

## **DAY 3: IMPROVING POLICY CHOICES AND POLICY COHERENCE**

### **Session 5: Conclusions on coherent policies for nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food related systems and summary of policy elements to be considered by the ICN2**

***Chair: Per Pinstrup Anderson***

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I am just going to hit on a few highlights from the summary and add my own biases.

First, it is very clear that a lot of new and synthesized evidence has been brought to bear on the topic of this meeting. Partly from the presentations and the discussions here, but also from the report of FAO's International Symposium on Food and Nutrition Security, the reports of the regional and sub-regional meetings held in preparation for the ICN2, the core resource documents and expert papers that have been prepared, the series of online discussions, all of the materials that have been prepared for this meeting.

We have had a rich discussion, much of which has been at the conceptual level. What is needed now is to take all this conceptual knowledge and bring it down to the practical level, converting it into action that will benefit the malnourished, those on low-incomes, particularly those in developing countries. This is not a criticism because we do need to do our homework before we get into the field, but on the other hand let's not wait another ten years while we are doing more research. The problem is urgent and we need to act now, we need to take risks. We may get it wrong. Governments may get it wrong. Private sector and civil society including NGOs may get it wrong. But that's part of doing something, and then we can try again. I realize it is easy for me to say because I am not involved in actually taking those risks. But I think it is important that we move from talking to action. So while doing legitimate research, for there is a lot more knowledge that we can benefit from, we need to do the two things in parallel. As we move ahead, let us keep in mind that much of what we want to do has a gender specific angle to it. I have talked in the last two days about women's time demands, time famine if you like. But there are many other gender-specific issues that we need to keep in mind as we begin to turn this conceptual knowledge into action at the field level.

Let us also keep in mind that what we need to do is multisectoral and multidisciplinary. Many of us are not very good at making multidisciplinary things happen. We need to help people who are going to implement these initiatives work together across sectors and across disciplines. That is true at local level and it is true at the international level as well.

The food security and sustainability workshop that was held prior to this Meeting generated much evidence that is useful to the ICN2, summaries of which are available for those who would like to see them. I would like to mention that if we fail to take into account the sustainability issues as we proceed to make the food and agricultural systems more nutrition-sensitive or nutrition-enhancing, we are missing the point. We have to look at sustainability; we have to recognize that human health and ecological health go together. If we fail on the sustainability side we may make be successful in the short term but not in the long run.

Let me now talk about some of the highlights from this Meeting. We started the meeting talking about trends in the nutrition situation and were told that dietary energy deficiencies have reduced and that we have made progress. We were told that we are producing more calories per person than we were in 1992. But we still have a big problem. There are still a lot of people - we don't know how many, it may

be 800 million, it may be some other number – but a lot of people are still short on dietary energy. We were also told that micronutrient deficiencies in terms of prevalence have stayed roughly constant since 1992, which implies that the number of people who are deficient in one or more micronutrients has apparently gone up. So has the number of overweight and obese people and people who suffer from chronic diseases resulting from obesity. That trend is upwards and it is moving very, very fast.

We talked about the diet transition, we talked about the increase in diet diversity, and we talked about the potential contradiction between the improvement in the consumption of fruits and vegetables and animal source foods on the one hand, and very little improvement in the micronutrient situation on the other. This may be due to one of two things – and this is my own personal speculation: either the data we have are not very good, we think maybe a couple of billion people are short on some micronutrient; do we really know? I don't believe we do. So it could be that the data are simply not strong enough to pick up whatever trends may be there. The other possible explanation for having improved diet diversity but apparently not improved micronutrient situations may be that the diet transition is affecting primarily those people who are not deficient in the first place. I don't really believe that hypothesis but it is certainly worth taking another look at. Who in fact benefited from this diet transition?

We were also told that the consumption of processed foods has gone up a lot. It is a rapidly increasing trend in the consumption of processed food. We were told that the intake of sugar, sweeteners, trans fat and salt is going up as well and even though I am not a nutritionist I know that may not be a good thing. We were told that the supply chains are getting longer. I guess that's no big surprise, we knew that. But it seems to be the case in almost every country that we can think of. Of course it depends on the context. If you are a semi-subsistence farmer you may still be part of a very short supply chain. But then again, you may be buying food that comes from a fairly long supply chain. So we cannot really make a sharp distinction between low-income rural people and low-income urban people in the sense of one having a longer supply chain or value chain than the other.

I think there was general agreement in the meeting that changes in the value chain offer tremendous opportunities for improving nutrition. What we did not seem to get a handle on was whose responsibility is it to turn such opportunities into reality? Yes I think we agreed that we want collaboration among the public sector, the private sector and civil society. I didn't hear any disagreement on that. There was some disagreement as to whether we could trust the private sector. I am pretty sure we can. The private sector is not in the business to do us harm, they are in the business to achieve their goals and again, coming back to what I was saying yesterday, we need to look for win-wins so that in fact the goals that are currently driving the system can be made compatible with the goals of improved nutrition.

What we did not come to grips with was who does what. What public goods require government intervention in order to improve the value chain? What private goods require intervention by the private sector or by civil society? And what kind of regulations and incentives are needed in order to make those changes happen?

What about consumer behavior. Does the consumer really put as much value on improved nutrition as we may do in this meeting? Or is there a need for a better understanding of consumer behavior? I believe there is. And again as I said earlier, I don't think we should put everything on hold while we figure out how to get more information about consumer behavior, these things have to go simultaneously. But I think there is a need to look at consumer behavior in a broader context. Not just from the perspective of nutrition but from the perspective of what else does the consuming household

have to deal with. And I am of course talking about those consuming households that have malnourished members. They have to deal with a number of other things. We need to look at the broader context if we are to understand how to improve the nutrition enhancement of value chains.

We have been told we need more work on metrics, on indicators. We were told that we should probably not limit the indicator to stunting as we try to understand and evaluate how agricultural and food systems can improve nutrition. We need to look at intermediate pathway variables. It could be diet diversity; it could be a number of other things. The point was made that we need more research on this and certainly we do, but again I think we probably have enough knowledge to move ahead, and yes, possibly make some mistakes along the way. But the more we talk about these things the more convinced I become that diet diversity is extremely important if we are to improve nutrition and not just increase dietary intake. This is not a new idea that I have suddenly come up with, this has been discussed a lot, but I think we need to put much more emphasis on it. So while reducing stunting may be the ultimate goal, and I think it probably should be the ultimate goal, it may not be the indicator that is feasible to use as we begin to improve the food and agricultural system. We need to find proxies and again we need to understand which proxies are most likely to indicate impact on the ultimate variable, the ultimate goal, namely improving people's welfare. In this case I am talking about stunting of children, but of course there are many adults who suffer from malnutrition as well, including obesity and micronutrient deficiency. In fact, apparently we are seeing an increasing number of individuals who suffer from both. They are obese and micronutrient deficient.

That introduces a very difficult issue for policy makers. How do you deal with that? And add to that in many countries you have a great deal of undernutrition as well as overweight and obesity. It is doubtful there is one policy that can deal with both of these issues and we need a package of policies that can deal with both over and the undernutrition.

I was very interested in the country reports in the afternoon of the first day. What we were told is there is a tremendous amount going on in the field. David Nabarro who was moderating the session concluded with something like "this is pure joy" that there was a lot going on. There are many new and innovative initiatives that were reported on that afternoon. The SUN effort seems to be working well in a number of countries and multisectoral plans are being implemented at local levels. However, many of the plans have not been implemented and we still have a lot of work to do in turning those plans into action in many countries. And when I say we, I am of course talking about government in the particular countries. We also heard from CAADP and from UNICEF about the work they are doing.

Let me return now to the conceptual discussion and go to the second day. I think what we generally agreed was there are quite strong opportunities for enhancing the nutrition effects of food and agricultural systems, whether we are talking about small projects, such as kitchen garden projects or whether we are talking about large policies. And the question was asked, if everyone stands to benefit from doing this, why hasn't it happened already? And of course the answer is not everyone stands to benefit from these kinds of changes. We are living in a world where policies and programmes are guided by a combination of stakeholder groups, some of which have more power than others. And those that are most powerful presumably are more likely to stick with what they can benefit from. These are what economists call political economy issues; we need to understand the policy process a lot better. In addition to this, other constraints are institutional. The institutions are not there to facilitate the kind of multisectoral action that would change food and agricultural systems for the benefit of nutrition. In addition, there are other goals that may override nutritional goals which is why I want to come back to my point regarding multiple wins: We need to integrate nutrition goals into other goals that currently

drive the system so that the two are compatible. If we can't do that, I don't think nutrition goals are going to win out. The lobby groups for improved nutrition are not as strong as some of the other lobby groups.

And then there is the behavioral question: Do consumer groups really value improved nutrition over other goals they have, given time and money constraints? What may explain why this hasn't happened is that there is a risk associated with doing new things. If I am a farmer and I am producing rice or maize or something else that my grandfather and father also produced, do I really want to take the risk of moving towards the production of broccoli or kale or something else? This is risky business and there may be a role for government here in helping to manage risks associated with the dietary transition.

We talked about pathways, availability, access, food security, we talked about behavior. The point came up several times that countries need to invest much more in infrastructure. One of the points made was that we have surplus production in one location of a country and people are starving in another place while the surplus is rotting, because the infrastructure is not there, the roads are not there, the institutions are not there, the farmer associations are not there. So there is again the need for the public and the private sectors to improve the rural infrastructure.

I think there was general agreement that we need diversity not only in consumption as already mentioned but in production. This sends a strong message to the agricultural research community to perhaps reallocate resources away from the three basic grains towards a more diverse portfolio of food crops. Now this doesn't mean we should stop doing research on rice, wheat and maize. Absolutely not. It's a question of relative allocation. This also goes for government subsidy programmes and similar things. Maybe there is a need to worry about producing more nutrients rather than more quantity of food. Now in some cases there's no conflict between the two but in other cases there actually is. My suggestion – perhaps it is just my bias but I think it did come up in a number of discussions – is that we need to focus much more on nutrient production rather than just looking at the quantity per unit of resource.

There was a short discussion on local self reliance and I am raising that because I think it's important that we understand that a lot of the action that we are asking for will happen at the community and household level. There is a need to better understand how governments, private sector and civil society can promote this type of action at local level. We agreed in the session on value chains that there are tremendous opportunities for nutrition gains through changes in the value chain. The unresolved question again is: What is the role of the public sector versus the private sector versus civil society? We need to again understand consumer behavior in order to achieve those gains.

Much of this is context specific and we certainly can't sit here and develop a recipe for the whole world. But we can help with frameworks so that local solutions can be developed. We talked about fortification, whether it's biofortification or industrial fortification. There was a point raised that it's fine to talk about food security but we need to talk about food safety as well. What's the point of having access to food if it makes you sick? One of the points that came up was the tradeoff between the degree of food safety and the cost of the food which is translated into food security. Do we really expect all poor people in the world to have the same food safety standards as the EU currently has? If we do, then the cost of foods that are available in local markets in developing countries will go up quite a bit. That doesn't mean that poor people should eat dirty food. It is a matter of relative standards. Higher income people require standards that may be so high they add very little to food safety.

The question came up about the role of the private sector and I would like to add to that the role of civil society, because I think that we all do have to work together. We can criticize each other and we should, but in the final analysis the public sector, the private sector and civil society all have to work together because all three are key players in this business and we can't get this problem solved if one of the three major players is left out. Remember that farmers are in the private sector, and remember also that consumers are extremely important, whether their interests are being reflected in civil society or in some other way.

We talked about social protection and we were told that nutrition might not be a major goal in most social protection programmes, but it could be, and I believe the recommendation was made by the presenter that probably more explicit consideration should be given to nutrition in future social protection programmes.

We talked about compatibility and coherence between efforts to change food and agricultural systems and efforts to change consumer behavior. However I think I already covered that. But the issue here is who is really driving the food system? Is it the consumer? Is it the farmer? Is it the food processing industry? Is it the government? I suspect the answer is context specific but all of the above. But the question is who do we need to interact with in order to make the changes that would make these systems more nutrition-enhancing?

We talked about targeting and vulnerable populations, the point was made that some of these people were made vulnerable by existing institutions and power structures. However I think there was general agreement that what we are talking about was to focus changes in the food and agricultural system towards improvements in the lives of vulnerable people with specific emphasis on nutrition.

In conclusion, I would like to make five recommendations that while developed prior to this meeting were re-affirmed at this meeting:

- 1) Continue building a common vision for nutrition at all levels. I have no doubt that – if not explicitly, at least implicitly - that is what we have been saying over the last two days.
- 2) Build institutional capacity and promote effective coordination across sectors. Again I think this is exactly what we have been talking about.
- 3) Better data for better policy making. We need better matrices.
- 4) We need to focus on improving value chains for the benefit of nutrition.
- 5) Align nutrition objectives with agriculture and food system goals. The point I have been making is that we need to integrate those goals so that what is currently driving the system is changed to accommodate nutrition goals.

Let me end, Mr. Chairman, by saying - and I think I already mentioned this in some way – we did not develop a recipe for how to enhance nutrition through changes in the food and agricultural system. We were not supposed to, and we didn't and I don't think we can at the international level, these things are context specific. I think what we did do is identify a number of steps to be taken at the national and local level. We suggested that experimentation should take place at the national and local level, and that different approaches will develop. I would argue that we need to put a lot of emphasis on policy. Yes,

small scale projects are important at the local level, but big changes in policy can ruin everything at the local level, so we need to understand how these big policies, policies with a widespread impact can be changed. Let me finish by suggesting that what comes out of this meeting will hopefully be reviewed by member countries and hopefully will get a response by member countries. I think it is very important that we get buy-in and if not, that we are told where we went wrong. Let me thank you for your attention and I will end here. Thank you.