

# Equipping Chefs with the Language of the Sustainable Development Goals

## Why chefs play a critical role in shifting perceptions in the fight for better nutrition

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### Key messages

- > Chefs play a critical role in changing the way we eat by moving out of silos and working across several different industries.
- > The Chefs' Manifesto was written by chefs, for chefs, to engage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and bring these directly into the kitchen.
- > We must utilize the language and the cachet of chefs in order to shift the dynamic and the conversation around nutrition so that real, lasting change is enacted.

With more than two billion people suffering from micronutrient deficiencies while a further two billion are overweight or obese, the world cannot continue business as usual if we are to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030.<sup>1</sup> New voices must be brought into nutrition conversations that are struggling to reach their target audience.

### The challenge of SDG2 and of nutrition in particular

As the prevalence of stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiency increases, so do rates of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. Never before has this phenomenon seen such high numbers, or rapidly increasing rates. **Figure 1** demonstrates this.

In 2016, The United Nations declared the years 2016–2025 the Decade of Action on Nutrition in an attempt to address the

startling number of people affected.<sup>2</sup> The UN's targets are attainable, but not without significant global action and major policy changes.

Bombarded with advice and evidence concerning healthy eating and nutritious diets, consumers are unsure what to believe and often tune out conflicting public messaging campaigns.<sup>3</sup> The nutrition community is struggling to have its message heard and acted upon. This nutrition echo chamber, coupled with the sector's insufficient funding commitments, threatens to derail progress towards national and global nutrition targets. It is critical, right now, that *all* actors be brought to the table. With 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) having indicators linked to nutrition, the 2030 Agenda provides a framework for greater cross-sectoral work and the engagement of new voices in the nutrition space. At the SDG2 Advocacy Hub, we saw this as an opportunity to break out of existing silos and work in a new way that embraces fresh voices and reaches a larger audience



Chefs sharing a plant-based meal at Torsker Farm in Stockholm

FIGURE 1: Levels and trends in child malnutrition

**UNICEF | WHO | World Bank Group Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates**  
Key findings of the 2018 edition

Stunting affected an estimated 22.2% or 150.8 million children under 5 globally in 2017.



**STUNTED**  
151 million

In 2017, wasting continued to threaten the lives of an estimated 7.5% or 50.5 million children under 5 globally.



**WASTED**  
51 million

An estimated 5.6% or 38.3 million children under 5 around the world were overweight in 2017.



**OVERWEIGHT**  
38 million

**In Northern America ...**

0.5 million  
0.1 million  
1.7 million

**In Asia ...**

83.6 million  
35.0 million  
17.5 million

**In Oceania ...**

0.5 million  
0.1 million  
0.1 million

**In Latin America and Caribbean ...**

5.1 million  
0.7 million  
3.9 million

**In Africa ...**

58.7 million  
13.8 million  
9.7 million

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. Levels and trends in child malnutrition: key findings of the 2018 Edition of the Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.

with a message focused on nutritious, sustainable food for all. Chefs are one such voice, bringing new language to a conversation struggling to reach its target audience.

### Bringing chefs to the table

Chefs' love for food is infectious and powerful. Chefs can convey excitement and communicate flavor. They can inspire action through their passion for ingredients and the creation of something bold and new, or subtle and delicate. They evoke memories through their dishes, connecting consumers with their five senses.

Gastrophysics, a term created by Prof. Charles Spence, is the combination of gastronomy and psychophysics – gastronomy being the knowledge and understanding of all that relates to man as he eats, and psychophysics being the branch of psychology that deals with the relations between physical stimuli and mental phenomena.<sup>4,5</sup>

This concept of connecting consumers with their food behaviors, attitudes to food and choice-making around food speaks to people on a basic level that everyone can understand and get excited about. Chefs can convey the message of the SDGs in ways that others have not yet mastered. It has been great to learn from chefs like Chef Jozef Youssef – the creative force behind Kitchen Theory, the gastronomy experience design lab that is home to the Gastrophysics Chef's Table, about how this sort of intentionality can be used to drive social change.

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### Why chefs?

More and more, chefs are becoming increasingly popular, setting trends and influencing pop culture in headlines across social media platforms. One only has to turn on the television and count the numerous cookery shows to realize that people admire chefs. We like what they create. We want to try their food. What's more, chefs are trusted. This allows them to move naturally in and out of spaces that other sectors may struggle to connect with. They are present not only in our kitchens and homes via social media and television, but also in schools, neighborhood gardens, community projects and businesses. As such, they play a critical role in connecting multiple industries with a shared language of food that can educate other chefs, farmers, politicians and educators alike. With so much influence, it is little wonder that chefs globally are rallying together to stand up and fight against the ever-growing double burden facing our planet.



### The Chefs' Manifesto

We have created a framework that empowers chefs to use their platforms to speak about the SDGs. The SDG2 Advocacy Hub approached chefs around the world to create their own narrative, which became embodied in the resulting Chefs' Manifesto. Breaking down the language of the SDGs, particularly with a focus on SDG 2: Zero Hunger, the Hub endeavored to educate chefs on the Global Goals and facilitate a conversation that resulted in their own Manifesto and Action Plan.

The Chefs' Manifesto is written by chefs, for chefs. It is based around eight thematic areas identified by chefs as the most important elements of the SDGs in their work:

1. Ingredients grown with respect for the earth and its oceans
2. Protection of biodiversity and improved animal welfare
3. Investment in livelihoods
4. Value natural resources and reduce waste
5. Celebration of local and seasonal food
6. A focus on plant-based ingredients
7. Education on food safety, healthy diets and nutritious cooking
8. Nutritious food that is accessible and affordable for all

The guiding principles underpinning the creation of the Manifesto are: utilize industry-relevant language; break out of traditional models of working within industry silos and start to work across sectors; and taste as an entity that evokes memory, emotion, and is a part of identity.

Through equipping chefs with the language of the Global Goals and facilitating a movement that brings the SDGs into chefs' workspaces, there is a real possibility of generating a global change towards sustainable, nutritious food for all. The aim is not to dispute the SDGs, but rather to have an unbranded movement, which can be contextualized and is culturally appropriate, to reach as many people as possible. Chefs can choose which elements to focus on, and in doing so, can educate their consumers, communities, patrons and supporters about sustainable eating and nutrition.



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Kenya's Chef Ali Mandhry and America's Chef Mary Sue Milliken preparing a plant-based dish at Taste in Stockholm

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#### **Scream flavor and whisper nutrition**

A chef's skillset can help to bridge this communication gap between nutrition actors and recipients. By bringing chefs into the health sector, they can shift the language from the pathologized 'nutrition' and 'healthy diets' by introducing 'taste' and 'flavor.' Consumers want to hear about food when it is presented to them as something enticing. Chefs can create a major behavioral shift in patients and consumers by changing the language of the overarching message. An obese person may not listen to a medical professional's advice to eat more fruits and vegetables but may be interested in learning how to create flavor-packed meals that make them feel good and take them on a sensory journey. Similarly, a person who is malnourished may not know how to increase their intake of iron, but could follow a meal

plan that evokes their five senses and is affordable, seasonal, accessible and sustainable.

Collaboration between chefs and the health sector that utilizes chefs' food-focused language in conversations around nutrition could create real, lasting change. A meal plan created by this dynamic set of actors, for example, could fulfill specific nutritional requirements but also use chefs' language and packaging to appeal to consumers. Such a program could also be contextualized by drawing on local nutrition and food knowledge to create culturally appropriate food solutions that feed into the Global Goals.

#### **An example of the SDGs at work through chefs**

The SDG2 Advocacy Hub has worked to showcase and amplify the work of individuals or groups already engaged in the Global Goals to spread their message across sectors. Generación con Causa is one such group – a team of eight Peruvian chefs passionate about using their skills to raise awareness around hunger and nutritious diets in their communities. In 2017, working in collaboration with the Peruvian government and the World Food Programme, they created a TV series called *Cocina con Causa* (Cooking with a Cause). The series showcased cooking that is nutritious, affordable, tasty and accessible to all Peruvians. In each weekly episode, a celebrity chef highlighted a nutrition issue by living with a family and helping them to cook. The chefs also visited different regions of Peru to create or adapt tradition-

al recipes with local communities to address their nutritional needs. *Cocina con Causa* reached millions of homes in Peru, offering viewers exciting recipes that utilized locally sourced ingredients within their economic constraints that addressed key nutritional issues and were delicious.

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Similarly, chefs will also help to translate the upcoming EAT-Lancet Commission’s report on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems. Set for release in early 2019, the report will detail science-based targets to achieve healthy diets for all within planetary boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Chefs can show us what a sustainable diet looks like on our plates. What’s more, chefs can contextualize this knowledge to account for climate, nutrition, and health as well as the food preferences of each community.

#### Action Hubs: Chefs and the SDGs in action

To create lasting success, we need to ground solutions in geographic and cultural locations. The SDG2 Advocacy Hub will support contextualized action by empowering local chefs to work together in what we have labeled Action Hubs. These hubs will drive concrete actions locally, from within the SDG framework. It is a practical way of bringing different actors together to create localized action that can tackle the nutritional problems in each area. Action Hubs will also highlight and amplify the existing actions of chefs. In India, for example, there are chefs working with

farmers to promote, produce, and harvest millet. Millet is good for the planet, and good for people: it uses less water than other grains and offers greater nutritional qualities. As part of the Chefs’ Manifesto, we are promoting the wonderful work they are doing educating consumers about using millet as an alternative grain while working towards the launch of India’s first Action Hub in December of 2018.

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Peru’s Chef Palmiro Ocampo preparing food with a local community as part of *Cocina con Causa*