

## TOPICS ON WHICH RESEARCH IS NEEDED – 12<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER TO 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

My name is Andrew MacMillan. I am an agricultural economist, specialized in tropical agriculture. I retired from FAO at the end of 2005, after 35 years in the Organization. My final job in FAO was to serve as Director of the Field Operations Division, which included the Service responsible for the management of the Special Programme for Food Security.

Over the years I have become more and more convinced that the **eradication of hunger and most aspects of malnutrition** in the world is an **entirely feasible objective** and that **our collective failure to make faster progress in this direction amounts to criminal negligence**. Through our generation's inaction, we are effectively condemning millions of our fellow humans to a needless premature death.

One of the problems facing any institution committed to reducing hunger and malnutrition is that there is an **extraordinary DEARTH of RESEARCH on WHAT WORKS and WHAT DOES NOT** – and hence **interventions have to be planned LARGELY on the basis of good INTUITION rather than HARD EVIDENCE**.

Some of our **typical claims** in FSN fields include:

- A **cash transfer programme targeted on very low-income families** will result in **higher** expenditure on food and, in turn, better family nutrition, improved health and ultimately better work and learning performance. We may also stick our neck out and claim that the funds spent on such programmes are likely to generate their own stream of economic benefits and probably also higher fiscal revenues.
- It makes sense to address hunger and malnutrition directly rather than to wait for them to disappear as a result of progress in reducing poverty. Progress in the reduction of poverty is likely to be slow, as long as a large proportion of a country's workforce is effectively incapacitated through under-nourishment and malnutrition.
- Programmes which aim for high productivity gains by small-scale farmers are likely to have **relatively limited food security impacts**. This is because, at least where demand for incremental farm output is fairly inelastic, big productivity gains by a few farmers – usually those who have best access to inputs and are least food insecure – will simply swamp local markets. Instead, tactics aiming at small productivity gains (and more diversified production) when achieved by very large numbers of farmers who are themselves food insecure, and translated into better nutrition within their own families – are likely to have a **much greater FSN impact**.
- **Comprehensive** FSN programmes need, at the very least, to combine components for **targeted cash transfers, school meals, nutrition education and low-cost participative learning opportunities** for small-scale farmers and investing in such programmes makes economic sense.
- Most practitioners agree on the importance of **school meals** components, especially when they are locally sourced, within comprehensive food security programmes.

Unfortunately I find a **serious LACK of EVIDENCE to support those claims**. For example, what work has been done to assess the extent of lifelong benefits accruing to children whose nutrition is improved through school meals? What is the impact of school meals on attendance at school, and what are the lifetime benefits stemming from school attendance at various ages?

The most convincing evidence that I have seen on the links between better nutrition and economic development comes from R. W. Fogel's work on the contribution of improved nutrition to long-term economic growth in UK and France, and from Jean-Louis Arcand's analysis of the relationship between nutrition and GDP growth in developing countries. I have just had my attention drawn to another useful piece by Joseph M. Hunt, entitled "The potential impact of reducing global malnutrition on poverty reduction and economic development. **But there must be much more relevant work.**

Therefore, it would be great, if we can **POOL a ROBUST LIST of REFERENCES with which to SUBSTANTIATE SUCH CLAIMS**. If there is **not**, it would seem to be **high time to BEGIN some SERIOUS STUDIES** – or else we shall continue to see **massive underinvestment in FSN programmes** simply because of our **inability to show categorically that they generate good returns**.

In other word, **I'd like to ask Forum colleagues to:**

- Provide **REFERENCES with which we can substantiate the above-mentioned claims**
- Give your opinions and insights on the **TOPICS on WHICH RESEARCH IS MOST NEEDED**
- Give your opinions and insights on **HOW to solve the lack of necessary re-search/evidence**.

Unfortunately the moral - and human rights - justification for hunger eradication – though powerful – still commands far too little weight in resource allocation decisions. I believe that many people share my view that it is morally repugnant that, in a world of ample food availability, any fellow human should pass through life hungry – but we don't seem yet able to persuade those that control the purse strings to address the issue on anything like the scale required.

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