Position Papers for Sustainable Food Systems: Key Messages for National Dietetic Associations

ICDA Food Sustainability Initiative: Supporting Sustainability in Nutrition

Background: In 2023, our advisors indicated that one priority for NDAs was to gain support in preparing strategic documents, such as position papers, to guide internal work related to sustainability. In response to this, our team hosted a peer-to-peer learning session with four experienced members. It was attended by 48 people from 18 countries representing Europe, North America, Central and South America, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

Purpose: The purpose of this summary is to share our collective advice for the effective development and use of Sustainable Food Systems position papers. It will summarise recommendations and considerations.

Questions? Contact Stacia Nordin, ICDA SFS Coordinator: ICDAsfs.Coordinator@AcadiaU.ca

Key Messages*

1. **Build a Strong Team:**
    - Secure commitment from your Nutrition/Dietetic Association and form a motivated, core group with diverse expertise. Seek external expertise if there are knowledge gaps internally. Balance the value of diverse voices against the value of volunteer time. Co-develop and be very clear about your objectives and desired outcomes.
    - Create buy-in from your membership. Engage NDA members in discussing the issues and sharing their knowledge.
    - Consider using a multidimensional, principled-based approach that can be used for decision-making to avoid oversimplified solutions that don't address the challenges.

2. **Work Within Your Resources:**
    - Progress takes time. If resources are limited, start small, with a narrow scope and available information. Short documents (e.g., a role paper) can set the stage for more comprehensive work to be completed later.
    - If needed, conduct literature reviews and gather evidence as resources allow, potentially publishing these separately. In the meantime, use existing research from reputable organisations like FAO and WHO, while being aware of potential biases. If funding is limited, consider partnering with academic institutions to conduct background research. Be transparent with your audience about existing evidence, as well as knowledge gaps.
    - Carefully consider external sources of funding against conflicts of interest. If accepting external funding, have a clear policy that ensures funders do not have power over document content and use. See examples**.
    - Learn from other countries' experiences (especially similar ones) and adapt their approaches to your context.
    - Be prepared to adapt your plan as you go.

3. **Integrate and Amplify Your Work:**
    - Wherever possible, make explicit how the new position paper (or other guidance document) links to existing professional documents, such as codes of conduct or organisational strategies, and even regional policies. Integrating your work with others amplifies the power of the work.
    - Collaborate with other health professionals and stakeholders to amplify the message.

4. **Sustainable Food Systems in Nutrition and Dietetic Practice is Not One Thing:**
    - Ensure your position paper considers country-specific contexts, e.g. geography, culture, politics, and the role of nutritionists and dietitians. Use focus groups with nutritionists and dietitians to understand the practical context.

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* AI generated with Human review and editing.

** EFAD Guidelines for Transparent Collaboration with Private Sector and other Third-Party Organizations: https://www.efad.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/EFAD-Principles-and-Guidelines-for-Transparent-Collaboration_2023.pdf

Society for Nutrition Education and Behaviour policy on sponsorship: https://icdasustainability.org/report/position-on-the-importance-of-including-environmental-sustainability-in-dietary-guidance-sneb-2019/