

**SUMMARY OF THE FSN FORUM DISCUSSION TOPIC:  
NUTRITION EDUCATION – ESSENTIAL BUT NEGLECTED  
FROM 20<sup>TH</sup> NOV TO 7<sup>TH</sup> DEC. 07**

**I. IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION EDUCATION**

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Nutrition education and consumer awareness are **vital**:

- 1 to inform decision-making at every level from individual food choices through family food planning, crop choices, the advice of extension workers, and school curricula and food securities policies and programmes (J. Sherman)
- 2 to ensure that a better and more diversified food supply translates into adequate diets for all groups (E. Muehlhoff)
- 3 for integrating producer and consumer concerns along the food chain (E. Muehlhoff)

Overall, nutrition education is one of the most sustainable drivers of food security and dietary diversification. 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 (E. Muehlhoff, J. Sherman, P. Ramachandran and others)

**Favourable factors:**

Mothers, children, teachers, and community leaders are extremely motivated to learn about nutrition (C.Dufour)

There is evidence to show that Nutrition Education works (see the document: "From Agriculture to Nutrition – Pathways, Synergies, and Outcomes, World Bank 2007" in References).

**II. GAPS IN PRACTICE, POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND RESEARCH ON NUTRITION EDUCATION**

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**Gaps**

- A widespread lack of awareness about nutrition as well as nutrition education, both among the public and professionals in the agriculture and health sectors. (C. Dufour, E. Muehlhoff, J. Sherman, J. McLean, T. Calderon).  
Examples: Many mothers in developing countries do not understand the importance of eating a good diet to prevent malnutrition (E. Muehlhoff), local foods often fail to compete with specially designed nutritional supplements (C.Dufour) etc.
- Difficulties in finding information/resources on nutrition education (J.Sherman, J.McLean, H. Tabakhna)
- Education is generally neglected as an element in the project formulation stage (J.Sherman)
- General lack of a model of education needed for effective nutrition education (pragmatic, social learning, action/attitude-based rather than information-based) (J.Sherman)
- General lack of a process model of materials development 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 (J.Sherman, J.Albert)
- Absence of nutrition education in school and academic curricula (J.Sherman, J. McLean).

**Reasons for these gaps include:**

**Lack of interest, and funding:**

1. Nutrition education is an under-appreciated area of work among nutrition professionals and policy makers. Nutrition education is not considered scientific research (J.Albert, S. Olivares)
2. In the agricultural sector, professionals take for granted that "people know what to eat", they

- just don't have the foods (C. Dufour)
3. In the health sector: the tendency to focus on supplementation and fortification strategies leads to overlook what can be done with local foods (C. Dufour)
  4. It does not serve any particular vested interest (and money) or promise any quick, easy solutions (C. Dufour, J.Albert)
  5. Lack of **public sector** funding, from governments and donors ((E. Muehlhoff, S. Olivares, J.Albert, J.McLean)

**Insufficient and inappropriate communication:**

6. Nutritionists frequently use language that is very technical and the advice provided may not be always be perceived as practical or too difficult to implement (E. Muehlhoff)
  7. Nutritionists do not attempt to get their messages out through the mass media, although consumer studies show that non-profit and government information sources are trusted by consumers more than advertising (J.Albert)
  8. Most nutritionists lack experience in developing and implementing communication materials and in testing if the public can understand and follow the advice given (J. Albert)
  9. Many developing countries create dietary guidelines but very few have the funds to disseminate the information about nutrition to the public (J. Albert)
- Not enough “hard evidence”/research on the advantages of nutrition education and the promotion of local foods (J.Sherman, C. Dufour)
  - Links between weakness/poor health and food intake often overlooked (C. Dufour, E. Muehlhoff, J. Sherman)

**III. GOOD PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR RAISING THE PROFILE OF NUTRITION EDUCATION**

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- Integrating NE into a range of projects in Afghanistan. A project in Tajikistan on the improvement of complementary feeding through food based solutions, with a strong nutrition education component ((C. Dufour, M. Adrianopoli)
- Cooking demonstrations are representing a very successful practice (C. Dufour, M. Adrianopoli)
- National nutrition coordinators are trained to test their public information materials and communication strategies. (FAO project in Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization) (J.Albert)
- 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 (M. Adrianopoli)
- FAO Project on Integrated Horticulture and Nutrition Development ( 2000-2006) in Bangladesh, reaching out to over 23,000 farmer households in 15 districts resulted in major improvements in nutritional knowledge, vegetable and fruit consumption of rural communities (L. Bhattacharjee)
- Cultural acceptance of the importance of nutrition, empowerment of mothers, promotion of local knowledge and heritage, etc. (C. Dufour, J.McLean)
- Adjusting nutrition recommendations to make them more realistic and easy to understand by the public Translate all available information from scientific language to people’s common language, i.e. nutrient requirements should be converted to dietary / food requirements (J. Albert, E. Muehlhoff, S. Yesudas)
- A food-based strategy combined with extensive nutrition education offers a long-term sustainable approach in controlling and eliminating micronutrient malnutrition. Linking horticulture development and national nutrition programmes with a focus on increasing variety may be the best strategy for sustainable reduction of micronutrient malnutrition. (L. Bhattacharjee).

- 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 (L. Bhattacharjee).
- Importance for agricultural projects to consider nutrition matters. Good practice: a school-based nutrition project implemented in Panamá, where nutrition and agricultural production were the main project components. It was implemented by a multidisciplinary team from the ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and others. (T. Calderon)
- Strengthen the nutrition knowledge of local experts through on-line courses by identifying interested donors and institutions with the adequate expertise, such as the Society on Nutrition Education (SNE) (T. Calderon).
- Need to better understanding of regional differences, not only in food intake across different age groups and gender, but beliefs about food and health, cultural acceptability of different foods and methods of preparation, local economics and agriculture (J. McLean)
- More knowledge/ best practices sharing and to overcome problems of lack of resources/info/awareness. Networks such as the Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) or the FSN Forum can be very useful for this (C. Dufour, J. MacLane, J. Sherman, E. Muehlhoff, T. Calderon, H. Tran)
- Need for an interdisciplinary approach (P. Dutta) and a national coordination for the involvement of different organizations (M. Adrianopoli)
- It is essential to focus nutrition education on primary school children. 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 (P. Ramachandran).

#### IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

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1. Use the FSN forum as a basis for future networking, sharing of resources; research results; educational tools; etc
2. Prepare a well researched article on the "state of the art in nutrition education"
3. Using the standing committee on nutrition (SCN) as a forum for raising the importance of nutrition education among professionals and networking

#### V. REFERENCES

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- **From Agriculture to Nutrition** – Pathways, Synergies, and Outcomes, World Bank 2007: <http://www.donorplatform.org/content/view/129/117/> (E. Muehlhoff)
- **Nutrition Information and Formal Schooling as Inputs to Child Nutrition** by Webb, Patrick (World Food Program) and Block, Steven (Tufts University): [http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fsn/docs/Schooling\\_Child%20Nutrition.pdf](http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/Schooling_Child%20Nutrition.pdf)
- **Schools and Health** database (The Partnership for Child Development): [www.schoolsandhealth.org](http://www.schoolsandhealth.org) (J. Sherman)
- **"Family Nutrition Guide"**, practical up-to-date information on how to improve the feeding and nutrition of families in developing countries, available in English, French and Spanish: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5740e/y5740e00.htm> (E. Muehlhoff)
- Nov/Dec 2007 issue of the **Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour** (JNEB) "Global Theme Issue on Nutrition Education, Poverty and Human Development". Engesveen and Shrimpton articles on Nutrition Education topics published by the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition. Sherman and Muehlhoff articles on development of curricula for school-based nutrition and health education and report primary results with Zambian children: <http://www.jneb.org/> (E. Muehlhoff)

- **“Nourishing Traditions – Local Greens”**, Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater Systems Project, India: [http://www.apfamgs.org/upload/pdf/RE6006\\_40125.pdf](http://www.apfamgs.org/upload/pdf/RE6006_40125.pdf)
- Information for the **promotion of home-based food and livestock production** with the explicit aim of increasing household consumption of micronutrient-rich foods: <http://www.fao.org/world/regional/rap/>
- **SOFI 2003**, Information on a school-based nutrition project implemented in Panama, where nutrition improvement was obtained due to an increase in food availability, adequate use of the food produced and community development-related issues: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/j0083e/j0083e00.htm>
- **Society on Nutrition Education (SNE)**: <http://www.sne.org/>