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Better Nutrition Better Lives

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The UAE has succeeded over the past two decades in achieving many of its national development goals. The human development index has improved to a large extent placing the country in 40th place worldwide. Furthermore, the UAE has already achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and gone a long way in attaining greater environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation. Success was achieved at national and international level. The United Arab Emirates has been a key donor to international development and humanitarian efforts, with UAE being the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in proportion to its Gross National Income (GNI) worldwide in 2013, as announced by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris. The country's development assistance in 2013 amounted to US\$ 5.2 billion, which is equal to 1.25% of gross national income, the highest ratio of any country in 2013. In addition, at national level, when we consider Food Security we may observe that the United Arab Emirates is among the best performing countries. It met the MDG-1 goal of halving the proportion of hungry people and managed to maintain the undernourishment levels below 5 percent since 1990-1992.

Devoting 25 % of the total federal government spending to education, the UAE within a short period of time has also ensured high literacy rates, which exceed 90% among UAE citizens. Furthermore, almost all health care indicators improved remarkably. Health services have attained very high standards. For example the UAE is ranked number one worldwide in having medical facilities that hold international accreditation, 60% in the private sector and 40% in government sector.

The UAE has developed a comprehensive national nutrition strategy for the years 2010-2015, including effective strategies, interventions and recommendations. Remarkable progress is occurring in the control of under

nutrition among infants and young children as well as IDD and vitamin (A), and vitamin (D), but anemia has been less responsive to prevention and control efforts. Obesity among all age groups remains a challenge. Over 50% of adult Emiratis from both genders are obese (BMI>30 kg/m²). Childhood stunting decreased from 23.5% in 1995 to 15.5% in 2008. There has been a similar improvement with regard to underweight: a decrease from 17.8% in 1995 to 8.2% in 2008. It is also noteworthy that the UAE will be certified free of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDDs) by 2015.

However, and in spite of all these achievements there are still many challenges that require serious efforts. Foremost among which is non-communicable diseases burden including CVD, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. These diseases still lead major causes of morbidity and mortality in the country.

The current situation in UAE has directed attention to focusing in certain areas in prospective health strategies. These include the establishment of a competent national nutrition surveillance system guided by the results of a national nutrition survey. Emphases will also be placed on capacity building for relevant manpower and increasing efforts for public awareness in nutrition and healthy lifestyles especially regarding control of commercial advertisement of fast food, soft and energy drinks.

Furthermore, as the UAE managed to translate its economic growth into improvement of the quality of life for its citizens, including a broad food security, a key challenge remains to manage energy, water and food resources to ensure both high living standards and sustainable growth. UAE appreciates the importance of food and water as elements of national security and is currently dedicating the necessary resources to maintain food and water security in a sustainable way.

It is anticipated that the UAE, by adopting such plans, would be able to control nutrition related health challenges in future.