Rwanda roundtable discussion to address challenges, fill gaps, and exploit opportunities to accelerate progress, include:

### 1. Fill data and knowledge gaps

Participants identified the lack of evidence-based programs and interventions as a key constraint. In order to generate evidence to inform policies and programs, gaps in data and research, including research systems, must be filled. Collecting disaggregated data on food security and nutritional outcomes (including micronutrient deficiencies) as well as household data on under-five malnutrition and vulnerable groups (e.g. elderly, and sick people), is key. More data on climate change's impacts, WASH, and household food consumption is also recommended. To improve data collection, community health workers should be trained to collect anthropometric data, and ICTs can be used to collect data to improve monitoring and evaluation.

Critical knowledge gaps include understanding underlying factors behind different demographics of undernutrition—for example, in Rwanda (as it is in the rest of Africa south of the Sahara) more boys are stunted than girls. Also important is research on the nutritional impacts of different nutrition-specific interventions. To boost agricultural productivity and further enhance food security, research on soil fertility mapping across zones and commodities on improving climate resilience should be conducted. Further, more information is needed on curbing overnutrition.

Filling data and knowledge gaps requires upgrades to research systems in Rwanda. Monitoring and evaluation systems that provide continuous feedback mechanisms to inform programs at all levels should be set up or improved. Creating systems for data and information sharing was recommended, and should include an accessible dashboard of best practices for scaling up successful programs.

### 2. Improve coordination

The Government of Rwanda has set up institutional mechanisms for multisectoral collaboration, but there is significant room to improve coordination across sectors, stakeholders, and levels of government. Participants identified a need for a secretariat with clear reporting mechanisms to champion food security and nutrition issues and to provide accountability. Such a secretariat could be hosted in the Prime Minister's office or MINECOFIN/State Ministry in charge of Strategic Planning, and could be in charge of joint planning and evaluation, as well as mandate topics for research and analysis. In addition, the secretariat would require dedicated capacity to ensure cross-sectoral coordination.

An operational plan for implementing the National Food and Nutrition Strategic Plan should be developed. Further efforts to improve coordination could include boosting the convening power of the Food and Nutrition Technical Working Group. To improve coordination across levels of government, greater involvement of local government in policy and program planning for food security and nutrition is key. Improving coordination can help to integrate approaches at implementation and harmonize program interventions for greater synergies. It will also help to ensure alignment of programs with government priorities. Programmatic opportunities to coordinate across sectors include integrating nutrition into *Imihigo* (performance contract) and linking social protection to agricultural productivity.

### 3. Enhance successful policies and programs

Rwanda has several existing policies and programs that should be enhanced or scaled up in order to accelerate progress toward ending hunger and undernutrition. For example, the Crop Intensification Program (CIP), One Cow per Family program, and *Imihigo* accountability program were identified as being instrumental in reducing

hunger and undernutrition in Rwanda. To scale up these programs, programmatic and geographic gaps in coverage should be filled. For example, the One Cow per Family program can extend its coverage to households with less than half a hectare of land who are currently not eligible for a cow. Further, programs and nutrition-specific interventions should be better targeted to the most vulnerable households and districts.

Food fortification and biofortification programs should be promoted and targeted to *Ubudehe* categories 1 (poorest families who do not own their home) and 2 (subsistence-level/underemployed families). Promoting shared responsibility between men and women in the household regarding nutrition and feeding was recommended. Improved access to WASH facilities was also recommended.

#### 4. Communicate and advocate for better nutritional outcomes

Of particular importance is the role of communications and advocacy. Media, including TV, radio, and theatre, are some of the new and innovative approaches suggested to promote nutrition education and awareness campaigns. Further, a national guideline on diets, combined with a communication plan, can help to inform people on what constitutes a balanced diet. It was also recommended to improve policymakers' knowledge of (1) the cross-cutting nature of food security and nutrition issues, and (2) the impacts of improved food security and nutrition on a range of development outcomes.

#### 5. Strengthen capacity

There is a need to strengthen in-country capacity at all levels, especially for nutrition knowledge. Capacity to plan and implement nutrition strategies should be strengthened within government. For example, nutrition specialists can be trained and placed in various ministries that engage in cross-cutting food security and nutrition issues.

Nutrition knowledge should be improved at district health centers in all districts. At universities, curriculums (e.g. for agriculture and rural development) should mainstream nutrition coursework. Community health workers and farmer promoters should be supported to mobilize communities, deliver knowledge and services, and facilitate monitoring and evaluation of interventions. At the household level, improving household knowledge on proper utilization of food, further institutionalizing *Imihigo*, and sharing knowledge on nutrition can help to fill this gap.

#### Next steps

There are many opportunities to fill gaps in research, policy, and implementation in order to accelerate progress. Responding to the needs identified at the Rwanda roundtable discussion, Compact2025 will set up a Knowledge and Innovation Hub in Rwanda, ideally within the Prime Minister's Office in partnership with relevant ministries and stakeholders. The hub will work to support country goals, processes and programs with demand-driven research for the purpose of accelerating progress. It will help to collect data, strengthen capacities, and enhance tracking and monitoring systems. The hub will stimulate innovation, synthesize lessons and compile, share and communicate information and best practices within Rwanda and beyond. It will also leverage existing networks, including the Rwanda Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (SAKSS). Outputs of the hub will include a freely accessible website, which will be set up in such a way so that it can be accessed by farmers and individuals in local communities through their mobile phones. A follow-up roundtable will be held next year to reconvene stakeholders, evaluate progress, identify action gaps, and fine-tune next steps toward ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025 in Rwanda.