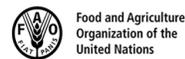


ICN2 Second International Conference on Nutrition
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**PREPARATORY TECHNICAL MEETING
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Session 1

Current global nutrition challenges, evolution of food systems, policies and dietary goals against which to measure progress

**The Importance of Trend and Policy Influences on Global Diets
since 1992**

Summary

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I. Key Issues

1. The 1992 International Conference on Nutrition organized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) declared "*Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable*" and pledged "*to act in solidarity to ensure that freedom from hunger becomes a reality*". Since then, much progress has been made towards these goals. The paper examines the forces that brought about such changes over this period, and in particular the role of public policies (unilateral and multilateral), that influence food prices and/or food availability notably agricultural, trade and investment and consumer-oriented policies to see if any lessons can be learned for making further improvements in nutrition in future. The framework for the discussion on dietary change was that food consumption is influenced by incomes, prices, availability and preferences.
2. On aggregate, diets and nutritional outcomes have improved in most parts of the world over the last 20 years, but there is substantial heterogeneity, with little change in Africa (particularly Sub-Saharan Africa) and India. Calorie availability has increased throughout the world. Even in the least developed countries per capita calorie availability has grown by 10%. Based on FAOSTAT food supply data, between 1992 and 2007 calorie availability increased between 150 and 250 Kcal per person per day in developing countries on average, although availability remains stagnant in many countries, particularly in Africa. Developing countries experienced a general increase in calories from

all food groups, but especially from sugar and meat, while calorie availability in the EU and North America has been relatively stable.

3. Stable or falling food prices for most of the period since 1992, combined with rising incomes, stimulated increases in calorie intake (the expansion stage of the nutrition transition) and promoted the move from an overdependence on carbohydrate-rich starchy staples of cereals, roots and tubers towards increased consumption of a more diverse diet (the substitution stage of the nutrition transition) including vegetable oils, livestock products and processed foods. The nutrition transition has therefore for the most part been positive resulting in falling levels in hunger and in the proportion of undernourished, though some 842 million people or 11 per cent of the population globally are undernourished. Presumably it has also led to a fall in the proportion of those suffering from micronutrient deficiencies. The Chicago Council acknowledged the shift from early death due to communicable disease to death later in life due to non-communicable disease as a technological, social and economic success. However, it also has had some negative impact with obesity and associated non-communicable diseases having emerged as a major public health concern, primarily in developed countries and the growing wealthier middle classes in middle and low income countries.

4. The evolution of income distributions suggests a reduction in inequalities in most world areas, with exceptions among Eastern Europe transition economies, and importantly, African and Latin American countries where inequality is strongly associated with high chronic hunger rates. Income elasticities for food are much higher in low and middle-income countries (more or less twice as large as in high income countries), and are higher for livestock products compared to cereals, fruit and vegetables at all income levels.

5. Globally the nutrition transition is characterized by increases in intakes of livestock products, processed foods, vegetables, vegetable oil and fast foods. The main forces behind these changes have been economic growth, aided by international trade and investment liberalization, urbanization, globalization and technological change in agriculture, food processing, distribution and international trade. International trade and investment liberalization have been key policy drivers of change both through their effects on economic growth and on globalization. Many of these factors are inter-related but evidence points at globalization being the dominant force for dietary change, prompted by international investment liberalization and trade reform. Where dietary change has been observed, evidence indicates that globalization, modernization of food systems and income growth have been key, and these changes are closely linked (through cause and effect) to urbanization, increase in more sedentary lifestyles and the increased workforce participation of women. While some suggest a causal relationship between maternal employment and child obesity, effects of maternal working hours on children's diets is limited. However evidence for developing countries suggest that increased female participation in the labour force has positive effects on children's nutritional status.

6. Beyond its major influence on prices and incomes, globalization has a critical impact on preferences and lifestyles, with a growing range of available food to satisfy new demands. Income growth has also exerted an important influence on dietary change since 1992, both by reducing hunger and by improving diet quality. Although direct evidence remains scarce, the available information suggests that countries experiencing increases in inequality are most exposed to overnutrition problems.

7. Agricultural growth has been more effective than non-agricultural growth in alleviating stunting in this period, and it has also exerted a strong effect on calorie intakes. However, the impact of trade and agricultural policy reform on food prices have had a relatively minor impact on diets (other than through influences on globalization and income growth), although agricultural investments have an important influence on productivity. It also has a strong impact on calorie availability and malnutrition reduction, especially in high malnourished populations heavily dependent upon agriculture. Consequently low and declining public investment in agriculture over this period implies a missed opportunity to improve nutrition.

8. Rapid expansion in agricultural and food trade, has facilitated efficiency gains in sourcing, production and processing agricultural and food products from regions with a comparative advantage allowing such specialization to increase food availability, keep down prices and stimulate job creation and economic growth these past twenty years, and this has been a major driver for dietary change.

9. Consumer policy vehicles like food aid, food assistance programmes, local procurement programmes and public distribution systems do not seem to have had major diet quality effects, but they have been effective in their basic goal of assuring minimum calorie requirements are met, particularly in emergencies.

II. Policy Recommendations

10. The low and declining public investment in agriculture observed over the last two decades needs to be reversed if agriculture is to better contribute to improved nutrition.

11. Future research will need to be oriented to address the issue of stagnating diets and nutritional outcomes in the poorest regions, especially Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Given the extent of heterogeneity in nutritional outcomes and the co-existence of under and overnutrition problems in many parts of the world, future nutrition policy interventions should be targeted at different population segments with different malnutrition issues rather than on overall population trends.

12. Openness to international trade and investment has been a major force for food chain modernization and delivery of nutrition benefits. Further efforts should be made to liberalise markets, at the same time safeguarding against any country-specific harmful effects of globalization.