

Fruits and Vegetables for health

Introductory features and goals

Jacky GANRY, *Deputy Director Research*
CIRAD www.cirad.fr
FAO visiting scientist

Fruits and vegetables are now recognized as important components of a healthy diet and their sufficient daily consumption could help prevent major chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity, as well as prevent and alleviate several micronutrient deficiencies.. Such are the conclusions of a recently published WHO/FAO report following an Expert Consultation in 2003 and the Kobe meeting in 2004.

But the consumption is far below the recommended 400g *pday/cap* in many developing countries.

WHO estimates that worldwide 2.7 millions lives could be saved through a better nutrition with Fruits and vegetables, stressing the attention on the fact that low fruit and vegetable consumption is among the top 10 selected risk factors for global mortality

The WHO & FAO fruit and vegetable promotion initiative has two main pillars:

- to promote production and consumption of fruits and vegetables so as to promote and improve health and to help prevent non communicable and other diseases or deficiencies;
- to encourage science in the areas of fruit and vegetable production, distribution, increased consumption, and benefits for health.

Activities:

1) The WHO/FAO workshop, Kobe/Japan, Sept 04

It was the first time a joint workshop between health, nutrition and horticulture specialists was organized.

It was attended by approximately 50 participants from more than 20 countries.

The main goal was to develop a framework to promote fruit and vegetables at national level

This framework gives the guiding principles for a fruit and vegetable programme based on availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability of the products with a concern of equity, in a holistic approach

It gives basic elements

- to analyse the consumer domains and the fruit and vegetable supply networks, their characteristics, entry points and barriers ,
- to identify the main stakeholders : agriculture or horticulture, nutrition, public health, education, finance, the private sector , farmers' unions or

other producer associations, consumer associations, women's groups, academic sector, community leaders

The main activities at national level are expected to be:

- the setting up of a national coordinating team with a clear definition of its constitution and roles
- the identification of national goals and objectives
 - goals should be realistic and timeframes need to be established according to circumstances at national level
 - they are focused on health, nutrition, production and/or distribution ,
 - they must address short-term, medium and long-term objectives
- the definition of activities at national level, based on existing national policies and action plans and on possible interventions at national level
- the identification of sources of data and data collection
- the monitoring and evaluation of the process, outcomes and impacts

2) The Lisbon Workshop on fruit and vegetables promotion in portuguese speaking countries, Sept 2005

The workshop's goals were

- to study and discuss the possibility of implementing the WHO/FAO Framework for Promoting Fruit and Vegetables at the national levels
- to revise past and ongoing activities to promote fruit and vegetable consumption in participating countries.

It was attended by participants from the health and agriculture sectors from all Portuguese speaking countries : Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Sao-Tome & Principe, Guinea Bissau, Timor.

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Two documents were produced in portuguese: a background document and the meeting report

3) Recent activities of the WHO & FAO fruit and vegetable promotion initiative

More recently was held a meeting in Montpellier, France, on March 2006 in order to prepare with potential contributors a workshop for French speaking countries to be held in Yaounde, Cameroon, on January 2007.

Another small meeting was organized for Mozambique last July 2006 in Maputo on occasion of a meeting on Urban and peri-urban horticulture in Eastern-southern Africa.

And now we are in Seoul where six countries from East Asia are going to share their experiences and perspective on Fruits, Vegetables and Health .

The goals are the same as in Lisbon

The aim is to look at the implementation of the "Framework for promoting fruit and vegetables at national level" in East Asian countries.

The objectives are:

- To review the existing fruits and vegetables policies, programmes and activities already ongoing in Asian countries
- To characterize fruits and vegetables production and consumption in Asian countries;
- To develop country specific programmes/action plans on implementing the "WHO/FAO Framework for promoting fruit and vegetables at national level"; and
- To foster and strengthen the collaborative work between health and agriculture sectors for fruit and vegetable promotion

The expected output is an increased capacity building and awareness for enhancing production and consumption of fruits and vegetables, addressing strategy and policy needs as well as technical know-how transfer:

- 1) Concrete action plans for each participating country to implement the "WHO/FAO Framework for promoting fruit and vegetables at national level".
- 2) Background document containing information on: the nutritional status of the population and relationship between diet and NCDs; nutrition policies; dietary patterns and fruit and vegetable production and consumption in Asian countries

Literature cited :

FAO. 2002, Food Balance sheet

FAO-WHO, 2004. Fruit and Vegetables for Health. Report of a Joint FAO/WHO Workshop, 1-3 September 2004, Kobe, Japan.