

SUMMARY OF THE FSN FORUM DISCUSSION
STAPLE FOOD AS A FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION TO MALNUTRITION
FROM 27TH MAY TO 26TH JUNE 2008

(Proceedings available at

http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/PROCEEDINGS_Staple_food_as_a_fundamental_solution_to_malnutrition.doc

I. ISSUES RAISED

- Several nutrition programmes and interventions in developing countries are more centred on "quick-fix" solutions, i.e either supplementation or fortification with little nutrition education on the importance of diet diversification. (A. O. Falana, M. M. Ireri, R. M. N. Nalebeson)
- Neglect of energy aspect of the individual needs which can be provided by staple food consumption (A. O. Falana). Low political will to support the promotion of staple food through nutrition programmes. (M. M. Ireri)
- Little community involvement in the decision making process and the implementation of interventions. (A. O. Falana, G. Kent, M. M. Ireri)
- Little involvement of implementers in the formulation and evaluation of policies/programmes. (M. M. Ireri)
- The policies made by the major players (UN organizations, USA, EU...) can foster the success or failure of war against hunger. The reality is that the situation of poverty has not improved since long proves that those who have the power are not the ones who have the problem, and do not care enough about those who have the problem. (E. F. A Ismail)
- Fortification or supplementation strategies have many inconveniences: fortification or supplementation food should be consumed by a sizable proportion of population, be inexpensive, be distributed through a widespread be no change in taste, appearance or colour on fortification etc. (V. Melo)

II. OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Two steps should be taken in order to solve problems raised by A. O. Falana (G. Kent):
 - Document on serious energy deficiencies in particular areas and review the patterns of supply of staple foods, especially the traditional staple.
 - Develop strategies to strengthen the supplies accordingly. Consideration should be given to all the different ways in which a deficiency in some particular nutrients might be solved. It might be addressed by using local foods in different ways, or by introducing new foods. Or it could be addressed by using processed products from the outside. The decision should be made after careful considerations of advantages and disadvantages by local people.
- There is a need to identify the concurrent factors that shape the consumption patterns/habits of different nations in their basic daily meals (E. F. A. Ismail). More studies are needed to find out the main cause or the confounders of malnutrition before quick fix solutions are applied. (R. M. N. Nalebeson).
- Some reasons why some sources of nutrients/staple foods have remained underutilized in

Africa include (J. Opio-Odongo):

- The gradual but profound changes in dietary patterns in many African communities, partly driven by the modernization process and the bombardment by advertising media;
- Changing food preferences, due to factors other than the exotic taste - these include the out competition of staples crops by alternative crops that meet the producers' food and income needs, particularly where land is scarce; changing cooking habits that are prompted by the scarcity of fuel wood that remains a major source of cooking energy in rural Africa; a weakening inter-generational transfer of knowledge, skills and values related to production, processing, storage and cooking of the staples; etc.;
- The perennial neglect of the staple crops by the crop development programmes of the research establishments in Africa, which has contributed to their vulnerability to devastation especially by new diseases and pests as well as the decline in soil productivity;
- Local stigma and taboos that discourage the consumption of some of the nutritious alternatives such as the insects that you mention;
- National food and nutrition policies that are not adequately anchored on knowledge of local food preferences, cooking habits, weaning practices and traditional methods of supplementation;
- Decline in staple food production due to poor climatic conditions, urbanization, rural urban migration, HIV /AIDS impact on agriculture; (R. M. N. Nalebeson)
- While supplementation and fortification are good, they yield greater benefits if targeted at vulnerable groups, especially children in the context of a child survival programme; (J. Opio-Odongo)
- **Possible solutions to malnutrition:**
 - **Effective community participation in decision-making and policy implementation.** The local community should gain more control over its own nutrition situation. It should always be receptive and prepared to advice and information from outside. It should insist that the local community itself gets to make the final decisions (G. Kent, M. M. Ireri, A. O. Falana)
 - **Participatory/well-informed decision and implementation processes** with participation of all stake holders (M. M. Ireri)
 - **Using wild plants for food:** The role of scientists is to help communities identify and adapt the wild species for human consumption through research and processing. In Africa, there might be a need to search for and also make research in veldt or wild crops currently not under use but might be potentially nutritive and act as an important source of protein and energy. Government interventions and nutritional education should facilitate access to appropriate technologies and knowledge/know-how that can transform wild species to suitable forms ready for human consumption (E. F. A Ismail)
 - **Wildlife and livestock products** can act as a source of protein for the poor. The problem is their availability and how they could be accessed and or processed in an edible manner suitable for utilization (E. F. A Ismail)
 - Strategies for modifying local food systems, such as home gardens to increase food production (V. Melo)

- Making the best of micronutrient rich food sources readily available that the population do not consume in adequate amounts or not intake at all because of a lack of awareness (e.g. insects). Dietary diversification by promoting consumption of local underutilized food has been a success in different countries such as Thailand and others (V. Melo)
- Organizations and governments should **promote the production of staple foods** by creating markets in the rural areas, build infrastructures that support the farmers to produce more, subsidise the prices of fertilizers, the use of compost manure, avail loans to farmers, improvement and increase yields through bio-fortification and make favourable policies (R. M. N. Nalebeson)
- The problem of malnutrition should be addressed in relation to the inter-relationships between adequate dietary intake, maternal and child care and potable water, health infrastructure and sanitation (R. M. N. Nalebeson)
- Besides staple foods, there is still a need for discussion about how to provide the other important nutrients that are needed.
- Building alliance and defining true partners in identifying and implementing solutions are crucial. Open communication and dialogues with "outsiders" are really important especially in developing countries where funds are very limited. Open communication and good inter- and intra-personal relationships could be the key towards achieving support (I. A. Agdeppa)