

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION SECURITY – WHAT IS THE PROBLEM AND WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE
FROM 1ST APRIL TO 15TH MAY

My name is Urban Jonsson and I have worked most of my adult life (for 25 years) in Unicef. Since I retired in 2004 as regional director of Unicef, East and Southern Africa (ESARO), I have established an international consultancy group, The Owls, providing support to multilateral and bilateral agencies, governments and NGOs in the area of human rights approaches to development. During my eight years as Unicef country representative in Tanzania I was responsible for the Joint WHO/UNICEF Support Programme in Iringa Region (later re-named the Iringa Nutrition Programme), during which time a conceptual framework of the causes of child malnutrition was developed, which later became the Unicef Conceptual Framework on Nutrition (1990).

During my many years of work with nutrition problems in society I have heard many permutations of 'food' and 'nutrition' being used to describe certain tools, issues or situations, such as 'food and nutrition policies or strategies, food and nutrition security, food and nutrition surveillance, food and nutrition units, centres or sections, and of course, 'the right to food', 'the right to nutrition', and 'the right to food and nutrition'. It has never been clear if one is a part of the other. That is where the confusion starts and this confusion reflects a lack of consensus on the generic causes of malnutrition in society. The confusion is compounded by the lack of appreciation between 'the science of human nutrition' and 'the science of nutrition problems in society'.

Logically, a statement like 'A and B' assumes that A is not a part of B, or B a part of A. We normally do not say something like "oranges, apples, and fruits", or "birch, pine and trees". Many people, however, use the term 'food and nutrition', not reflecting that food could be a component of nutrition. If that were the case, correct statement would, of course, be 'nutrition, with a focus on food'; 'the role of food for good nutrition' etc. The same criticism would apply in the case where nutrition is seen as a component of food.

The confusion mentioned above explains to a large extent the **ambiguity in using the terms 'food security' and 'nutrition security'**. There is therefore an important need to 'unpack' these two concepts in such a way that they are reflecting evidence based scientific reality.

If 'food security' and 'nutrition security' are found to have different meanings, what exactly is the difference? And what are the relationships between the two? A good start is to remember the old philosophical position that "The solution lies in the problem". I therefore encourage all participants in this discussion to be very explicit about their understanding of the immediate, underlying and basic/structural/root causes of the problem of malnutrition in society.

I limit myself to the most important nutrition problem, namely young child malnutrition in developing countries.

Questions

1. **Are there generic causes of young child malnutrition? Is so, which are these and how are they related to each other and to the final nutritional outcome?**
 - Are there any *necessary* determinants of good young child nutrition? A 'necessary determinant' is a determinant that *must* be present in *all* situations where the nutritional status is adequate. If not present, malnutrition will always be present.

- Do you see any generic hierarchy of causes of young child malnutrition? A 'hierarchy of causes' means that some causes are more proximate to the nutritional outcome than others, and may themselves be caused by more distant causes in time and space.

2. **Is 'nutrition security' a part of 'food security', or is 'food security' a part of 'nutrition security'? Or are they the same? Or are they totally different?**

- Can you give an example of where 'food security' has been achieved, with continued young child malnutrition?
- Can you give an example of where 'nutrition security' has been achieved, with continued food insecurity?

Many thanks in advance and looking forward to your opinions,

Urban Jonsson

The Owls (former UNICEF)