

DISCUSSION: NUTRITION EDUCATION - ESSENTIAL BUT OFTEN NEGLECTED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. GENERAL INFORMATION	2
II. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC	2
III. LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS;	3
Contribution by the Topic Facilitator, Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO	3
Contribution by Charlotte Dufour, FAO Afghanistan	3
Contribution by Heila, Private Clinic Nutritionist	4
Contribution by Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO	5
Contribution by Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO	5
Message by Sonia Olivares, Associate Professor, INTA, University of Chile	5
Message by Janice Albert, Nutrition Officer, FAO Rome	6
Message by Judy McLean, Adjunct Professor of Nutrition, University of British Columbia, Canada.....	6
Message by the Facilitator	7
Message by Dr Prabir Dutta, Researcher Dg Foundation.....	8
Message by Jane Sherman, Education Consultant, Italy.....	8
Message by Huyen, the FSN Forum Moderator.....	9
Message by Jasmina	9
Message by Oscar Posas	9
Message by Salome Yesudas, Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater systems project, India.....	10
Message by Lalita Bhattacharjee.....	10
Message by Teresa Calderon, independent Nutrition Consultant, Bolivia.....	11
Comments by Huyen, FSN Forum Moderator	11
Message by Prema Ramachandran, Nutrition Foundation of India, New Delhi.....	12
Message from Marina Adrianopoli, National Research Institute for Food and Nutrition, Italy	12

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Duration:	19.11 - 7.12.07
Facilitator:	Ms Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO
Number of participants:	11
Number of Contributions:	14

II. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC

Greetings,

My name is Jane Sherman and I act as an education consultant in diverse fields, which include nutrition education. This last has brought me into contact with FAO, where I have been involved in the production of the Nutrition Education Curriculum Planning Guide and in other activities of the FAO programme which seeks to integrate nutrition education, home gardening and school gardens in the context of food security.

Nutrition awareness is surely **vital to informing decision-making** at every level from individual food choices through family food planning, crop choices, the advice of extension workers, and school curricula, up to Ministry of Agriculture initiatives and government food security policy; and is one of the most sustainable drivers of food security. My personal contacts with these sectors suggest that there is a widespread absence of such awareness, even among the well-educated, in both the developed and the developing world. Nutrition education theory, research, projects, policies and strategies have developed over several decades in the United States and Europe and have attracted recent attention because of the emerging issue of obesity. But judging by the resources displayed on this site, and by an analysis of the projects described on the Partnership for Child Development Schools and Health data base (www.schoolsandhealth.org), **nutrition education in the developing world gets little coverage in publications, research and projects**, which tend to concentrate on food aid or food supplementation.

My questions are:

- Does this impression correspond to others' experience and insights?
- Can Forum members **substantiate** this impression by **REFERENCE to gaps in policies, programmes, projects or research**, or suggest how it could be substantiated?
- If this impression is justified, can you suggest **REASONS for this NEGLECT?**
- Can you suggest **STRATEGIES** for raising the profile of nutrition education and awareness in all concerned sectors?

Having no institutional status, I cannot promise to take direct action, but I will gladly pass on advice and insights.

Many thanks for your feedbacks,

Jane Sherman, education consultant, Italy

III. LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS;

Contribution by the Topic Facilitator, Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO

Dear FSN Forum members,

My name is Ellen Muehlhoff, I am nutritionist and have worked in FAO's Food and Nutrition Division (since 2006: Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division) for nearly 18 years. My work focuses on Food and Nutrition Education and Consumer Awareness. I will serve as the facilitator of this discussion topic. Welcome to this Forum and I look forward to our interactions during the next few weeks!

As most of you will be aware, FAO's constitutional mandate includes ensuring adequate nutrition, empowering producers and consumers, disseminating nutrition information, improving education related to nutrition and spreading public knowledge of nutritional science and practice. Well-nourished, healthy individuals are better able to contribute to social and economic development. **Progress in reducing hunger and malnutrition**, achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals and the realization of the Right to Adequate Food, can be greatly accelerated by **effective nutrition information and education**.

Knowledge of food and appropriate dietary practices is a **prerequisite for improving access to and consumption of nutritionally adequate diets**, which is fundamental to **reducing all forms of malnutrition**. Nutrition education and consumer awareness are **essential** to ensure that a better and more **diversified food supply translates into adequate diets** for all groups.

Nutrition information and education are also indispensable for **integrating producer and consumer concerns along the food chain**. To address problems of undernutrition and alleviate the negative impact of changing dietary and lifestyle patterns on individual health and development, **appropriate policies and information and education strategies** are needed to enable all consumers to **access and select a range of nutritious and safe foods**, and to practice lifelong healthy eating habits.

Your views on this important topic and area of work, your insights, experiences and lessons learnt in advancing this area of work, as well as existing constraints and knowledge gaps would be appreciated.

Best to all,

Ellen

Contribution by Charlotte Dufour, FAO Afghanistan

Dear Jane,

Thank you very much for these observations and questions, which I agree with fully. I am working with FAO in Afghanistan on integrating nutrition education -especially promoting local foods- in as many development projects as possible: agriculture (poultry, dairy, and horticulture), literacy circles, schools (with pilot school gardens), health facilities, etc. (with support from Ellen Muehlhoff)

Our field observations confirm 3 things:

1. Awareness about good nutrition is very limited. In many communities, the very concept of nutrition does not exist, and the link between weakness/poor health and food intake is not considered.
2. Mothers, children, teachers, and community leaders are extremely motivated to learn about nutrition. Just yesterday, my colleague Charity Dirorimwe and I were visiting a school where we

implemented a garden and provided nutrition training to teachers. All teachers passed on the messages to the students, who remembered key messages well. The principal told us that his daughter (a student), is now telling her mother what to cook and how to diversify the family's menu!

3. It can work! We have anecdotal evidence that shows that cooking demonstrations with improved local recipes can really help children gain weight. (for the moment, we were only operating on a pilot level)

At policy level, I also see the lack of interest you refer to.

- in the agricultural sector, I find professionals take for granted that "people know what to eat", they just don't have the foods. (but our experience shows this is incorrect)
- in the health sector: the tendency to focus on supplementation and fortification strategies leads to overlook what can be done with local foods. As one health worker put it "we're not working on food, we're working on nutrition".

This is probably linked to trends in the nutrition sector at the international level: I agree with you that one of the problems may be that there is not enough 'hard evidence'/research that nutrition education & promotion of local foods can work. One reason may be that, unlike certain special food supplements or ready-to-use-foods, there are few stakeholders with a vested interest (and money) in proving that local foods are good for health and that promoting them is important.

When research is done, I sense that the indicators of success (usually nutrient status, weight gain etc.) rarely take into consideration other factors such as cultural acceptance, empowerment of mothers, promotion of local knowledge and heritage, sustainability, etc. (or if they do, they are considered secondary). This means that local foods often fail to compete with specially designed nutritional supplements (dare I say "magic bullets"?)..

But I'm not sure complicated research is required. As one participant said in the last SCN meeting: "We pretty much know by now that if we feed malnourished children better, they gain weight".

What we do need to learn more about is successful strategies for disseminating practical nutrition skills at community level and promoting behaviour change. I am sure there are many success stories out there on nutrition education, which would be worth digging out and sharing. Forums such as the SCN can be very useful for this: in the last SCN meeting, we presented our work in Trials of Improved Practices and development of improved local recipes, and many participants were very keen to launch similar activities in their own country of work.

(Note: next week, we are holding a workshop to review our nutrition education work and prepare our strategies for next year; We'll be happy to share the report with forum members; it should provide examples of how we can raise interest in nutrition education in various sectors).

I would be very interested to learn about other success stories in other countries.

All the best,

Charlotte

Contribution by Heila, Private Clinic Nutritionist

Dear all,

I'm very interested in the nutrition education program but I couldn't understand how can I take this education, because I'm a nutritionist in my own clinic & I want to be updating always with the latest nutrition information, please if there are texts or lectures how can I get it.

Warm Regards,

Heila

Contribution by Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO

Dear Heila,

FAO has produced a book entitled "Family Nutrition Guide", which provides practical up-to-date information on how to improve the feeding and nutrition of families in developing countries.

The Guide is primarily written for health workers, nutritionists, agricultural extensionists or other development workers who design nutrition education materials and activities and work with people at community level. It should also be useful to mothers or other caregivers who want to know more about family feeding, as well as anyone training health staff and other community-level workers.

The technical nutrition facts of each topic are complemented by communication suggestions for people working directly with families and community groups. These suggestions describe the steps needed to prepare an education session, encourage participation and make the session more fun, as well as effective.

You can access the Guide, which is available in English, French and Spanish (and soon in Arabic and Dari as well) under the following url:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5740e/y5740e00.htm>

For a hard copy of the Guide, please write to: nutrition@fao.org

Best regards,
Ellen

Contribution by Ellen Muehlhoff, Senior Officer, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, FAO

Dear Charlotte,

Many thanks for your insightful comments and observations from Afghanistan.

I agree with you, nutrition is a concept that is frequently not well understood. A survey on knowledge attitudes and practices on food and nutrition that we conducted in a rural area in Zambia some years back, showed that **many mothers simply did not understand the importance of eating a good diet to prevent malnutrition.**

I wonder whether we as nutritionists are partially to blame for this. In communicating with people, **nutritionists frequently use language that is very technical** and the advice provided may not **always be perceived as practical or too difficult to implement.**

I would be interested to find out how Forum participants see this?

Warm regards,

Ellen

Message by Sonia Olivares, Associate Professor, INTA, University of Chile

Greetings,

I am very interested in the forum activity. My experience in nutrition education in a research Institute like INTA has been very difficult, working in a place where nutrition education is not considered scientific research. It's very difficult to get some financial support, because the

Chilean polices are mainly oriented to basic research. Then, in nutrition education, sometimes we need to work with our own resources.

Best regards,

Sonia Olivares

Message by Janice Albert, Nutrition Officer, FAO Rome

My name is Janice Albert, I am a Nutrition Officer working at FAO in Rome.

One type of nutrition education is the provision of information through the public sector. It is true that this is an under-appreciated area of work among nutrition professionals and policy makers. Even in wealthy countries, government agencies do not have sufficient funds to reach the public with information about nutrition. This can be demonstrated by looking at the budgets of agencies that are mandated to carry out nutrition work. I suspect that there is a perception that public sector education is futile because government agencies cannot possibly compete with the power of advertising by private firms; therefore, nutritionists do not attempt to get their messages out through the mass media. This is a pity because consumer studies show that non-profit and government information sources are trusted by consumers more than advertising.

If policy makers doubt that citizens care about nutrition, they should consider that food marketers are very interested in taking advantage of consumer interest in health and nutrition by making claims about the health benefits of products. When there is a vested interest in providing information, nutrition information is made available. As Charlotte suggests, the lack of interest in nutrition education about diets may be because it does not serve any particular vested interest or promise any quick, easy solutions.

Jane asked for examples of gaps in polices. A survey by FAO on food-based dietary guidelines found that many developing countries have developed dietary guidelines but very few had the funds to disseminate the guidelines. In addition to lack of funds, most nutritionists do not have experience in developing and implementing communication materials and strategies. They do not know how to test information materials to be sure that the public understands and can follow the nutrition advice they are trying to convey.

Jane asked about strategies and Ellen asked about the way that nutritionists communicate with the public. In a FAO project in Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines, FAO, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization, trained national nutrition coordinators in ways to test their public information materials and strategies to communicate with the public. The nutritionists carried out focus groups and household behavioral trials to test whether average people understood their messages and whether they were able to follow the recommendations. The nutritionists were surprised to learn that people were not always able to understand the messages and that there were many real constraints to following the advice. The nutritionists adjusted their nutrition recommendations to make them more realistic and easy to understand. Since the project ended very recently, it is too early to know whether using information that is closely adapted to local needs will have an impact on health over time.

Message by Judy McLean, Adjunct Professor of Nutrition, University of British Columbia, Canada

Greetings everyone!

I am very excited to have found this forum and particularly this topic. I am an adjunct professor of nutrition at a Canadian university although I have also taught nutrition at a university in Rwanda and am working on trying to develop nutrition education programs for use in communities and schools in several regions in South East Asia and Africa. I am the director of nutrition for a number of projects and have been **struggling to find nutrition education resources**. When teaching in Africa I found great interest but as others have said, a **widespread lack of**

knowledge, even among health workers. Nutrition education was almost nonexistent at every level. Part of my job was to educate those who were going to be out in the field, as the nutrition course was in the Faculty of Rural Development. I see this as a very important part of the picture as there is a lack of educators at this level in many countries. Those of us who are interested in teaching at universities find it is very difficult to get any sort of funding and it is costly to travel so far, taking time away from work here. Yet, the value seems obvious.

This site has been very helpful already as I have found links to a number of useful resources that I was unaware of. In order to develop and deliver appropriate messages there is a **need for better understanding of regional differences not only in food intake across different age groups and gender, but beliefs about food and health, cultural acceptability and desirability of different foods and methods of preparation, local economics and agriculture**, to name just a few things. I have had **difficulties finding this type of information** and am presently conducting a number of surveys in Central and East Africa designed to fill some of these gaps. I will gladly share the results of these surveys when we have assessed the data.

The impression I have from what I have read here is that many of you have the type of information I and others are seeking and that **this is a place where we will be able to share a variety of resources including research results, education tools, possible funding opportunities or just provide answers to the questions some of us are struggling with.** It appears that there is a wealth of knowledge on this forum and I look forward to reading your input each day.

I will be attending the SCN meeting in Hanoi and hope to meet some of you there. I recently returned from there where I spend time in meetings with the National Institute of Nutrition who are also seeking access to education tools and help with their programs!

My email address is judy.mclean@ubc.ca if anyone wishes to contact me about Hanoi or anything else related to the topic of nutrition education.

Warmest regards and thanks to you all,

Judy McLean

Message by the Facilitator

Dear all,

It is so encouraging to read your contributions and to know that there are many likeminded and committed nutrition professionals working in different parts of the world. As Judy suggests, we can at least partially overcome problems of lack of resources through NETWORKING, SHARING experiences, research results as well as educational tools.

In this respect, I would like to draw your attention to the Nov/Dec 2007 issue of the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour (JNEB) "Global Theme Issue on Nutrition Education, Poverty and Human Development", which highlights efforts to address problems of hunger and malnutrition as well to develop an understanding of the shift in diets towards westernized foods that is occurring in low income-countries.

Engesveen and Shrimpton have reviewed the many publications on nutrition education topics published by the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition. Sherman and Muehlhoff describe the development of curricula for school-based nutrition and health education and report preliminary results which suggest that both knowledge and behavioral changes have been achieved among Zambian children. Albert and colleagues report about the development of food-based dietary guidelines in the Caribbean. You Articles can be downloaded free from the following website: <http://www.jneb.org/>

Judy, your suggestion to link up at the SCN in Hanoi is great if people manage to find the funds to

attend. In any case, let's help each other to be BETTER INFORMED, to raise AWARENESS on important nutrition issues and build INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY wherever we work, in UN agencies, NGOs, Governments, universities, research institutions to accelerate action on nutrition.

Best regards,

Ellen

Message by Dr Prabir Dutta, Researcher Dg Foundation

Dear Judy McLean,

I am a retired Deputy Director(Microbiology)trained in environmental economics sponsored by World Bank. Today no subject is complete without sharing ideas and connecting with people who have expertise in different subjects. Nutrition, health and agriculture (both plant and animal) are closely connect with each other. In order to achieve progress in reducing malnutrition, improving literacy rates and economic standards are also important. A combinatin of actions is urgently required to achieve positive nutrition outcomes at the local and at the global level.

Best regards.

Dr.Prabir Dutta, Reseacher Dg Foundation.

Message by Jane Sherman, Education Consultant, Italy

I've been away for a few days, but I wanted to pick up on some of the points made by our forum members.

We seem to agree that there is a **widespread lack of nutrition awareness not only in families and communities but also among professionals** in agriculture and health sectors, with a tendency to focus on supplementation and fortification rather than on using local foods to supply nutritional needs. Judy confirms "a widespread lack of knowledge, even among health workers" in Africa, while Dr Dutta stresses the need for an interdisciplinary approach. At the same time it appears that there is great motivation to learn, at least at community level.

Perhaps there is a case for **demonstrating both the neglect and the motivation more publicly with a well-researched article?**

We would probably agree on the importance of people being informed and able to act for themselves in the matter of their own health. This seems to me to be a mainly educational concern, or at least a situation where education must go hand in hand with other interventions. In this educational perspective these seem to be a few of the issues which are emerging:

- Education is generally **neglected as an element in the project formulation stage**, which should explore the educational needs of all stakeholders and also of project staff (who could usefully be encouraged to educate each other). Charlotte's and Charity's work in integrating NE into a range of projects in Afghanistan seems a good model.
- The word "**training**", which implies short-term one-off inputs (and generally, I may say, a lack of evaluation), should be substituted by "**education**", envisaged as something which occurs over a relatively long period and which is passed on to others.
- Janice and Ellen illuminate the fact that **nutritionists themselves do not have enough experience in education or communication. The model of education needed for effective nutrition education (pragmatic, social learning, action/attitude-based rather than information-based) is generally lacking.** Also lacking is a **process model of materials development** (well illustrated in Janice's example) involving an ongoing two-way flow of communication between learners and teachers, adaptation to local needs, experience and concerns, proper trialling of materials, continuing feedback and revision.
- In schools, which have great potential for generating sustainable improvements in practice and

for disseminating messages to families, the battle is on for **space in the curriculum**, which has already been occupied by HIV/AIDS, life skills and entrepreneurship.

We also seem to agree on the need to **publicise the issues and to share experiences**. Can this forum facilitate the kind of sharing that Judy has in mind?

Jane

Message by Huyen, the FSN Forum Moderator

Dear Jane, Judy and others,

To Jane's question "***We also seem to agree on the need to publicise the issues and to share experiences. Can this forum facilitate the kind of sharing that Judy has in mind?***", the answer is **YES**. The FSN Forum is a neutral platform for knowledge and resource sharing. We have the web-based forum and mailing list for online discussions and the dynamic website where any member can upload resources (documents, links, news) relevant to FSN.

Some members have been using the resource sharing tool (log in and contribute resources from http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/contribute_resources.html?no_cache=1) and there have been **230 relevant papers** in the repository. We strongly encourage members to contribute online systematically so that we can build an important pool of resources in FSN. Any other relevant information, such as funding opportunities, relevant web links, job opportunities, etc. can also be shared using this tool and will be stored respectively in the News/Events Section (accessible from the home page), Related web links section http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_relweb.html (now with more than **30 relevant web links**, including a page for **grants and funding opportunities** (http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_relweb/grants_and_funding_opportunities.html) and the Job Centre http://km.fao.org/fsn/fsn_jso.html?no_cache=1 . **The search engine will be available in January 2008.**

We are still building the platform and constantly adjusting the Forum's activities according to the members' needs. We believe that it would be helpful to have more sharing tools such as wikis, a blog, face-to-face meetings or building **thematic sub-groups**. However as Andrew MacMillan rightly argued, our "**claims**" should be **substantialized** and be **evidence-based** in order to **convince donors**. Therefore the **first evaluation** is being carried out to **collect members' feedbacks and needs in order to decide future activities, make the Forum truly demand-driven and convince decision-makers with facts and figures**. I would be grateful if **this week you could spend 2 minutes to complete this short questionnaire**, therefore contributing to the building of the Forum. Just click at this link http://km.fao.org/fsn/fsn_survey.html and log in with your email and chosen password to see the questionnaire. I am looking especially for suggestions on **how to communicate outputs of discussions on the FSN Forum to policymakers/decision makers**.

The **statistics of the survey** so far are available at:

http://km.fao.org/fsn/fsn_survey/fsn_statistics.html Again, you have to log in to see the members' assessment)

Warm regards,

Huyen

Message by Jasmina

Dear colleges, could you share papers about competitiveness in agriculture? Jasmina. My mail is: jasmina.havranek@azvo.hr

Message by Oscar Posas

Thank you for the informative materials. I wonder how the World Food Day was celebrated in

Asia? Thank and Merry Christmas and a More Prosperous 2008.

Message by Salome Yesudas, Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater systems project, India

Dear Members and team behind operation of FNS Forum, Nutrition education is very important aspect of improving nutritional status of an individual, family and community levels.

We should sincerely **translate all available information from scientific language to people's common language**. The nutrient requirements should be converted to dietary / food requirements. Comparative statements will also help us to cater to wider population.

I am attaching the link for your information this file may throw some light and also these efforts may need further improvement as well.

Thanks to all.

http://www.apfamgs.org/upload/pdf/RE6006_40125.pdf

Sincerely,

Salome Yesudas, Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater systems project
<http://www.apfamgs.org>

Message by Lalita Bhattacharjee

Greetings everybody, I am late in my response, but better late than never! I would like to share some of our experiences from Bangladesh.

In particular, I want to follow up/reiterate Ellen Muehlhoff (FAO HQ, Rome) and Jane Sherman's comments/insights on Nutrition Education. **A food based strategy combined with extensive nutrition education** offers a **long term sustainable approach** in controlling and eliminating micronutrient malnutrition. Food and dietary diversification are central to food based strategies.

An FAO Project on Integrated Horticulture and Nutrition Development (2000-2006) funded by the UNDP and Government of Bangladesh with FAO as the technical agency has reached out to over 23,000 farmer households and communities in 15 districts in Bangladesh. A significant project outcome was the **community based nutrition programme** (an integral part of the overall horticulture production programme) which led to major improvements in the nutritional knowledge, skills and technologies of rural communities. Vegetable and fruit consumption in project areas has increased while programmes of food preparation, intake methods and young child feeding have promoted changes in nutrition behavior among children. A dietary impact assessment found substantially higher energy, protein and micronutrient intake among households covered by the project as compared to non- project households. School nutrition programme evaluations have shown improvement in children's nutrition knowledge and increase in consumption of colored vegetables and fruits (among adolescent girls -Grade IX).

The project is directly enabling the beneficiaries to improve their lives with locally available resources and support from local level government functionaries. The farmers (75% of whom were women) trained by the project can now prepare a variety of vegetable/horticulture based preparations, have more food available for their families and use improved food preservation techniques and consumption practices. Food preparation demonstrations and school nutrition programme have become routine part of the Department of Agriculture Extension, Ministry of Agriculture field activities.

The project experience also shows **that linking horticulture development and national nutrition programmes with a focus on increasing variety may be the best strategy for sustainable reduction of micronutrient malnutrition**. Horticulture cropping potential can be

combined with rearing of small animals, poultry and fish breeding for dietary improvement of marginal rural households. **Agriculture and food policies, traditionally oriented towards primary agriculture production should also promote home based food and livestock production with the explicit aim of increasing household consumption of micronutrient rich foods.**

Please check out details on <http://www.fao.org/world/regional/rap/> or write to: biplab.nandi@fao.org

Lalita

Message by Teresa Calderon, independent Nutrition Consultant, Bolivia

My name is Teresa Calderon; I was working in the Food and Nutrition Division in FAO until 2002. I came back to my country, Bolivia, where I am working as independent nutrition consultant. My preferred fields are nutrition and development, nutrition education and food and nutrition security. I have certainly met some of the participants in the Forum since I worked in many regions and countries in these regions. I have already seen some familiar names and I am happy to share some comments with all of you.

I do agree nutrition education needs more research and I am aware of the difficulties to gather funds, plus other related matters raised by Sonia Olivares. Some of you mentioned the need for developing/raising the research and nutrition education capacities of local nutritionists in some countries. This could be done through courses on line provided i) interested donors are identified and ii) institutions with the adequate expertise are identified and willing to collaborate. Among others I would like to mention the Society on Nutrition Education (SNE) with great expertise in nutrition education and research.

The relation between agriculture and nutrition and the importance for agricultural projects to consider nutrition matters was highlighted in the last decades. Publications by FAO and other organisations and institutions were developed; Ellen and other FAO staff could provide some references to those persons interested on it. I would like to refer to a school-based nutrition project implemented in Panamá, where nutrition and agricultural production were the main project components. Nutrition improvement was obtained due to an increase in food availability, adequate use of the food produced (organic vegetables and fruits and small animal rising) and community development related issues. It was implemented by a multidisciplinary team from the ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and others. A reference to this project is done in the FAO publication SOFI 2003.

The development of this forum is certainly great and is certainly benefiting all of us but certainly a lot more to people from countries with little access to the sort of information we sharing/exchanging now. In that regard I would like to suggest the organisers to find ways to maintain the contact when the forum is finished.

Best regards,

Teresa Calderon

Comments by Huyen, FSN Forum Moderator

Teresa, thanks a lot. Just a little clarification, the FSN Forum is supposed to be a **permanent forum/platform**. There is however a timeline for each discussion topic to get the focus, to better facilitate and summarize contributions. Additional contributions sent after one discussion has been closed are always welcome. We will surely find new ways to help members maintain and develop contacts. On this, kindly give your suggestions while answering the current survey.

By the way, if there are requests from members, we can always go back to a past topic (probably with some new aspects for discussion). The Forum is **your** platform so don't hesitate to take

advantage of it!

Best,

Huyen

Message by Prema Ramachandran, Nutrition Foundation of India, New Delhi

Dear Colleagues,

Nutrition education is **one of the most important interventions** to modify the dietary intake of the people and **improve dietary diversity**; this is especially true in transition economies where majority of people have moved above the poverty line recently and are yet to improve dietary diversity. Nutrition education to improve dietary diversity and encourage increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. This is critical not only for reduction in the very high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies in these communities but also guard against the emerging problem of over nutrition and non communicable diseases. While nutrition education for all segments of population is needed **we believe that it is essential to focus on primary school children.**

As a part of the action research studies of the Food and Nutrition Community of the Solution Exchange, Nutrition Foundation of India undertook an action research on introduction of vegetables in MDM (mid day meal programme) as a major tool for improving vegetable intake in primary school children and use MDM as the focal point around which nutrition education among primary school children. A brief report of the findings of the study has been added to the Forum's database and can be found at

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=318&nocache=1

All education efforts for behavioural modification are difficult, time consuming and the desired behavioural change may take years to develop. But once the change has occurred, that will be life long and so efforts beginning in childhood have to be given due attention and persisted with in spite of apparently slow progress.

Prema Ramachandran,

Director, Nutrition Foundation of India, New Delhi

Message from Marina Adrianopoli, National Research Institute for Food and Nutrition, Italy

Thanks Chiara, I believe we all recognize the value of the on-line group FSNL, which serves as a forum for dialogue among members, therefore I'd like to express my interest and share with you all, knowledge and experiences in the field of nutrition, and explore innovative approaches to promote and improve food security and nutrition at the local level.

I am currently work in Tajikistan on the **improvement of complementary feeding through food based solutions**; we are providing feeding recommendations for mothers, promoting the consumption of local foods and encourage the timely introduction of adequate and micronutrients-rich food with the aim of tackling micronutrients deficiencies among infants. This project has a **strong nutrition education component**: mothers are expressing positive feedback; they are interested in being aware of the right combination of foods, the preparation of recipes for children and the basic principles of infant nutrition. In this perspective, **cooking demonstrations are representing a very successful practice**, which is clearly increasing and intensifying the community participation.

Moreover, **the support of well trained health workers and social promoters is essential for the dialogue with mothers and caretakers; health and social promoters can easily bring "the message"**, reinforce the proper utilization of food on regular basis and increase the community engagement.

While traveling and working across the country I have seen the involvement of many organizations in the sector of food security and nutrition, and I've even felt that a **national coordination is needed to harmonize the ongoing activities** throughout the country. Tajikistan is currently working at the national level to strengthen food security policies and strategies and improve the capacity to collect and use data on food security and vulnerability. Of course, the availability of good quality data on food security (and crop assessments and early warning system) would be an incredibly precious support for all activities at the local level.

Marina