

What are Latin American countries doing to tackle the double burden of malnutrition effectively?

Discussion No. 116 from 11 June to 2 July 2015

The Red ICEAN and the FSN forum are partnering for the second time to host the forum discussion entitled “**What are Latin American countries doing to tackle the double burden of malnutrition effectively?**” to be held from June 11th to July 2nd, 2015. The main purpose of this joint effort is taking stock of and capitalizing on what countries in Latin America are doing, to effectively address the double burden of malnutrition. Other regions are also welcome to share their experiences and contributions in this matter.

Background and justification:

Latin America has experienced a significant, though uneven, economic growth in the past few decades. Overall, it has made great strides in reducing food insecurity and the number of hungry people (see for example the latest issue of the Panorama report¹). However, the rising levels of overweight and obesity and its associated chronic diseases constitute a major public health concern across the region, while some countries are still dealing with an unacceptably high, persistent prevalence of undernutrition.

The double burden of malnutrition, defined by the coexistence of undernutrition and overweight and obesity (both of which frequently occur together with micronutrient deficiencies), has been dictated by the pace of the nutrition transition² and other socioeconomic factors in many countries of the region. Most recently, the figures of the double burden (as determined in women and children) of 7 countries were documented in a supplement series of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*³, showing important differences at national and household level. For example, Chile has one of the lowest levels of stunting and highest of obesity in the region, while Guatemala

¹Panorama de la Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en América Latina y el Caribe 2014

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4018s.pdf>

² Referring to the increased access to an abundance of high-calorie foods, loss of traditional diets and the reduction of physical activity among individuals, as income and urbanization rises, leading to increases in obesity and obesity-related chronic diseases.

³ Supplement—The Double Burden of Undernutrition and Obesity in Latin America: Where Do We Stand and Where Do We Go?. (2014). The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

and Ecuador showed the highest prevalence of the double burden of malnutrition at household level.

Consequently, policy advisors and programmers are faced with an evolving, multifaceted problem, which varies considerably at regional, national and household level. There is therefore a pressing need for preventive strategies that can tackle all forms of malnutrition concurrently in a coordinated way, and adapt them to context and target group as needed.

These, among other concerns, led the international community to call on Heads of State and Governments to agree on a new global framework to adequately address major nutrition challenges over the coming decades at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) held in Rome between 19-21 November 2014.

Tackling growth failure, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight simultaneously requires coherent efforts and policies that focus on promoting healthy diets and adequate growth and development among children. At the same time there is a pressing need to shape the food systems and the food environment to favour healthier food choices, and make them affordable and available to the public.

Most countries in Latin America have ongoing programmes and legal instruments that aim to tackle and prevent undernutrition, and many have begun to implement measures to curb the rising levels of obesity, however these are rarely linked.

Nevertheless, progress has been made, by means of programmatic adjustments towards more integrative approaches, and in the implementation of public policies that promote healthy diets, while lessons have also been learned from past programmes. At present, there are many experiences and insights to share, which can contribute to the development of successful integrative policies and strategies.

The Red ICEAN in collaboration with the FSN Forum is therefore launching this online consultation which is proposed in the light of “*Recommendation 6 of the ICN2 Framework for Action*”, which intends inter-country collaboration and information exchange on nutrition, food, technology, research, policies and programs.

Discussion questions:

We would like to hear your comments on the following guiding questions:

1. Which nutrition problem (s) does your country prioritise? (undernutrition, overweight/obesity, micronutrient deficiencies, all forms of malnutrition)
2. How is this/are these problems tackled? Please let us know if they are tackled independently or as part of a comprehensive strategy, through policies and programmes that focus on prevention and promotion of adequate, healthy diets. Have these efforts been evaluated?
3. What in your view could be done more effectively to prevent all forms of malnutrition? Please elaborate on the mistakes to be avoided and what needs to be done to ensure that the policies and programmes in place, if any, will succeed in the long term?
4. What in your view is the role of nutrition education in addressing the double burden of malnutrition?

3 | **What are Latin American countries doing to tackle the double burden of malnutrition effectively?**

We hope this discussion will result in a rich sharing of experiences!

We also look forward to your active participation and support to circulate this opportunity to the appropriate stakeholders in your country as well as your invaluable contributions to this forum.

Sincerely,

Rubén Grajeda and the Red ICEAN coordination team