

FSN FORUM DISCUSSION

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: NUTRITION, A KEY TO INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING FOR POVERTY REDUCTION?

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Duration:	01.12.2008 to 12.02.2008
Facilitator:	Charlotte Dufour
Number of participants:	32
Number of Contributions:	45

II. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC

Dear Forum members,

My name is Charlotte Dufour and I have been working for several years on nutrition, food security and livelihoods in emergency and development programs, through NGOs and with the UN. I have just returned from Afghanistan, where I worked with FAO for 3 years as Household Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods Advisor, based in the Ministry of Agriculture within the German-funded FAO project “Supporting Household Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods in Afghanistan”. I am now working as a consultant (with FAO and others), focusing on the integration of nutrition in food security, agricultural and livelihoods policies and programs, and the promotion of inter-sectoral linkages for sustainable improvements in nutrition.

The complex causes of malnutrition and **the need to address malnutrition through multi-sectoral interventions** are well recognised. There seems to be considerable interest in such approaches, as illustrated by discussions in the [Standing Committee on Nutrition \(SCN\)](#), NGOs’ motivation to integrate nutrition activities in their work, research promoted by academic institutions (e.g. [IFPRI](#)’s platform on agriculture and health linkages), and donors’ interest in coordination and integrated planning.

And yet, the challenges to putting theory into practice remain considerable. Nutritionists struggle to **incorporate nutrition objectives into food security and agricultural policies and programs**. Meanwhile, nutrition is often subsumed in the health sector and food security advocates struggle to **ensure food security interventions are associated with health programs to reduce malnutrition**. Nutrition, which could provide a valuable entry point to people-centred development and integrated programming for poverty reduction, often ends up falling off the agenda all together.

Why is this? What can be done to promote effective linkages and integrated programming, from community level to central level, in a sustainable way?

The FAO project I was working on attempted to address these issues through interventions at household, community, provincial and central level (you can find information on the project on: <http://www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/Projects%202008/Nutraion/Nutrition.htm>), but more efforts are still required. I am therefore very interested to hear forum members’ opinions and experiences on these issues, and thus propose to launch a discussion on “*Putting people first: Nutrition, a key to integrated programming for poverty reduction?*”

I would particularly appreciate your feedback regarding the following questions:

- **What experience can you share** regarding the integration of nutrition in agriculture and livelihoods programs and integrated/multi-sectoral programming?
- What **constraints and obstacles** have you faced in doing so (e.g. expertise gap? Funding? No political interest?)? Were you able to overcome them and if so, how?
- What **approaches, activities and tools** do you think successful for integrating nutrition in

ongoing programs and for reducing malnutrition and poverty in a sustainable manner?

- Finally, if you have produced or are aware of **relevant publications or tools on this topic**, thank you for sharing them with the forum members.

I look forward to hearing about your experiences and ideas and to receiving any advice and references you may have. These shall be valuable for forum members and can also contribute to the elaboration of guidelines and training materials on these issues.

Thank you very much for your contributions and best regards,

Charlotte Dufour

Nutrition, Food security, and Livelihoods consultant

III. LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Contribution by George Kent, University of Hawai'i, USA

Charlotte asks why it is such a struggle to get nutrition treated as a high priority concern. I would say it is because **high level policymakers are far more concerned with the commodity (cash) value than the nutritive value of the products of agriculture and fisheries**. One indicator of this is that while we monitor prices at the farm gate, we show very little interest in who finally consumes the product and its effects on their well being. Farmers are mostly interested in producing money; whether or not the product is good food is secondary.

In work I have done on ways of expanding the contribution of fish in helping to alleviate malnutrition, the fisheries people's interest was only in the volume and value of the product that went out the door. They had some interest in how the product was used, but only as a way of increasing economic demand for the product.

Let me put the point more strongly. On the whole, **there really is not much interest among the powerful worldwide in the problem of malnutrition**. If you assess in terms of action rather than rhetoric, you must conclude that the powerful don't care very much about malnutrition.

Compare the amount of money spent on promoting infant formula with the amount of money spent on promoting breastfeeding. I don't see any prospect for getting more money to support breastfeeding unless someone can find a way to make serious money from doing that.

Where is the serious funding for the Millennium Development Project's goals relating to nutrition?

There are no serious technical obstacles to solving problems of malnutrition. In my view **the major problem is the inadequacy of the motivation**. The people who have the power to solve the problem are not the ones who have the problem.

Aloha, George

Contribution by Joseph Opio-Odongo from Uganda, former UNDP Sustainable Development Advisor and Environmental Policy Specialist

Dear Colleagues,

George makes two very interesting observations, namely: a) **there really is not much interest among the powerful worldwide in the problem of malnutrition**; and b) **the major problem is**

the inadequacy of the motivation.

On the first observation, even if policy making was an effective solution to the malnutrition problem, which I doubt, it is hard to see the problem of malnutrition becoming a priority policy agenda. In any case, it is the silent majority that suffers from malnutrition. Even those who care for them invariably lack the clout to engage the politically powerful. The fact that the problem of malnutrition manifests itself among both the food secure and food insecure, just as it does among both the poor and the non-poor, albeit to varying degrees, suggests that **the causes of malnutrition are multifaceted**. Appropriate and **more effective actions**, therefore, **would require adequate analysis of the problem** in any given situation. It also suggests that **actions outside the policy domain**, as is implied in George's second point on motivation, **merit attention**.

In seeking to enhance motivation, **the most appropriate "target groups" to engage would be the households and families**. That engagement, however, should be of a type that produces the desired results. It therefore requires **adequate empirical evidence on the merits and demerits of the traditional foods and feeding habits** that change agents can use to **facilitate effective changes in the attitudes, behaviours and feeding practices** of household and family members; especially those with the obligation to care for children. That credible body of knowledge, if appropriately applied, should compel households and families to desire and seek either alternative foods or modified cooking and feeding habits.

I would want to argue that it would be futile to try to proselytize the conversion of families from their supposedly nutritionally inferior foods and feeding practices to the supposedly "modern" and superior menu and feeding practices. Doing so would merely recast the problem that Prof Higgins suffered with Elizabeth in the "My Fair Lady."

Regards,

Joseph Opio-Odongo

Contribution by George Kent, Political Science Professor, University of Hawai'i, USA

Greetings –

I appreciate Joseph Opio-Odongo's thoughtful response to my earlier comments. However, I have trouble understanding what is meant by "actions outside the policy domain." It looks to me like Joseph is advocating a type of policy.

Joseph's key paragraph said:

"In seeking to enhance motivation, **the most appropriate "target groups" to engage would be the households and families**. That engagement, however, should be of a type that produces the desired results. It therefore requires **adequate empirical evidence on the merits and demerits of the traditional foods and feeding habits** that change agents can use to **facilitate effective changes in the attitudes, behaviours and feeding practices** of household and family members; especially those with the obligation to care for children. That credible body of knowledge, if appropriately applied, should compel households and families to desire and seek either alternative foods or modified cooking and feeding habits."

My understanding of the challenge is quite different. In my (admittedly, simplified) view, the world is comprised mainly of the powerful, who are not hungry, and the hungry, who are not powerful. While many people have looked to the powerful for solutions to the hunger problem, they have not responded, mainly because the powerful have little to gain from the ending hunger.

The alternative is to work with the hungry themselves. Joseph agrees, at least to some extent.

However, he still views the hungry as target groups to be influenced by well-meaning outsiders. His focus is on helping the poor to make better food choices.

My view is that **the poor habitually choose foods that are not very good not because they are uninformed, but because they** are poor and for that reason **have very few options**. One indicator of this is the lack of diversity in their diets. We know that if they had more money they would start using more diverse diets, and thus be better nourished.

My view now is that **outsiders should focus on making sure that the poor have decent opportunities to provide for themselves**, either by producing their own food or by earning enough money at decent jobs so that they can purchase a variety of good foods. There is no need for outsiders to intervene to end hunger. Outsiders only need to assure that the poor have decent opportunities to provide for themselves. Then outsiders should just get out of the way.

We don't need to enhance the motivation of the hungry to end hunger. We just need to ensure that they have decent opportunities to do that.

Aloha, George

Contribution by Joseph Opio-Odongo

Dear George,

I appreciate your response to my earlier contribution. The only clarifications I wish to make in regard to your commentary are the following:

- By actions outside the policy domain I simply meant non-policy actions
- The powerful seem to have little to gain from ending hunger because hunger has not become a high profile political issue. Were it to become a persistent electoral issue, for instance, the so-called powerful interest group would have to reckon with the problem. That possibility, however, seems foreclosed by the abject poverty compels the poor to trade their political rights for the petty cash that the non-poor use to buy their votes during political campaigns.
- I referred to the poor as a target group for purposes of a constructive dialogue between the poor and others (both internal and external to the community) who offer to assist them in ending hunger and malnutrition. I was certainly not alluding to the need for an interventionist approach to the hunger and malnutrition problem. If that were the case, I would not have referred the problem that Prof Higgins had with Elizabeth in the "My Fair Lady" episode, ..
- While it is true that poverty limits the poor to **very few options** in dealing with hunger and malnutrition, not all such options represent **foods that are not very good**. I know of traditional foods, including those from the wild, which are nutritionally rich. There are of course instances where cooking and feeding habits deny the poor the opportunities to derive maximum nutrition value from such foods. And it is here that I thought the poor could benefit from external support to confirm if indeed cooking and feeding habits are part of the problem or such foods are just nutritionally bad.
- My limited experience in working with and living in poor communities, always leaves me wondering whether indeed **more money** in the hands of poor people would automatically translate into enabling them to **start using more diverse diets, and thus be better nourished**. In the poor communities that I know best, I have witnessed more alcohol being purchased than more nutritional foods for the family. There may be exceptions where the additional incomes accrue to women.
- I have watched new opportunities for economic empowerment in the rural economy availed by changing macro-economic conditions not seized by the able-bodied poor. In such situations, if the poor have made a deliberate choice to grow out of poverty,

outsiders could play a facilitative role and eventually **just get out of the way**. But where the poor persistently bemoan their predicaments amidst growing opportunities, there certainly is a role for outsiders in helping to "**awaken the sleeping giant**" tools such as "Appreciative Inquiry" are useful in this regard.

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Contribution by Pia Pacheco, from Argentina

Greetings,

I do agree with George's view. However I think if government is to be called outsider, then it is important its commitment towards the solution or mitigation of hungry among vulnerable communities. I don't think it is a problem related motivation and how to focus it throughout the "target groups", I guess it is more about a honest compromise from the resource owners to deal with the subject and opening ways for inclusion and decent opportunities to access to the resources to a dignified livelihood. However the experience I have regarding the national projects to fight hunger is the obscene political use of the food distribution.

Regards,

Pia Pacheco

Contribution by Andrew MacMillan, Agricultural Economist and former Director of the Field Operation Division, FAO

George Kent has a delightful way of simplifying issues (as he admits) but sometimes tends towards over-simplification!

Thus, while I agree with the thrust of his conclusion, I would not go as far as he does in writing off a role for the "**rich and powerful**" in solutions to the problems of hunger and malnutrition simply because their response has so far been disappointing. Whether we like it or not, their **political weight and resources** are **important in creating the global consensus on the imperative of eradicating hunger** that seems to be essential to getting serious action taken on a relevant scale at country level.

What has been interesting about the recent food price "crisis" is that, once consumers in rich countries began to feel the pinch, there was a flurry of well-meaning activity on the international stage. Now that the pressure is off and the rich and powerful are focusing their energies on preserving their wealth and protecting their economies from deep recession, the food problem has been largely forgotten - except by the 900 million people who continue to have to face it every day of their lives. And most of the rest of us have already forgotten that there remains quite a **fragile balance between global food output and needs**, and that the **suite of technologies on which intensive farming is now based** has long passed its best-buy date and is **unsustainable**.

If we want to draw lessons from these two crises, we could perhaps suggest that they both point to the **growing interdependence of people - poor and rich - around the world** as a result of the still-young processes of globalisation and to the **need for new codes of conduct and regulations** that will make these processes work better for the good of all. They suggest that, in a globalised economy (and one in which communication technologies make the growing gaps in

living standards so visible to all), the unchecked and often ostentatious pursuit of wealth by the rich and powerful without regard for its effects on the poor and weak will be bound at some stage or another to drive those who see themselves the losers to behave recklessly - with potentially huge destabilizing effects, as we have seen in the wake of 9/11. Surely the big **lesson for the rich and powerful is that it is in their self-interest to contribute to the creation of a more equitable world** - and one of the highest priorities must be to work towards the eradication of hunger and malnutrition, the manifestations of the deepest forms of poverty (ideally, as George argues, through creating better employment opportunities, but also, I would claim, through **putting in place social protection programmes where near-full employment is an elusive goal**).

Like George, I am probably over-simplifying. When, however, there is a real global food crisis, rather than a price escalation fed by speculation as has been the case this year, this will have catastrophic implications for all the world's people. Surely, it makes sense to invest in addressing the sources of that risk now, even if the threats of recession are tending to make individuals and governments in rich countries more inward-looking.

Andrew

Contribution by R. N. Hegde, Senior Fellow, National Institute of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural development, Hyderabad, India

Dear Members,

I fully agree with the views of George Kent that outsiders should focus on making sure that poor have decent livelihood opportunities to earn enough money to enable them to have variety of good food. I would like to express my opinion on the issues raised by Charlotte Dufour in her introductory message (please read at: http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/TOPIC_Nutrition_Integrated_programming_.doc)

Sharing Experience: Here, I would like to append my contribution to the "Solution Exchange India discussion on Agriculture and Health Linkages in India-Example" which are relevant to this topic also.

Agriculture and Health Linkages in India

I have conducted research studies on impact of orchard development programme on socio-economic transformation of tribals in Maharashtra and I consider that the results of my research is relevant to the topic under discussion.

Majority of our villages in India are devoid of basic infrastructure such as good roads, public transport, safe drinking water, sanitation and medical facilities. Unemployment, illiteracy and malnutrition are the major problems.

The study in Jawahar taluk in Thane district (160 km from Mumbai) which has 95 per cent tribal population had witnessed a tragic incidence of death of 45 children within a week in the year 1992 due to malnutrition and an outbreak of measles disease. Then the Government of Maharashtra requested Pune based BAIF Research and Development Foundation, a NGO to initiate orchard development programme which had developed expertise in this field under their Wadi programme in Gujarat state being implemented since 1983. BAIF started their programme in 1993 by providing participatory planning, training and technical help to establish one acre of orchard(0.4 Hectare)consisting of 20 mango and 40 cashew trees with intercrops of vegetables and fodder and forest species in the boundary with green hedge fencing. Interestingly, existing cropping pattern of growing low calorie value crops like rice and millets was not changed.

Today, in 2008, if anyone visits the area, the achievement of goals for ensuring the tribals, the food security, nutritional security and employment security can be confirmed. Thousands of acres of wasteland (fallow land) have been converted in to perennial income generating asset, the orchard. The production of fruits and vegetables in the area has increased manifold so also

consumption of fruits and vegetables by the tribal families. The study has revealed that the consumption of vegetables, fruits, and milk has increased by 72.63 per cent, 41.87 per cent and 70.77 per cent respectively.

Unless, the poor farmers are given livelihood opportunities to generate surplus income, we cannot think of increased consumption of nutritious food like milk, vegetables and fruits. The illiteracy, poverty, hunger, malnutrition and unemployment are interrelated. So, we should have holistic policy which addresses these issues in village level. Touching anyone in isolation will not solve the problem. Since, rain fed agriculture covers a significant portion of lands and contributes a substantial share of the total production in Africa, Asia and Pacific region, horticulture especially the fruit crops could be a complimentary activity for bringing nutrition security and also for creation of capital formation in the form of orchards in the rural areas.

Constraints and obstacles: I found creating credibility among the poor farmers in the project area by the project implementing agency, the BAIF Development and Research Foundation was not much difficult because this organization is run by professional and committed personnel. BAIF is a NGO working in 12 states of India for upliftment of rural poor for the past 40 years. BAIF facilitates the communities to create opportunities for gainful employment through its multi disciplinary programmes viz. horticulture, watershed development, animal husbandry, community health, agri- business etc. Funding agencies like EU and KfW have supported this programme of tribal development through horticulture.

Approaches, activities and tools for the successful implementation:

Approaches:

1) Assessment of local needs 2) Encourage formation of local groups of 10 to 20 members as Self Help Groups (SHG's) 3) Micro planning 4) Community participation through involvement of both land holders and landless 5) Women empowerment 6) Village level development plan 7) Survey of participant's families 8) Development in a cluster of 15-20 villages

Activities:

1) Watershed development through contour bunding, farm ponds, water harvesting structures like wells, check dams etc. 2) Livestock development 3) Literacy programmes 4) Skill training for the landless in the service sector like carpentry, brick making, fruit nursery raising, vermi compost making, para medical and para veterinary practitioners etc

Tools:

1) Exposure visits to orchards in the neighboring districts 2) Providing extension education through farmer to farmer contacts 3) Establishment of fruit trees with multipurpose forest species on the boundary 4) Intercrops of seasonal vegetables 5) Encourage SHG's to form a Federation to provide backward and forward linkages for development initiatives 6) Group dynamism for the process of development 7) Employing semi literate local unemployed as field guides from participating families 8) Creating awareness on safe drinking water, health, hygiene, sanitation, infant immunization 9) Transparent accounting by linking SHG's to local banks and supply of inputs and development of market infrastructure through SHG federation.

Relevant Publication: Please read the *Ph.D for the study on BAIF's Wadi* (a local name for a small orchard) programme: http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=654&nocache=1

Dr. R. N. Hegde

Contribution by Charlotte Dufour, Nutrition, Food security and Livelihoods consultant, FAO Italy

Many thanks, George and Joseph, for your contributions to the discussion.

If I understand well, there is a kind of debate regarding whether it's best to focus advocacy efforts on the powerful and/or the poor households themselves to make progress? Is this a fair way of summarizing some points you make?

I have found that it is probably necessary to do both simultaneously, and that **efforts at various levels of policy and action** (central government, provincial officials, NGOs, community leaders and households) **can be mutually reinforcing**.

In Afghanistan, the project I was running attempted to work at all levels and did achieve some success:

- at **central level**, when we started, the Ministry of Agriculture officials were hardly aware / interested in malnutrition as an issue. But after three years or **lobbying and trainings** and sensitization workshops, MoAg officials all recognised the need to address malnutrition and their role in doing so, and it was clearly captured in the Ministry's policies (though next challenge is ensuring it's captured in implementation).

- at **provincial level** we **built alliances** of NGO and government departments and provided them with **technical assistance to integrate nutrition activities** in their work. For example, NGOs working in agriculture integrated nutrition and health education in their work; and some medical NGOs started agricultural activities in the areas where they had clinics, or partnered with another NGO with agricultural expertise. After two years, we had trouble coping with the demand for nutrition trainings by NGOs and communities.

- at **community level**, we did a lot of **nutrition education**, and started cooking demonstrations. I agree with George that a key constraint to households' good nutrition is lack of access to resources, but there is also a lot of preventable malnutrition (which can be tackled with available resources), due to lack of knowledge regarding good nutrition (in particular for complementary feeding and maternal nutrition). In most cases, providing access to food does not necessarily lead to optimal utilization. (c.f. households selling the fruits and veg from a gardening project to buy Coca-Cola!)

Incidentally, the central level officials became much more interested in nutrition when we started reporting that MoAg and FAO were reaching over 30,000 households with nutrition education in partnership with 25 agencies...

Another strategy we used was to develop **inter-sectoral alliances**. For example, all our nutrition publications were joint publications with MOPH and MoAg. And we worked with both MoAg and MOPH on both food security policies and health policies, to ensure nutrition was tackled. When motivation in one ministry was limited, the commitment of the other ministry tended to drive both forward... We also developed partnerships with Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Youth, etc. whose commitment to nutrition grew through joint activities.

Of course, it's an uphill battle, especially in a context where much focus is placed on commercial agriculture and economic growth (as opposed to poverty reduction). But there is some success. And maybe the more powerful aren't interested, but there may be enough stakeholders willing to push for it to make progress possible... I was always very positively surprised by the great interest in nutrition demonstrated by households, but also NGO and government staff.

One key element I found important to tackle was the need to both raise awareness about the importance of fighting malnutrition, but also **DEMYSTIFYING** what it means to tackle it. Many people are quite interested to address it, but get overwhelmed ("We don't have a nutritionist! We can't work on nutrition!"). Maybe nutrition and food security experts need to pass out the message, that working on nutrition is actually quite beneficial in terms of poverty reduction and inter-sectoral synergies; has lots of positive effects in terms of education, health and raising a population's productivity; and that there are many things that can be done, which don't require inaccessible expertise?

For more details about lessons learned from the project managed by FAO in Afghanistan, please find here the powerpoint I prepared to share the conclusions drawn from this experience:
http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=650&nocache=1

If any forum members have success stories to share, we'll be happy to hear them!!!

Many thanks,
Charlotte

Contribution by P.K.Thampan, President of Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kerala, India

Dear Members,

In the food production sector what is currently targeted is higher on-farm output without regard to the nutritional needs of the producer families and of the general consumers. The priority of the policy makers is to achieve higher growth rates in agriculture and in the national economy. In this exercise the health and nutrition security of the poor people does not form an integral component of the strategies adopted for food production and poverty reduction. **Even the existing opportunities for producing nutritious food in combination with the traditional farm produces are not identified and propagated for wider adoption.** As a result, the farmers, in general, continue to produce the traditional foods and in the absence of any motivation for introducing diversity in farming they do not explore the possibility of generating multiple foods of plant and animal origin, higher on-farm income and employment.

Farmers respond positively to innovations in the cropping/farming system provided they gain confidence in the technical and economic viability of the new technologies and the dedication and dependability of those who motivate them. Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation has motivated farmers in a few villages to adopt intensive integrated farming comprising the cultivation vegetables, root and tuber crops and fruit plants with or without livestock components in coconut holdings. There was excellent positive response from the farming community and over 500 farm-households have practised the system. In a field evaluation it was observed that from the cultivation of protective foods alone the participating farmers derived an average additional net income of US\$ 876 per hectare per year. In those holdings where livestock components were also integrated, the average net income was US\$ 2,590 per hectare. The most conspicuous feature was that in all the farm-house holds covered by the study the marketable surplus was derived after satisfying the household consumption needs. This contributed to household food and nutrition security.

Malnutrition and poverty could be reduced in a sustainable manner by integrating tree species of economic importance, diverse food crops and livestock components including poultry and pisciculture in the existing farming system. The integration of pisciculture in the rice farming system is slowly becoming popular in many countries. Through such integration it is possible to generate multiple sources of nutritious food, income and employment for the dependent families as well as for other members of the society. This will create additional opportunities for the people to combat malnutrition. Although intensive integrated farming is crucial for producing multiple sources of nutritious foods these may not be accessible to the landless and unemployed people in the rural as well as urban areas. Opportunities for income and employment for this category of people have to be created to enable them to spend on nutritious foods.

Integration of nutrition in agriculture and livelihood programmes for reducing malnutrition and poverty **has to be accomplished through public- private participation.** The farmers are to be motivated through appropriate methods of extension education and services for practising intensive integrated agriculture on their holdings for generating multiple sources of nutritious foods, higher on-farm income and employment. Appropriate marketing strategies are to be

introduced for sustaining the interest of the farming community in on-farm production of protective foods to serve their own household needs as well as of the local community. The women members of the farm-households and the educated but unemployed youth are to be supported both economically and technically to develop their skill in selected enterprises and to venture in to income generating activities. Through these measures it is possible to facilitate the production and availability of nutritious foods and to create opportunities for the rural poor to increase their purchasing power and improve the quality of food they consume.

Regards,
P.K.Thampan

Contribution by George Kent

My thanks to Pia and to Joseph for their comments, making it clear that we basically agree, but mainly needed to clarify some terminology.

Pia mentioned the “obscene political use of food distribution.” I think the best remedy for that is to make the distribution schemes strongly rights-based, with effective mechanisms of accountability. I discussed this with regard to the situation in India, in “ICDS and Right Food,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai, India). Vol. 41, No. 45 (November 11, 2006):

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=655&nocache=1

I agree with Joseph’s point that the poor generally can make better choices among the foods that are available to them, and should receive guidance and even some pressure to do that. The pressure could, for example, be in terms of differential pricing, so that the healthy foods are also the cheaper foods.

However, I do have reservations about this approach. It helps people adapt to their poverty. I am more interested in finding ways to assure that the poor have new ways for breaking out of their poverty. This is why I emphasize the creation and protection of opportunities for them to make a decent living. We need to distinguish between ways of adapting to existing systems and ways of changing those systems.

Of course, sometimes it is sensible to both, simultaneously.

Aloha,
George

Contribution by B.P.Gangadhara Swamy, Program Coordinator-Livelihood and Microfinance, CCF-INDIA

Dear All

Here there are few comments on the present food crisis and its effects on the nutrition of people.

1) This situation is related to India. Before 15-20 years back, most of the farmers were storing the grains for 3-4 months and based on their financial requirement they were selling it in many slots. But nowadays they are selling it in one stretch immediately after the harvest is over. By this, **merchants with sufficient capital and storing facilities are reaping the more profits by creating artificial scarcity of foods.**

2) Most of the high income group people from the cities, in dream of a farm house for their retirement life, are purchasing lots of lands in the villages. After purchasing this, they are keeping the land idle. (In Karnataka, India, From Bangalore-Mysore, and Mysore-Gundlupet, more than 2 lakh acres of land has been sold for this type purposes. This is other than SEZ purpose). By this, most of **lands are becoming uncultivated and creating food scarcity.** Once these farmers get

the good prices, they will take other low profile lands inside their villages.

3) Some of the **food crops are neglected by the farmers due to low rates, even though they are nutritious** e.g Jowar and ragi.

4) Most of **pulse and oil crops are supplied from dry land areas** and these dry lands areas **are neglected by the farmers**. Most of the farmers prefer to go for irrigation where they grow only irrigated crops like paddy, sugarcane and flower crops. Creating scarcity of pulse crops, which is affecting the health of the people.

With regards

B.P.Gangadhara swamy

Contribution by George Kent

I appreciate the wonderful example that R. N. Hegde presented to us of successful agriculture-based development projects in India. Their success is probably due to the fact that they were based on **full attention to the important social dimensions**, including involvement of local people in the planning process. I would be interested in hearing what becomes of these projects after the BAIF Research and Development Foundation people left the scene. Have the economic, nutritional and other gains been sustained?

As for Andrew's comments, I agree I sometimes simplify, and even oversimplify. I am trying to following the mandate in a paper of his that I have on my desk: "Ending Hunger: Time to Stop Talking and Get Down to Action." We are totally together on that point!

Yes, Andrew is correct in saying that we should not write off the rich and powerful simply because their response so far has been disappointing. But after a few decades of looking upward for answers, a certain fatigue sets in, and it becomes more comfortable, and seems more sensible, to look to those at the ground level.

To illustrate, Andrews call for **new codes of conduct and regulations that will make these processes work better for the good of all**. Years ago I spent a good deal of time with FAO's fisheries division on the development of a code of conduct for fisheries, and especially fish trade, that would give more attention to the nutritional impact of fish production and trade. So far as I know, that effort had no lasting effect at all. People on the production side, whether in fisheries or agriculture, generally are mainly interested in the commodity value of the products, not their nutritional values. Their policies reflect that.

Andrew said, "Surely the big lesson for the rich and powerful is that it is in their self-interest to contribute to the creation of a more equitable world." As I see it, the rich and powerful have not yet taken that "lesson" on board, and we have not yet been able to make a compelling case for it. **We have not made a good argument that there are material benefits to be gained by the rich if the world became more equitable**, and we have not been able to appeal to their moral conscience in a compelling way.

This is why I am now convinced that **there is no one as motivated to end hunger as the hungry themselves**. And this is why the poor need to be assured of having decent opportunities to provide for themselves. Of course that is not the only thing that should be done, but it is a hugely important one.

Charlotte, I agree that it is necessary to address malnutrition in all its dimensions from many different angles. However, as indicated my response to Andrew, I have come to the view that my limited personal energy, as an isolated individual, probably is now best directed to **helping find ways to create better local opportunities for the poor to provide for themselves**.

I am now working on the old idea of increasing local self reliance. My main question now is, **how can higher levels of governance (national, regional, global) help to support local self-reliance?**

Aloha,
George

Contribution by Cristina Lopriore, health nutritionist, FAO Italy

Hello,

My name is Cristina Lopriore, I am a public health nutritionist by training and I am currently working on training issues in the context of the EC/FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme. I wish to share some thoughts on this very interesting forum discussion, in particular to the following three questions by Charlotte's request for feedback:

1. **What experience can you share** regarding the integration of nutrition in agriculture and livelihoods programs and integrated/multi-sectoral programming?

A first but fundamental best practice that should be adopted methodically in pro-nutrition livelihoods programming in both emergency and development contexts is captured in the *Sphere standard n.2 on Nutrition Assessment and Analysis* which says:

“Where people are at risk of malnutrition, programme decisions are based on a demonstrated understanding of the causes, type, degree and extent of malnutrition, and the most appropriate response.” [The Sphere Project Handbook]

This may seem an obvious and very basic standard to apply, but in reality still a lot of emergency rehabilitation **responses are not systematically grounded in a solid comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes**. This was one of the main findings coming out from the thematic evaluation of the role of needs assessment in the tsunami response (http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=659&nocache=1). Not surprisingly, the most successful programming practices were those that had included analysis elements of underlying context including structural vulnerabilities, understanding of pre-crisis livelihoods strategies, coping strategies and their impact on severity of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Another important evaluation finding showed the lack of **proper assessment and building of local organizational needs and capacities**. Strengthening relations with and building the capacities of local partners (formal/informal) are essential steps towards combining short- with long-term efforts for integrated/multi-sectoral nutrition programming. [See the next bullet.]

2. What **constraints and obstacles** have you faced in doing so (e.g. expertise gap? Funding? No political interest?)? Were you able to overcome them and if so, how?

From my training perspective in the context of the EC/FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme, we see **there is a major capacity building and training gap for food security and nutrition policy and programming**. There are several reasons for that, among others:

- Despite the large number of training courses which currently exist in nutrition, very few of these **enable field workers and managers, particularly government staff and national staff of international or national NGOs, to be responsible for nutrition policy and programming**. The two main reasons for this were: (a) geographical location of the majority of the most effective courses, and (b) a major capacity deficiency of trainers for regional courses.
- The **coordination and sharing of resources in training materials** between those running the courses is still limited. Many opportunities are missed, e.g. not including experienced people

from the field and/or training participants to be trainers within the existing courses. Although in recent years efforts are underway in this regard particularly amongst the international agencies. **Distance learning** (offered by both facilitated and self-paced courses but also online discussions like this forum) **is becoming increasingly available** on the Internet enabling engaging and interactive learning to take place. These tools are not only cost-effective ways of reaching a large audience, but are easy to translate into multiple languages and facilitate the building of communities of practice. [See below resources]

- Many training courses lack a needs and employment assessment, particularly of the organisational needs as well as those of the individual to be trained. This in turn limits the accountability on the part of both the organisation and individuals to take forward and put into practice the elements of the training.

- Short courses are rarely followed up in any way.

3. Finally, if you have produced or are aware of **relevant publications or tools on this topic**, thank you for sharing them with the forum members.

The following are some useful resources on this forum topic:

- **Improving Household Food Security and Nutrition through Community Empowerment in the Luapula Valley, Zambia.** The case study provides an overview on the 7 main lessons learned and calls for a review of our current thinking on project design and implementation (viz. logical framework, quantification, objectively verifiable indicators, etc.) in the context of contributing towards improving people's livelihoods on a sustainable basis: http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=657&nocache=1. Other lessons learned by livelihoods diversification projects are also available: http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=658&nocache=1

- **Distance learning programme of the EC/FAO Food Security "Information for Action"** Programme is free of charge and several courses are now available (e.g. Nutrition and Livelihoods Assessment and Analysis, Food Security Policies: Formulation and Implementation, Collaboration and Advocacy Techniques) http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=656&nocache=1

To everyone who has contributed so far on this discussion forum, I would like to say thank you and I send you my very best wishes,

Cristina Lopriore

Contribution by Jacques du Guerny, former Chief of the FAO Population Programme Service

Dear All,

On potential important lever exists **to promote better nutrition: partnerships with the health sector in countries with generalized AIDS epidemics** because HIV infection, AIDS and ARVs require improving the nutrition of infected persons. A dialogue on this could be established or strengthened between the two sectors. This could perhaps **encourage the Ministry of agriculture to take more into account nutrition issues**. Donors could also be contacted in this connection.

Regards
Jacques du Guerny

Contribution by Judith Appleton, Food & Nutrition Specialist, UK

Two more elements needed to round out this discussion are:

Productivity-to-labour

Higher-level decision-makers often want to know what the economic benefits of nutritional improvement are. Among others, Italian nutritionists and economists at the World Bank have had work done on nutritional effects on labour productivity. **Advocacy for large-scale nutrition programming should include reference to the labour productivity potential (and hence the economy)** and the importance of good lifelong and adult nutrition also to those outcomes.

Measuring change

Where reference to labour productivity is relevant to economic and funding advocacy, **the nutrition indicators** used by the health and agriculture sectors (nutstat and food security) **may need to be supplemented, particularly with regard to measures for adults, and with regard to productivity measures.**

Judith Appleton

Contribution by Angela Kimani, Nairobi

I agree with George Kent, that most of the **resources used in food production**, even at the highest level, **only consider the returns** that they get at the end of the day and **not the quality of the food being produced.**

It is high time that the world gets to understand that malnutrition also includes obesity and overweight which have negative consequences in the long run like greater chances of getting Stroke, Heart Problems etc, besides marasmms and Kwashiorkor, nightblindness for those lacking certain nutrients and receive undernutrition.

What role can FSN members play to ensure that our leaders as well as the common man understand the major role that nutrition plays our health?

Angela Kimani,

Contribution by R. N. Hegde

While Dr. George Kent has appreciated the example of BAIF he also expressed his interest to know what has happened after the exit of **BAIF Development & Research Foundation** and about the **sustainability of the project.** Hence, additional information is furnished here.

Fruit trees of mango and cashew are well maintained by the farmers and they are getting good yield every year. The area under vegetable cultivation is also on the increase . Some farmers , even constructed their permanent houses in their small orchard itself. The migration of the tribals is significantly reduced. The farmers have formed two organizations viz. the SHG Federation and the Co-operative Fruit Processing Unit, which together take care of the sustainability aspects of this project.

SHG's numbering around 180 have formed SHG Federation, to which members are from mostly women folk, which takes care of women's livelihoods and community health through linkages with Government Schemes. Nearly 1200 farmers who established orchards under this project have formed a separate Co-operative which has established a fruit processing unit in the cluster. Last year it is reported that the unit has processed 40 tons of raw cashew in to cashew kernels and 30 tons of raw mango in to mango pickles, as major portion of mango goes to fresh fruit market. This Co-operative has also created their own brand name "Vrindavan" to sell their products in cities in

nicely packed and labeled card board boxes. India's reputed corporate house the ITC Agro Ltd. is also sourcing their produce for the malls in the metro cities.

The **success of this project goes to following factors:**

a) Considering the **family as a unit for development.**

b) **Ensuring over 90 % survival of fruit trees planted by the farmers.** This has happened due to the pre- condition set by BAIF, for continuance in the project to get project benefits that there should be a minimum of 80 per cent survival rate. Hence, gap filling was carried out by the farmers very meticulously. Those who have not performed well in the initial stage have been out on their own.

c) **Refraining from alcohol consumption** was another pre-requisite for the participants as decided by the wives of the farmers and SHG members voluntarily (not by BAIF)

d) **People's participation in every stage** right from planning to execution.

Now, there are only two officers from BAIF, one of each is guiding the above cited two organizations. Further, the asset (Orchard) has also increased their esteem and pride since prior to BAIF's intervention in the project area, only the rich farmers owned the orchards as they had the capacity to invest in this type of agriculture activity which has a longer gestation.

On the whole, **this project can be considered as a model sustainable livelihood project for poverty reduction.** Increased livelihood opportunities created in the village to different strata of the community has brought economic prosperity and automatically taken care of the nutrition security to the poor.

Dr. R. N. Hegde

Contribution by George Kent

Friends --

Judith Appleton said, "Advocacy for large-scale nutrition programming should include reference to the labour productivity potential (and hence the economy) and the importance of good lifelong and adult nutrition also to those outcomes."

I agree that this dimension should be discussed, provided that other considerations are taken up along with it.

There is abundant evidence that **improved nutrition can increase work capacity. But that should not be confused with increased productivity.** Productivity requires motivation as well as capacity. There are many circumstances in which work performance improves with improved nutrition, but globally the dominant pattern seems to be just the opposite. People who are well fed often are reluctant to do any hard physical work at all. Many people who are poor and badly nourished work very hard. Even more important, they work cheap. Within broad limits, people who eat less may be more efficient, delivering more work output for each unit of energy input.

The **linkage between nutritional status and work output depends on the social context** in which the work is embedded. To illustrate, after the Sandinista victory over Somoza in Nicaragua, people were well fed for the first time in decades, so they were much less anxious to earn wages by harvesting cash crops. They reduced their effort on the plantations, but at the same time many tended their own garden plots.

There is real danger in the human capital approach to justifying national nutrition and child

survival programs. Where would this line of analysis lead in regard to nutrition programs for the elderly? What would be done for handicapped children? In this narrowly economic approach, there is little room for human dignity. The function of human life is economic production.

The alleviation of malnutrition should not be viewed simply as means to economic development. That approach has got it backwards, assuming that the function of people is to serve the economy, rather than the reverse. People should be helped to improve their nutrition status mainly because it is the right thing to do. **Efforts to reduce malnutrition should not have to be justified in terms of improved productivity.**

The human capital argument is morally defective because it shows little consideration for the well-being of those who are malnourished. The best reason for ending malnutrition is that it is not right for people to remain malnourished. No other reason should be necessary.

The human capital argument for reducing malnutrition is based on the idea that doing so would contribute to the nation's economic growth. While **moral considerations alone ought to be sufficient to motivate efforts to reduce malnutrition**, often they are not. Thus, recognizing the realities, I agree that **where a truthful and convincing human capital argument for reducing malnutrition can be made, it should be used, along with the moral argument.**

Aloha,
George

Contribution by Harun K.M. Yusuf, Professor of Biochemistry and Human Nutrition at Dhaka University, Bangladesh and Nutrition Advisor to FAO

I agree with George Kent saying that ..."farmers are mostly interested in producing money; whether or not the product is good food". But tell me who is not interested to make some profit in exchange of the labour and the investments they make in production. From time immemorial the farmers of Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the world, have been giving their labour and inputs for the production of various kinds of crops of their choice, but mainly, of course rice. (**Rice production in Bangladesh increased 3-fold** from around 10 million metric tons (mMT) to about 30 mMT **between 1971-2008**). They used to produce a good amount of wheat also, the production of which rose from 1.3% of total cereals in 1971 to as high as 10% in 1998-99. But then, they found **wheat cultivation not as profitable as rice, resulting in sharp fall** to 3.3% of total cereal production in 2007-08. Pulses also became a casualty of the booming rice; its **production decreased dramatically** during the green revolution of rice. The consequence has been obvious. The **quality of the diet of the common man**, the main components of which were rice, dal (pulses) and small fish for centuries, **deteriorated**, with both dal and fish becoming more and more dearer. The farmers are not to be blamed for this. The **National Agricultural Policy** (of 1999, which is now under the final stage of revision) has **strong commitments for crop diversification** (in line with the Bangladesh Food and Nutrition Policy 1997), but the problem is with its implementation. **Farmers can be motivated, but their returns shall have to be ensured.** During bumper production, they often do not get the price to realize their investments

Also, Kent's comment that "high level policy makers are far more concerned with the commodity (cash) value than the nutritive value of the products of agriculture and fisheries" is absolutely right. I would put it in a slightly different way. The **policy makers and development planners are more concerned with producing enough staple food** (rice in our country) to keep the people 'fully' fed, so that there is no scarcity of food (foodgrain – rice) and no body suffers from hunger. While this is very important, it is also important to see that the people are fed "well", i.e. they eat a food which is more or less balanced to keep up the nutritional value of the diet. Ironically, this doesn't happen here. Production of rice has, to the relief of the policy makers as well as the countrymen, increased this year, despite floods and cyclones last year (2007), to make a per capita apparent consumption of around 460 g/day of rice. Together with another 50 g

of wheat, the total apparent cereal consumption in Bangladesh is now 510 g/day, much above the recommended level of intake of 400 g at the most for balanced nutrition. **It is difficult to raise the issue of balanced nutrition during discussions in policy forums, particularly under a stressful situation of staple scarcity.** Only when the situation eases a little bit, the issue of nutrition is discussed somewhat.

Malnutrition is likely to prevail in a country like ours as long as the cereal contribution to total dietary energy continues to be around 80%. Nearly half (48%) of our under-5 children are still underweight. Although commendable improvements have been achieved in mitigating vitamin A and iodine deficiencies, the prevalence of iron deficiency anemia in children (49%) and pregnant women (45%) is rampant. All concerned at the policy level should realize the economic costs of this sort of widespread malnutrition in women and children in terms of productivity as well as human resource potential in cognitive development. Just feeding rice full bellied will not help. **The entire mind set of the policy makers shall have to be changed to bring about a change in the total scenario of crop production pattern** in a country like Bangladesh where at least half of the population depends on local production for their food.

Dr. Harun K.M. Yusuf

Professor of Biochemistry and Human Nutrition at Dhaka University, Bangladesh.

Currently, Nutrition Advisor to FAO

National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme, Bangladesh

Contribution by Prasanta Misra, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India

Dear All,

Where there is malnutrition, there are also many other issues which are interrelated, all of which, somehow or other have led to deficiency in nutrition availability to the population which includes children as well. In a country like India, many good intentioned programmes do not take off because of the odds these programmes suffer in the hands of people who handle these programmes. Mid day meal can not be any different. On the face of it mid day meal programme seems a good programme because it can even drive some, not so provided families, to send their children for schooling which in turn can help educate the children.

Looking at it more holistically the **mid day meal programme can go a long way in spreading nutrition and hygiene awareness** in the locality of the programme implementation. It is of importance that the mid day meal programme is designed keeping in mind the larger interest of the community it is serving. Some aspects which need be considered, and also has been highlighted while debating on mid day meal -packaged vis a vis cooked food, are:

1. The mid day meal could be **designed on local foods/taste keeping in mind the nutrition content**. It must value and preserve the local culture and food habits.
2. The **meal content** -cereals, pulses, vegetables- can be **acquired locally as much as is possible**.
3. The delivery mechanism need consider **employment of local people, or women's self help groups**.

With respect to the point 2 mentioned above we have an interesting **case study** which happened in the **Tumkur district of Karnataka**. A local NGO-TIDE promoted a **low cost green house for production of high quality capsicum and tomato**. A women's self help group managed the green house. **Part of the produce was used in mid day meal programme**. It is understood that few more schools in the area now are interested in using this method to obtain good quality vegetables for the programme. The concerned NGO is already exploring venues for marketing the surplus vegetables. Creation of a marketing/logistics network will encourage more such ventures in the area leading to higher level of technology adoption and the involvement of more women in this programme.

This case study has been uploaded to the FSN Forum reference section and can be found at:
http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/Success_Stories-GH-B_lore.pdf

While there is a scope to improve this delivery mechanism, the case does offer certain important lessons for programme implementers. The possible learning are:

- **Useful modern technology can be deployed with the help of self help groups** (preferably women's group) in the school proximity.
- **Success of the technology will lead to its larger adoption in the area.**
- **Availability of good quality vegetables in the locality may increase its consumption** in the area, which will mean **improvement in the nutrition content** in the food intake.

Regards,

Prasanta Misra
Ministry of Agriculture,
Government of India

Contribution by K.A.S. Mani, APFAMGS Project Leader, India

APFAMGS is an FAO funded NEX project in Andhra Pradesh, India, which is working with communities for **implementing demand side groundwater management** (www.apfamgs.org). The project works towards **behavioral change in community facilitated through improved skills, knowledge and understanding**. The project has enabled the communities to monitor various technical parameters related to water availability, food security and nutrition.

In-built into the programme is the **aspect of food security and nutrition**. Annually the **community themselves conduct a food and nutrition survey** and based on the data collected **assess the food and nutrition security**. The survey also records the expenditure on food and health as well as the amount of food produced locally. Based on the data collected the farmers alter their cropping plans to ensure food and nutritional security. Based on 3 years of food and nutrition survey the community have identified the various coarse cereals that have been serving the food and nutritional needs and have tried to revive some of them. **Community has carried out inventory of local greens and published them in a book "Nourishing Traditions"**.
http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=666&nocache=1

K.A.S. Mani
Project Leader,
APFAMGS

Contribution by Mahtab S.Bamji, Dangoria Charitable Trust, India

The **Dangoria Charitable Trust**, Hyderabad is trying to **promote vegetables through the mid day meal programme** in several schools of Medak district, AP. Local supply of fresh vegetables is being attempted by **linking the village-based growers with the cooks** who prepare the meal. In three schools, **school gardens have been started** with some success. This effort is coupled with nutrition, hygiene and health education to the children, the teachers the cooks, the vegetable growers and the community in general. By way of incentive, good quality seeds of nutrient-dense vegetable were given to the farmers. **Significant improvement in nutrition knowledge of children was apparent after 7 months**. Increase in the quantum of vegetables added to the MDM was claimed by the cooks. In a questionnaire, children reported higher frequency of weekly consumption of GLV and other vegetables at home after 7 months. **MDM, can be a useful programme for nutrition education**.

Mahtab S.Bamji
Hyderabad

Contribution by Urban Jonsson, The Owls, former Unicef regional director for eastern and southern Africa

Dear All,

I have followed the very interesting discussion regarding 'Putting people first: Nutrition, a key to integrated programming for poverty reduction'. I would like to comment on some of the contributions:

1. Many of those who contributed to the discussion ask for "how to integrate nutrition in ongoing programs"(C. Dafour), "how to engage households and families" (J. Opio-Odongo), "the old idea of increasing local self reliance" (G. Kent) etc. SCN concluded already in the early 1990s that **in order to make nutrition-oriented programmes and projects effective and efficient they must be community-based or community-focused**. UNICEF and many other agencies and actors developed and applied the **Triple A Approach** of **assessment, analysis, action**, re-assessment, improved action etc. The approach is a variant of 'learning-by-doing'. The approach is based on the principle that people who are poor should be recognized as key actors in and for their own development, rather than beneficiaries of transfers of commodities and services. The Triple A Approach is particularly useful in **facilitating the process of 'putting theory into practice'**. It is clear that the success of eradicating child malnutrition in Thailand used an almost identical approach to the Triple A Approach. The Triple A Approach is described in many books, reports and articles.
2. We should **not over-simplify the world as just consisting of the powerful and the powerless** (G. Kent). As a matter of fact the vast majority of people in the world fall in between these extremes. Sociologists and political scientists have for hundreds of years tried to 're-construct' the world in different groups, classes, races etc. We need to be a little bit more sophisticated in trying to understand power and power relationships.
3. Some have emphasized the "need to address malnutrition through multisectoral interventions" (G. Kent); or that "the causes of malnutrition are multifaceted" (J. Opio-Odongo). This is true and that is why there is such a need of an explicitly formulated **Conceptual Framework of Causality in explaining the problem of malnutrition in society**. It is very important to appreciate and understand the **difference between the 'science of nutrition' and the 'science of nutrition problems in society'**. Nutritionists should play a very limited role in the 'science of nutrition problem in society'. It is like surgeons who play a very important role in taking care of victims in traffic accidents, but play a very limited role in the design of traffic systems for reduced accidents! The immediate causes of child malnutrition are inadequate dietary intake and disease. These in turn are results of or caused by the underlying causes of inadequate household food security ('Food'), inadequate access to basic health services ('Health'), and inadequate caring practices ('Care') (including feeding practices, hygiene practices, health seeking practices, and psychosocial stimulation). Finally, 'Food', 'Health' and 'Care' are themselves caused by historical, economic, social, political and cultural processes in society. All this was captured by the UNICEF Conceptual Framework in Nutrition, launched in 1990 and adopted, adapted and used in hundreds of nutrition programmes around the world.
4. From the above (3) it follows that "nutritious food" (P. K. Thampen) is a misnomer. This term was left by most nutrition scholars and practitioners many years ago, except from many FAO staff or other food-biased scholars in nutrition. **There is nothing like "nutritious food", only "nutritious diets"**.
5. Of course I agree with those farmers who grow what gives them the highest profit, and that they have no duty to grow food that may combine into better diets. That should be the duty of the government to address through pricing policy or other measures.

6. Finally, I **strongly recommend reading** (and re-reading) of the very insightful **report published by the SCN in the early 1990s on 'successful nutrition programmes', 'successful countries in reducing malnutrition'** etc. History shows a large number of successful efforts to reduce malnutrition. Let us not forget that!

Urban Jonsson

The Owls (former UNICEF)

Contribution by Raj Ganguly, Consultant, India

Dear members,

Greetings.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relating to poverty reduction and health improvement are closely related, reflecting the close relationships between ill-health, vulnerability and poverty.

Adverse effects of ill-health are greatest for the resource poor due to frequent illness, exclusive earning through physical work, and lack of savings to cushion the blow. Estimates say that about 25% of hospitalized Indians become poor due to hospital expenses. (Nair and Durairaj, June 2007; http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn-viewresdet/en/?no_cache=1&r=670&nocache=1)

Food and health is intricately related. As food continually gets ignored as the basis of good health, the consequences unfold slowly in the form of reduced immunity and severe disease outbreaks, further complicating the vicious cycle of poverty.

The ancient Ayurvedic system from India upheld the importance of food for both prophylactic and curative measures to maintain good health. In ayurvedic therapy equal importance is given to 'Pathya' i.e. food. In India, 'Food' has been examined and categorised from health perspectives and seasonal requirements, which till date has been beyond the scope of modern nutritionists. Even the agriculture system evolved with a holistic perspective to produce food for maintaining good health. Crop domestication, seed development, cultural practices etc. followed the principle to produce 'good food' for 'good health'. A comprehensive document on Rice, which demonstrates this traditional wisdom of 'food and health' linkage, is appended herewith for generating an appreciation of this perspective .

It is a irony of our times that 'Food' got positioned as only 'energy supplier', till very recently, when the 'wellness industry' is taking shape with nutraceutical products albeit targeted to only affluent society. The growth of pharma on industrial scale has further marginalised the therapeutic potential of food.

Nutrition is central to food, besides other aspects as 'safety', 'accessibility' and 'affordability'. It assumes the most significant role to ensure 'Good health', and thus should be the focus for any sustainable poverty alleviation programme.

Thanks.

Raj Ganguly

Contribution by Kiran Jayasa, India

Respected Members,

With respect to last date, and as well to deal the situation in a simple, i tried the following. Putting people first: Nutrition, a key to Integrated Programming for Poverty Reduction

A. NATURE SIDE:

1. Poverty Reduction (Economy Raising)

Each and every thing is appearing under money standards / formats. Poverty reduction means GETTING ACCESS TOWARDS Food, Clothing, Housing with out error. We need to have an insight / a scope of ECONOMY SUSTAINABILITY

2. Economy Sustain (Food Share)

In order to START / MAINTAIN one function, we need to maintain HIGH LEVEL OF SHARE of food towards our regular activities / economy strength. Everybody need to PASS FOOD GATE for further quests of living conditions.

3. Newton's Third Law (Production Accountability)

We do get REACTIONS (ECONOMY PRODUCTION) depending on the best we did ACTIONS under energy (FOOD CONSUMPTION). So first thing is Consumption that leads Production Rates with respect to Consumption Standards.

4. Food Consumption Gate (Divergent Competitions)

Humans can only pass the Food Gate depending on way of STRIKE OF ACCESSING among sources. The less economy sources are PLANTS THAN OF ANIMALS (Non - Humans) and also for HEALTHY STANDARDS.

5. Plants vs. Humans

The plant is using both CO₂ AND O₂ . In case of Humans, we need to FOLLOW O₂ . We are LESS BEFORE PLANTS for living conditions since plants for following TWO WAY TRACK but humans are experiencing only ONE WAY TRACK. We need to depend mostly on PLANTS.

6. Teaching vs. Practical

Each individual have to experience of WALKING THE PATH apart KNOWING THE PATH with respect to STRIKE OF FOOD GATE and as well for FOOD PRODUCTION. We need to press for HUNTING than of PROVIDING food and make sure of SURPLUS FOOD for INCOME

7. Good vs. Better vs. Best

We need to demand for THE BEST from the FOOD PRODUCERS [[which is by the combinations of SELF-INTEREST, ADDITIONAL SHIELD OF PRODUCTION RESEARCH, and profitable MARKETS.]] By THE BEST, we can get AT LEAST GOOD. Otherwise, if we strive FOR GOOD, we may get any of the options OF BAD VS. WORSE VS. WORST.

B. PEOPLE SIDE: They must have or they must be IN

1.Production percentage GREATER THAN of Consumption percentage 2.Concept of usage of items in MEANINGFUL and ATTENTIVE way 3. Must go through UPDATED STANDARDS for increasing QUANTITY and QUALITY

I am willing to extend each and every thing if time permits with examples.

Kiran Jayasa

Contribution by Silvia Kaufmann, Food and Nutrition Consultant, FAO Afganistan

Dear All,

This a very interesting discussion, thank you to all colleagues contributing to the lively exchange.

The stated 'commitments' given by members countries aiming to reach the MDGs and to halve hunger and malnutrition by 2015 increases the urgency to identify and put most effective approaches and interventions in practice. I agree with G. Kent and others that it is neither a lack of technical understanding of the nutritional problems nor the fact of not having feasible solutions in hand. But it seems that there is a **lack of commitment**, or is it motivation as expressed by G. Kent, among the high level politicians and decision makers in both, affected as well as donor countries. As a consequence, nutrition does not receive adequate attention or even falls of the agenda as a whole. However, the **low commitment**, in my opinion, is a **consequence of lack of knowledge and understanding among politicians and major decision makers**. Hence, decisions are often taken in favour of immediate, visible and quantifiable (or countable) outputs. Numerous national agricultural sector policies provide such examples. Despite the evidence that it is neither the increase in cereal production nor the improved income ensuring household's food security or good nutrition, various policies focus on increased production mainly and neglect approaches responding to the problems of the poorest.

I agree with U. Jonsson that one should **study** again earlier **publications showing the effectiveness and efficiency of nutrition interventions**, they even elaborate on the impact on labour productivity, as discussed by J. Appleton. Proper assessments and project cycle management as well as targeted community focused approaches are essential for good programming. Nevertheless, the **serious gap** hindering the integration of nutrition in relevant sector policies and strategies appears **between policy makers and nutrition promoters/practitioners**. The latter need to build up their capacities, need to become stronger in bringing nutrition higher up on the agenda, in showing progress and to advocate for most successful solutions at all levels. Close networks and evidence based exchange of lessons learnt are a step forward.

The actual debate is very supportive to that, and I would like to share lessons learnt from a community based multi-sectoral programme implemented by the Ministry of Pubic Health supported by the German Government through GTZ in Northern Laos.

At the start of the programme, a context specific causal model of malnutrition was applied to assess the nutritional situation and causes of malnutrition. Results were used to design programme interventions and provided the basis to the evaluation after four after community based interventions.

The Integrated Food Security Programme comprised of activities in the fields of agriculture, food and cash crop production, curative and preventive health care, primary and non-formal education, as well as communal infrastructure. Nutrition specific actions were integrated into the various sectors.

Chronic malnutrition was extremely high within the programme area (69% compared to national average of 47%). However, the annual rate of reduction achieved exceeded national and global progress with regard to chronic malnutrition and underweight of children as well as chronic dietary energy deficiency of women (3.9%, 4.4% and 15.3% per annum, respectively). Also child and infant mortality rates dropped significantly (CMR: 259 to 109; IMR: 235 to 95 deaths per 1,000 live birth) and equalled national rates by the end of the programme.

Among the set of interventions implemented, improved hygiene behaviour, increased access to

water supply and the adoption of an improved agriculture production system were statistically the most significant determinants of reduced malnutrition. Significant increases in household's rice production as well as cash income (45% increase) indicated good achievements towards food security and poverty reduction, but did not contribute significantly to improved nutrition. Not the rice consumption, but the variety of side dishes a family consumed was associated to malnutrition as was the food diversity among households obtaining their products through own production or cultivation.

Throughout Lao PDR the rice production as well as the national gross product increased since 2000, unfortunately rates malnutrition increased simultaneously. Results show that contributions to food security and poverty reduction will not ultimately lead to improved nutrition but need to be complemented with additional multisectoral and nutrition specific actions to tackle problems of malnutrition effectively.

Silvia Kaufmann

Contribution by Geeta Verma, Deputy Team Leader, West Bengal Technical Assistance Support Team (WBTAST), India

I have been following the discussion with interest and agree that the issue needs to be taken up at all levels but specially the policy makers and the community / people themselves.

If the ultimate goal of a poverty reduction programme is to enhance the quality of life of all people then Nutrition should be a key element of any integrated programme. There is ample evidence which indicates that Malnutrition impairs development and quality of life of an individual in many ways, creating a cyclic cause- effect relationship, that is, each one is both a cause and effect of the other. Despite this close relationship between malnutrition and poverty it has been found that **economic progress does not necessarily lead to improved nutritional status, and malnutrition persists even in apparently food secure households** (World Bank - Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development, A strategy for large scale action). This also due to the fact that Nutrition behaviours and practices are deeply rooted in traditions and cultures and happen within the confines of homes, there is no magic pill that can improve nutrition overnight, sustained and multipronged efforts are needed.

In the case of India, addressing malnutrition is particularly challenging, owing to the inherent diversities, strong cultural and social mores and traditional inequities . The successive five year plans (especially the 10th and 11th) of the country have focussed issues of both food security - food production and distribution and malnutrition.

A special initiative of the government is the "**Integrated Child Development Services**" (ICDS) a programme for all round development of young children, details on its aims and design are available at <http://www.wcd.nic.in/> ICDS has also emerged as the largest direct nutrition programme in the country. The services of ICDS are delivered through community based centres called "Anganwadis" and workers are drawn from the community itself, they maintain close links with families and are ideally placed to support families to adopt optimal nutrition behaviours. ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant and lactating women - nutritionally the most vulnerable groups of the life cycle. The Government is committed to extend the ICDS programme to every woman and child of the country. The programme outlay has also seen substantial increases, the most recent has been the increase in allocation for supplementary food in response to escalating food prices. Some operational challenges include - ensuring nutrition services at the most critical times e.g. advanced stage of pregnancy, newly delivered mothers, children 6-18 months old. An optimally functioning ICDS, can provide the platform to support and empower communities on Nutrition related issues, but unless inputs of ICDS are complemented with the other poverty reduction / development schemes the programme will not have the desired impact on Nutrition and Health status of women and children. Most successful Nutrition programmes have empowered families by demonstrating simple doable actions that can help to improve nutrition

status of women and children. This **approach works only when there is a reasonable availability of and access to food.**

There are many programmes to address poverty, malnutrition, food security and other developmental issues, what is lacking is a **unified database** that can actually **assess the different inputs of the different development initiatives and link them with Nutrition outputs**. This is an exercise that should be carried out at both Micro (at village, community, local, block levels) and macro levels (District, State and Nation). If the citizens of a Nation are to be ensured basic rights and a reasonable quality of life it is essential to sensitise planners and policy makers by a regular flow of such information. A strong Monitoring and evaluation system with access to data from all sectors is required, as is a dedicated agency for Nutrition one that can look at all aspects and coordinate all. Once this happens it will be possible to mobilise civil society, the community and individuals and groups from all walks of life to understand the impact of Nutrition in their lives and to advocate for Nutrition. The greater the awareness on Nutrition concepts and Basic Nutritious diets, and good infant feeding practices the better the chances to adopt improved practices. This may ultimately help in elimination of Malnutrition and eventually poverty.

Geeta Verma
Deputy Team Leader
West Bengal Technical Assistance Support Team (WBTASt)
India

Contribution by Charlotte Dufour

Dear colleagues, friends, allies,

Happy New Year! I hope the coming year will be a successful one for all of you, whether you are striving to support communities better help themselves or advocating with senior policy makers for more commitments to poverty and malnutrition reduction, or both.

Thank you so much for the great wealth of responses that just demonstrate how **broad, challenging, fascinating, though often frustrating**, work on nutrition, food security and poverty reduction can be. I imagine those of you who have been leading this fight for many years must be thinking: "But we've said this before. We've tried that before. We know this, but have things fundamentally evolved?" (Many thanks to Urban Jonsson for reminding us of key milestones and references).

I was nevertheless personally very encouraged by the **success stories**, in particular those shared by our colleagues in India. (Having just returned from a holiday in an ayurvedic center in Kerala, where an amazing diet helped me recover from the stress of years of lobbying for nutrition, I am all the more sensitive to mentions of orchard and garden products, and of the inherent links between food and well-being! Thank you, Mr. Ganguly, for inviting '**Western**' trained nutritionists to revisit **oriental wisdom**. May I recommend, in that regard, the book Healing with Whole Foods: Oriental Traditions and Modern Nutrition, by Paul Pritchard?)

All examples confirm that **empowerment of local communities and individuals through community-driven, integrated, flexible and iterative programming** is essential to drive progress at household level, and (hopefully) stimulate more commitment and action at the policy level. I see no other option than to multiply these actions as much as possible to drive change...

I have **one question regarding the role of nutritionists**, following Urban Jonsson's remark that the "difference between the 'science of nutrition' and the 'science of nutrition problems in society'", and his suggestion that "Nutritionists should play a very limited role in the 'science of nutrition problems in society'".

I am not sure I agree, but maybe I have misunderstood? I don't know if I am a nutritionist (I came to nutrition through the social sciences), but I've grown to see the role of **nutritionists as bridge builders between health, agriculture, education, economy**, etc. and as **advocates, linking community level interventions and policy**. At community level, the examples we've seen seem to show it is difficult to achieve nutritional impacts without addressing the social, political and economic situation of households, in particular women (e.g. role of literacy, income generation, SHG's, etc. to support sustainable nutritional change).

Being all too aware of your efforts (Mr. Jonsson) to promote the recognition of the complex causes of malnutrition, and its political dimension (c.f. promotion of rights-based approaches), I would very much appreciate if you could clarify what you meant by that statement. What would your recommendations (and those of other forum members, of course) be to **nutritionists: where should we invest our "limited personal energies"** (in George's words)?

I look forward to receiving your suggestions...

Charlotte

Contribution by Urban Jonsson, from the international consultancy company The Owls

Dear Charlotte and others,

My statement that “**Nutritionists should play a very limited role in the ‘science of nutrition problems in society’**” needs to be explained – I agree! First, when I use the term ‘nutritionist’ I refer to a person who is trained at B.Sci, M.Sci, MD or Ph.D level in **human nutrition**. I do not include people, like you, with a much broader education including social sciences. It is my experience from many parts of the world that those people who are primarily or basically trained in the science of human nutrition are as ineffective as those surgeons I referred to being expected to have useful ideas about how to change the traffic policy in order to reduce accidents, with increased needs of surgery.

As a matter of fact, 20 years ago, David Alnwick and I concluded in an evaluation of malnutrition in Kenya, that one of the major *causes* of the limited nutritional improvements in the country was the very large number of ‘trained’ nutritionists who were working all over rural Kenya!

Another experience is from the relatively successful nutrition improvement programme (JNSP) in Iringa Region, Tanzania, in the 1980s. ‘Human nutrition’ was seldom mentioned or used. Anyone could easily understand the basics of human nutrition after a few weeks on the job learning. We even developed the extremely simplified FADU approach, with F = feeding frequency, A = amount of food (energy) per feed, D = energy density, and U = utilization (1.00 for healthy young children and less and less for children with diarrhoea etc). It only showed that **advanced knowledge in human nutrition simply was not important**. Much **more important were knowledge and experience in, for example, anthropological and cultural issues, political analysis, communication and mobilization skills**, knowledge of Swahili etc, etc.

In summary, *nutritionists* are important in many settings, but not very important in contributing to the solution of the problem of young child malnutrition in developing countries. In order to become useful they need additional training in any of the social sciences. With such broader training they will be able to understand the ‘science of nutrition problem in society’.

Urban Jonsson

Contribution by Vanya Orr, from the NGO the Earth Trust in India

I am running an NGO in South India & there seem to be some simple things that could be used

anywhere where people are trapped in situations they cannot escape. In (at least SOME of) these situations you have an **effective, economic & immediate way to change the situation. Grow gardens in the smallest patches.** I think this is happening wherever there are people, but it is exactly at this point that effective, un-bureaucratic action can happen. This is a brief article on our **school garden programme.** I hope it's not too long! Happy Pongal to all!

Earth Trust's Children Project

Today more than ever, we have things to address for our children and we have to give them tools for a sustainable future in a world that is going to change all our present concepts & present them with un-imaginable lifetime challenges.

We cannot escape this responsibility to give them these tools, not only training for sustainable care & produce from the land rooted in deep respect & love for it, but a sense of social responsibility & the strength & voice to turn around their communities. Each child needs to be given significance & a purpose for their life and the tools to achieve it.

We began this a couple of years ago in 3 rural schools and formed a strong base for the present expansion to 10 schools. It was initiated by Mr. A. Alexander. He trained his local team who are expanding & developing it now vigorously.

It has been a passionate & mind expanding programme for the children. They are mainly between nine & thirteen years old and attending poor Government Middle Schools in small villages.

- Our aim has been to provide them with these tools & skills for the future
- Empower their connection with nature
- Give them a role of significance in their communities
- Develop confidence, self reliance & social awareness
- An understanding of health & nutrition
- Address rural depopulation, malnutrition & ignorance
- Empower teachers & parents involved

The programme begins by group-building, outings to wilderness & an understanding of its importance. They look at what is happening in their environment & its consequences. Are there things they can do to stop the deterioration? They learn organic and Biodynamic gardening skills to grow vegetables for their school meals. They collect traditional seeds & grow old varieties of millets, amaranth & grains as well. Surpluses are sold for funds to help them further their studies. The poorest children are given chicks to rear & organic mushrooms to grow to get a small income for their own savings account.

It has helped children who have learning difficulties to become confident exponents of the theory behind organic systems and they have shown & explained their activities & the science behind it to visitors from all over India as well as abroad. They grow green manure & azolla & have compost competitions. They also have medicinal herb gardens & know how to use them.

Following the success of the school gardens, further training involving teachers & parents has resulted in the first 12 home gardens, run by the children with positive support by the parents.

We keep in touch with the senior members- called our Organic Ambassadors & hope to encourage villages to make available an acre for their children to have professional further training in Organic/BD farming as well as earn an income in the future.

Alexander- & Mohankumar, who now runs the show, have had a number of publications made as well as an inspirational & practical **Tamil textbook for Middle Schools on Organic/Biodynamic Gardening.** We are currently searching for funds to publish an English version which has been widely sought after.

Vanya Orr,
The Earth Trust

Contribution by Charles Teller, from the Population Reference Bureau, Washington, USA

Dear Urban, Charlotte and others,

It's so good to hear the clarion and nagging voice of Urban Jonnson commenting on our professional roles in addressing nutrition issues within the context of poverty. I have frequently shocked my nutrition colleagues by stating: "nutrition problems are too important to be left to nutritionists!". As an immodest social scientist-demographer, I realize that we have a similar situation in terms of population problems- too important to be left to demographers!" It is **the multidisciplinary, intersectoral nature of nutrition** (and population as well as environment problems) that **makes it such a challenge in address poverty and hunger reduction**.

My personal preference when working in the international nutrition field is **NOT to separate "food" from "nutrition"**. Even at a WHO research institute at INCAP in Central America, we used to commonly address what we more broadly called "la problematica alimentaria-nutricional".

What I have recently observed, during **the food price crisis of 2007-2008**, is what I labeled the **"failed leadership" of the International Health and Nutrition Field** (American Public Health Association, International Health blog, Oct. 28. 2008: www.apha.org). I noticed a relatively less active engagement in the international media debate by global health sector nutrition leaders, such as WHO, UNICEF and the UN's ACC/SCN, while the food and economic side leaders, such as WFP, IFPRI and World Bank, were highly proactive. We have confused the world with inconsistent definitions (famine, starvation, undernourishment, GAM and SAM, stunting and wasting, and underweight, etc.) of the nutrition impacts of the food crisis.

As the topic of this discussion goes, by "putting people first", by investing in people and monitoring their progress in more clearly defined terms of dietary and nutritional status, and by using standardized biometrics such as anthropometry, form an integral part of the multidisciplinary monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction MDG 1.

Charles Teller

Contribution by Wenche Barth Eide from the Department of Nutrition, University of Oslo, Norway

Dear Urban,

You have tried to explain to Charlotte Dufour and the rest of us following this debate, your statement why "nutritionists should play a very limited role in the 'science of nutrition problems in society'".

I regret to say that you did not succeed very well.

You could have done, had you formulated yourself differently and used others of your experiences, but it would probably have weakened your argument in trying to undermine even the **trained nutritionists' potential as 'bridge-builders'** between a range of sectors that in different ways can **contribute to nutrition improvements** (a concept also used by Charlotte). But you prefer to dwell in the past and not look at what is currently evolving in many places that needs encouragement and support.

Many would, at least in part, agree with you - and I have personally done so for the last forty years as you well know - that **much of "classical" nutrition training** as we still find it at many universities around the world today, often **leaves much to be desired**. This is in view of the **need**

for all 'nutritionists' who intend to work with nutrition as a societal problem and concern **to be exposed to a wider spectrum of issues and ways of thinking around "human nutrition"**, beyond but not thereby excluding the physiological and biomedical aspects of nutrition of human beings. It is precisely because of continuing shortcomings in the context of formal training, that many in both the academic and practicing nutrition community have had a tendency to encapsulate themselves within the narrower borders of some of the original **"nutritional sciences"**. But let us note that this generic term, which is even found in the name of the "International Union of Nutritional Sciences", could be interpreted as an opportunity to define such sciences **within a broad range of intellectual and practical frames**. This is clearly necessary if we wish nutrition training programmes to contribute to **building human resources to handle "the science of nutrition problems in society"**. Both forward-looking "trained nutritionists" and their colleagues working on nutrition problems from other educational and sectoral platforms must join in this endeavour

What is clear is that one does not stimulate progress in this field by just writing off anybody with an academic degree in human nutrition as useless in development.

Which leads me to the first example you use to justify this: other than as an interesting contribution to nutrition history, few will be persuaded by your own (with David Alnwick) twenty year old observation from Kenya that "one of the major causes of the limited nutritional improvements in the country was the very large number of 'trained' nutritionists who were working all over rural Kenya". I am not taking issue on whether or not this observation may have had some 'truth' in it. But you know as well as I do that Kenya now and twenty years ago is different when it comes to the presence of *national* researchers and professionals in nutrition, and that the same is true in other parts of Africa. There is now a growing constituency of young "trained nutritionists" in Africa and other places, who are concerned about malnutrition in their countries and who are eager to share experiences, build new values and advance insights that can serve in the interest of improved nutrition as addressed at various levels in their countries. I am sure many of them have had your brainchild the UNICEF conceptual framework for the causes of malnutrition and the Triple-A approach presented in their studies, and thus are fully aware that causalities need more than classical human nutrition science to be understood and addressed.

This is even expressed in a statement of the African Graduate Students Network (AGSN) a couple of years ago: **"Social capacity development is necessary and complimentary to human and physical capacity development to tackle most of the challenges in meeting MDG. Social capacity cannot however be achieved by the current approach in human resource development strategies such as just having advanced trainings in Nutrition."**

Clearly, as a new generation of nutritionists with this attitude develops, this should also **gradually change the academic scene and training programmes**. But **encouragement is needed** for this to happen within the constraints of academic protective barriers against new and innovative learning approaches.

Then in addition to your belated conclusion about Kenya, you state - obviously with some pride - that in the highly successful Joint Nutrition Support Programme in Iringa in Tanzania in the 1980s, the term "human nutrition" was seldom mentioned or used. With this and your simplified FADU approach (fair enough, although its purpose and addressees are not further explained!) you find you have sufficient basis for concluding that advanced knowledge in human nutrition was not important in this case. What comes across is that this would 'justify' forgetting about it also in other situations linked to 'development'. Such a simplification simply cannot be taken seriously, which is why I also do not wish to spend time on it. (This I say independently of my deepest respect for the Iringa story and evidence as such, which you also made me personally have glimpses of 'on location').

What you could have informed Charlotte and others about, if they are not aware, is, for example, the initiative you yourself were part of 12 years ago in the three days long satellite **seminar on Public Nutrition** in Montreal at the time of the **16th IUNS Congress in 1997**. About 100 participants who were part of or had felt the constraints of conventional nutrition training

programmes, became very inspired at what they saw as a forthcoming movement to get this concept further developed, including getting universities to accept it as a line of study. Public Nutrition was there defined by Jean-Pierre Habicht and others of the presenters, as **“incorporating ‘public health nutrition’ but going beyond it”**.

What we note is that PHN is progressing, while the more widely encompassing PN - with nutrition truly placed as “a key to integrated programming for poverty reduction” – seem to have lost out. With all respect for lots of current good initiatives within PHN, it continues to tie nutrition primarily to the health sector, where a broader concept and interpretation of PN might have had the chance to open more doors to other sectors. The good news in the PHN context include some interesting experiences brought for example by the Journal of Public Health Nutrition, and various movements within the EU, including efforts to try to certify the title of public health nutritionist. There are also examples from **some countries now setting new requirements to the training curricula for all health workers that principles of ethics and human rights be included**. This can be one entry point to the **necessary corollary in nutrition training programmes for understanding causes, responsibilities and accountabilities in addressing nutrition problems at the various societal levels**. And within the Working Group on ‘Capacity Building’ under the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) one gets annual reports on developments in the various regions. This includes the very innovative efforts to work across geographic borders in the countries of Central and Eastern European (CEE) to lay the basis for a common generic curriculum based in the problems of the region. It may be added that the work is coordinated in the main by “trained nutritionists”!

I am therefore optimistic given the many signs that promotion of community/societal aspects of nutrition with all that entails, are on the rise, also in several university programmes although slowly. I deliberately do not use examples with my relatively scarce and occasional observations on a global basis. Nor do I here report on efforts in the same directions over many years in my own country and that you are aware of. Rather I hope we could hear from people both in and out of universities and in all regions, about new examples of initiatives and curricula that can give reason for **expectations of a different profession of ‘trained nutritionists’ in the future**. Perhaps the FAO FSN Forum might open a separate debate on this, if somebody would volunteer to initiate it? Or why not you, Urban??

Then you can get all your frustrations about the trained nutritionist breed out in the first place, and then see from reactions whether perhaps you have been living too much in the past and are not sufficiently following what’s going on at present? This is not to say that we should not look to history to learn why changes must be promoted, and here is where your Kenya example from two decades back still has a place.

Wenche Barth Eide
Department of Nutrition
University of Oslo
Norway

Contribution by Charlotte Dufour

Dear Mr. Jonsson,

Thank you very much for clarifying your statement. Clearly, we agree!

Pluri-disciplinary and multi-sectoral work is essential to effectively fight malnutrition. (I was pleased to read these exact words in Charles Teller’s message, with whom I fully agree, just as I was posting this message on the forum!)

Unfortunately, I often find that **“non-nutritionists”** working in NGOs or other development agencies tend to be **intimidated** by nutrition. Many say “we can’t work on nutrition, we don’t have

a nutritionist, we don't know what to do, etc." although they may be already running agricultural projects or water and sanitation projects that are probably doing more for improving nutrition than a food supplement distribution.

I sometimes feel that (some) **nutritionists** have made the topic of nutrition **too technical and "scary"**, leading us to lose precious allies in the fight against hunger... I also fear the focus on individual nutrients has **marginalised « foods »** (and their ecological, social and cultural dimension) from nutrition itself. Thus the need to **«demystify» nutrition**, and also bring back a more **human** (rather than physiological / biochemical) focus in nutrition.

One effective way of doing so is to gather **professionals from various fields of expertise**, working in a particular region, and facilitating the preparation of **malnutrition problem and solution trees** for specific **livelihoods** groups. Through this exercise, participants demonstrate (to themselves) that they are already working for nutrition. It is also a good way of developing a joint understanding of "the nutrition problems in a society", and preparing a **common, multi-sectoral action plan**. FAO has used this exercise in numerous contexts, and it is very effective to mobilise energies to combat malnutrition. (FAO's nutrition department is currently preparing guidelines on how to run such workshops)

Mr. Jonsson: you mention the **FADU** approach. Is there a way to access the materials that were developed to implement this approach in the field? They would be very useful!

Many thanks,
Charlotte

Contribution by Judith Appleton, United Kingdom

"participants demonstrate (to themselves) that they are already working for nutrition"

Charlotte, I agree that this is the key to making progress **FOR** nutrition rather than **IN** nutrition. I have helped project staff, partners and others (including roadworkers in Ethiopia) do this many times, and am delighted that FAO is preparing workshop material that will sanction this approach! I hope the work also focuses on simple language.

Judith Appleton MBE
Food & Nutrition Specialist
UK

Contribution by Ignatius Onimawo, Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Nigeria

I want to disagree with the views expressed by Urban Jonsson **that Nutritionists have a limited role to play in solving nutrition problems** in the communities. That statement could be likened to saying that Medical doctors have limited role to play in solving medical problems. I find it funny why people think that they know all about nutrition simply because they applied a simple model that produced some positive results. **Nutrition is much more than embarking on a feeding program**. The fact that some Nutritionists in Tanzania did not produce the desired results is not enough for any body to make such blanket statements on the importance of nutritionists in solving malnutrition problems in the community.

I agree that there is need for multi sectoral approach to solving malnutrition and also the **need for continuous training of nutritionists** but to down play their role is a great disservice to nutritionists and to nutrition as a profession. In some other countries in Africa, the problem of malnutrition has persisted because of these type of views expressed by Jonsson. We need each other and must also respect each other. I make bold to say that Nutritionist have great role to play in combating malnutrition at whatever level.

Prof. Ignatius Onimawo
Professor of Nutrition
Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Nigeria

Contribution by Mahtab S. Bamji, Dangoria Charitable Trust, India

Dear all

Nutrition is certainly not a stand alone subject. It needs Awareness of, and Access to at Affordable price to balanced diet, (knowledge of proper feeding practices, particularly for young infants), safe environment and drinking water, and health care outreach. Awareness has to be at all levels starting with the political leaders, administrators, health and agriculture professionals, teachers, NGOs, social scientists and community.

Unfortunately in India, nutrition has become the baby of nutrition scientists and some departments like the department of Women and child development. There are vertical programmes with poor convergence. When conferences are held, like minded people (nutritionists) who do not need to be convinced talk with each other. **Others like administrators, doctors and agriculture scientists**, make guest appearance, present their papers and go away with little effort to learn from others. This "we know best" mindset needs to change. Medical professionals **have to be sensitive to nutrition** and think of promoting rather than curative health care. Agriculture professionals have to think beyond income and export and make cropping patterns nutritionally and environmentally sustainable.

Strategies for food complementation, and clean environment through local planning for nutrition security (which subsumes balanced diet, clean environment, etc.) with community participation, need to be developed rather than depending on imports. Agriculture for income can go alongside with agriculture for local nutrition security. The old fashioned Gandhian approach. It is a matter of great shame that after 60 years of independence India continues to have such high levels of malnutrition- macro and micro, not to speak of increasing incidence of obesity- the proverbial double burden. Strong leadership is needed. **Nutritionists need to demystify nutrition, help create awareness and do hand holding for government programmes** instead of just confining themselves to the departments of food and nutrition in home science colleges. They too should be aware of and sensitive to the multiple factors that influence nutrition.

Mahtab S. Bamji
Dangoria Charitable Trust
Hyderabad, India

Contribution by Yves Martin-Prevel, Nutrition Unit of the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (Research Institute for Development), France

Dear colleagues,

I feel a bit uncomfortable with this controversy about the role and the impact of so-called "nutritionists" in solving nutritional problems. **How to define a "nutritionist"?** I'm basically an epidemiologist but I've been working for more that 15 years in "public nutrition". Am I a "nutritionist"? Answering to the question seems useless.

I like the idea stated by Judith and Charlotte that **what is important is to work FOR nutrition**, whatever the degree level you have got and whatever is your background or the sector you work in.

Our main responsibilities are twofold:

- **raising global awareness about the extent of nutritional problems worldwide** (especially

maternal and child undernutrition) and of their cross-sectoral nature, thus enabling more numerous people to work FOR nutrition in all sectors.

- **supporting capacity building in public nutrition** to enhance the ability of all actors to address undernutrition.

No need to give them, or not, the name of "nutritionists".

Best wishes

Yves MP

Yves MARTIN-PREVEL, Epidemiologist, MD, MSc, PhD

Nutrition Unit (WHO Collaborating Center for Nutrition)

Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)

Contribution by Urban Jonsson, from the international consultancy company The Owls

Dear all,

I did not expect such a strong reaction on my comment regarding 'nutritionists' - some very positive, others very critical. I am, however, happy that Charlotte, who was the one who asked for clarification, agrees with my explanation. I believe some others, especially Wenche Barth Eide deserves a more detailed response, as summarised below:

1. When I use the term 'nutritionist' I refer to a 'nutritionist qua nutritionist', i.e a person whose academic training and/or experience is limited to the science and practice of *human nutrition*. I agree very much with Wenche's observation that "much of the classical nutrition training as we still find at many universities in the world today, often leaves much to be desired." and that there is a great need for a 'broader' training of 'nutritionists'. These are my arguments as well! The fact, however, is that ***very few universities in the world today provide such a training and that more than 90% of trained 'nutritionists' are extremely limited in the understanding of nutrition problems in developing societies and are therefore not very effective and efficient in contribution to the solutions.***
2. Of course there are a few universities, including Cornell University, Tufts University, Tulane University, Oslo University (where Wenche is working), Mahidol University etc, where students receive such a 'broader' training. This clearly explains why, for example UNICEF, the UN agency with the largest number of nutrition staff, almost all come from these universities! I am not "writing off anybody with an academic degree in human nutrition as useless in development". I am only saying that most people who have a limited background in human nutrition should not be expected to contribute more to the solution of nutrition problems in developing countries, than what we should expect a hospital based surgeon dealing with traffic accident victims, contribute to the analysis and planning of safer traffic systems in the town.
3. My example from Kenya was just one of many examples I have from all over the developing world. Regarding Kenya, things have not improved significantly! I know that because I am living in the country since many years. Maybe presentations at international conferences suggest improvements, but these improvements can not yet be seen on the ground. The same in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Ethiopia etc. Those few students who are trained at those universities I mentioned above do very seldom, if ever, come back to work in poor communities in rural Africa!
4. I was not joking about the JNSP Iringa Nutrition Project, when I claimed that the preparation, implementation and monitoring of this project had required very little of any advanced knowledge in the science of human nutrition. The UNICEF Nutrition Strategy from 1990, adopted by so many international actors, was prepared by a non-nutritionist.
5. I participated very actively in the efforts to promote a science of *Public Nutrition* for exactly the same reasons as mentioned by Wenche. But why did the idea not gain any significant ground

outside the already committed few? One major reason was that very few university departments were prepared to 'broaden' their nutrition training to include economics, political science, anthropology, social mobilization and communication.

Best regards from someone who is 'not living in the past', but who neither forgets what works and what does not work.

Urban Jonsson

Contribution by Tonderayi Matsungu, from the University of Zimbabwe

Colleagues!

I have read some of the contributions on this topic and feel that I need to make my own additions to this on-going discussion.

I strongly agree with the suggestion that we put Nutrition as a key to integrated programming for poverty reduction.

If we look at the conceptual framework (UNICEF-1990) then there is nothing on the underlying causes of malnutrition:

1. Access to food
2. CARE
3. Access to health and safe water and sanitation

These are the **Three components** that if they are met adequately **will ensure that individuals are nutritionally secure** (nutrition security). Then if you look at these closely you will discover that in trying to address these factors you will also address the problems of poverty.

Since nutrition strategies and interventions (multi-sectoral) are aimed at improving issues of nutrition security, in the long run they will alternately also address the problems of poverty especially in developing countries.

These shows us that **NOT one group of professionals can solve the complex problems of malnutrition**. Only when people work together as a team (not necessarily just "Nutritionists"), will they be successful in addressing issues of poverty and malnutrition in the world.

TONDE MATSUNGO
Nutritionist (Zimbabwe)

Mr Tonderayi Matsungu
Nutrition Researcher
Institute of Food, Nutrition and Family Sciences (IFNFS)
University of Zimbabwe

Contribution by Jane Sherman, Nutrition education consultant, Italy

I agree very much with Mr Matsungu's elements of food security - access to food, care and access to health, safe water and sanitation. I would like to add another essential - education. The need for education has been implicit in all the very interesting contributions to this forum thread, and it is time it became explicit.

By nutrition education I do not mean only the spread of information (although this is undoubtedly important), but also personal and social awareness of nutrition issues, value systems and (above all) behavioural change. The need for such education is clear at all levels, from policy-making

(e.g. promoting breastfeeding and school meals) down to individual and family behaviour, for example complementary feeding, giving value to fruits and vegetables, choosing healthy snacks and planting food gardens. Such a broad education framework must call on all the relevant professions, as has been pointed out several times in this debate, including the sectors of formal education and agriculture.

In most of the countries I have worked in, most of the people (including highly-educated professionals) simply do not make the connection between good diet and good health. This might be the first step in a popular nutrition education curriculum.

Can I appeal to our distinguished contributors to make education and awareness an explicit element in their discussions, their projects and their policies?

Jane Sherman
Nutrition education consultant

Contribution by Paula Dominguez Salas, United Kingdom

Dear all,

My background is quite broad as I wanted to be a doctor, but then became a vet working in animal production, later a food technologist, to finally reconvert in Public Health Nutritionist. Therefore, my soul is quite multidisciplinary.

I think the title of this discussion stands by itself ("putting people first"), is self-explanatory enough and is what many people forget too often. I work now in research (where scope seems to be more open about multidisciplinary!) but have also worked on the field as an (atypical) nutritionist and have found myself in this debate more often than I would have loved to. I find it difficult to believe how **much time and energy is lost while standing for each one's areas of expertise** legitimacy to deal with nutrition and underestimating the capacity of other fields to do a good job (I've heard it from many different sides!). All sectors think always that they are the best placed for it.

Nutrition is quite an essential and intimate area of an individual and therefore, everyone has a saying. In public health terms, the saying has to be highly professional, no doubt about that. But I believe **nutrition is one of the most multidisciplinary areas, and knowing what is good to eat is not enough**. You need to have access to the right food, and be capable of preparing and assimilating it properly. There **health, water, sanitation, agriculture, environment, education and many others do play a key role**.

Because nutrition is such a primary and basic need, the focus and the effort should always be placed on the beneficiary, instead of fighting for areas of power... It is a complex enough problem as to add more difficulty and **all approaches are needed and should be welcome**. Anybody who's able to contribute positively should be taken on board, and more coordination should take place to avoid isolated projects which are not sustainable or which are not integrated within the rest of initiatives, to seek for complementarity and strengthen each other. Definitely the important problem of malnutrition needs all the views from all different corners and specially working together. The earlier we can take that into practice, the more we'll be able to progress.

I would also like to take this opportunity to find out whether anybody in this forum is working, has experience or knows **anybody else working in nutrition in The Gambia**. If there is, I would really appreciate to get in touch with. **Please, contact me on:** paula181920@gmail.com.

Many thanks for everything.

Best regards,

Paula

Contribution by Ranjani Harish, from the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, India

Dear All,

I have been keenly following all the contributions on the role of Nutrition in poverty reduction. I feel the discussion has unnecessarily focussed more on the Role of Nutritionists rather than nutrition as a key to integrated programming for poverty reduction.

As a nutritionist working in the field of public health/community nutrition and nutrition epidemiology in India for a few years saying that nutrition AND nutritionists have an important role to play **in poverty reduction** would be stating the obvious. However, this role has to be along with other experts from the health and government sectors, thus **only a multisectorial approach would work**.

In my experience as a practising nutritionist and then health educator I have encountered many people who think that nutrition is so basic and simple that it does not require expert advice, hence I am not surprised at the critical reactions to the role of a nutritionist.

In India for poverty reduction to take place few basic things need to happen first. The poor require some basic education which in turn will help them get some employment which in turn will help them afford at least 2 square meals a day. **As nutritionists we need to be active in propagating good nutrition policies and our expertise SHOULD be sought in drafting these policies**, so that the free food programs run for the poor can be successful community interventions which helps improve the overall health of the nation.

Thanks & Regards,
Ranjani Harish - Research Officer
Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, Chennai, India.

Contribution by Purna Chandra Wasti, from the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control, National Nutrition Program, Nepal

Dear Charlotte,

Actually you have posted the most relevant topic for the developing and least developed world which are struggling and their most priority program is poverty reduction. Now, the nutrition, although it has been in the MDGs, is understood and dealt mostly through health domain. Now, (based on my experience of my own country) the poverty reduction strategy just deals with the income. Even the donor agencies do not bother exercising on advocacy to integrate nutrition in development (either poverty reduction or local development).

The advocacy first should target the UN and other donor agencies and then we (the concerned) should build a greater alliance by crossing the boundaries.

Contribution by Filippo Dibari, from Valid International, Kenya

Dear all,

I think the whole thing is becoming just one more occasion to divide the Nutrition community, which is a synonym of further weakness and bad impact for the beneficiaries. Probably it would be possible to make a "distinguo" between: (1) Public Nutrition (or Public Health Nutrition or Applied Nutrition), and (2) Clinical Nutrition. Both still the umbrella of "Nutrition". Probably this is

still not enough to be comprehensive of all the contributions arrived so far, but could allow the discussion to proceed in a constructive way for the future “officially” approved denominations of areas of interventions related to specific skills.

Best regards.

Filippo Dibari (for example) - Public Health Nutritionist, Valid International and Valid Nutrition

(NB: I am NOT any “Clinical Nutritionist” since my MSc had a broad-approach, plus the title was “Public Health Nutrition” (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) – I could never work in clinical nutrition in a hospital in EU, just it would be negative to have a “pure” clinical nutritionist struggling with qualitative research, or nutrition/coverage surveys in developing countries!)