

Mysore Declaration: Capacity strengthening in nutrition

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

A group of more than 70 international nutrition scientists and leaders met in 2006 for an international symposium to discuss current and emerging needs for capacity building in the field of public nutrition at the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) in Mysore, India. Dr. V. Prakash, Director, CFTRI, was the organizing committee chair for this meeting. The presentations and discussions concluded with the group reviewing and approving the "Mysore Declaration: Capacity Strengthening in Nutrition," which follows here.

The Mysore Declaration outlines major challenges and calls upon international and bilateral agencies, national governments, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to reposition nutrition as central to national development and increase the investments in nutrition at the global, national, and international levels to address the double burden of malnutrition with a single agenda.

All participants strongly supported the need to improve the capacity of developing country institutions to overcome the many nutrition problems that are holding back social and economic development. However, there was much concern for the frequency with which some of the best trained and productive nutrition scientists are recruited by international agencies and organizations and the private sector for posts outside their own countries. This often constrains national efforts at capacity building in nutrition and is disheartening to organizations attempting to provide high quality advanced training for developing-country nutrition scientists.

The Declaration urges that organizations, agencies, and companies recruiting in developing countries include policies that mitigate the depletion of the limited

pool of trained national nutrition professionals. The Mysore Declaration urges that a national capacity development fund be set up by all stakeholders and dedicated specifically to developing and strengthening individual and institutional capacities in food and nutrition in developing countries. Recognizing that these agencies and private companies need competent people from developing countries, this may well provide an extremely helpful contribution to food and nutrition capacity building in these countries. An amount of 2% of program costs was suggested but considered too arbitrary to be incorporated in the final Declaration.

In its penultimate paragraphs, the Declaration urges all sectors of society, including UN organizations, bilateral agencies, international NGOs, and other donor agencies, national governments, civil society, and the private sector, especially the food processing and food services industries, to work together to position nutrition more centrally in terms of national development and increase related investments at all levels. All of these stakeholders will gain much from improved national capacity in food and nutrition. The Declaration also urges civil society to hold governments responsible at all levels for effective implementation of measures for capacity development in food and nutrition.

The Mysore Declaration should be widely circulated, taken to heart, and acted upon by all stakeholders in the improvement of food and nutrition capacity of developing countries. A plan of action proposed to accompany the Mysore Declaration is currently being prepared by a drafting group from organizations represented in the Symposium. It will be presented in a future issue of the *Bulletin*.

— Nevin S. Scrimshaw

We from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, met as participants in a symposium, "Building Leadership Skills in Food and Nutrition Essential for National Development," on 23–25 June 2006, organized by the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) at Mysore, India under the auspices of the United Nations University (UNU), Capacity Strengthening in Nutrition in Asia (CASNA), International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS), International Nutrition Foundation (INF), Tufts University, and UNICEF, with support of the Government of India, declare as follows:

The nature of the present global food and nutrition problems.

We live in a world of great inequity in terms of access to food and existing nutrition conditions both within and among countries. This is not only morally unacceptable but also has enormous costs in terms of human lives, affecting social and economic development. In this world of plenty, more than 800 million people are undernourished and about 170 million infants and young children are underweight. More than five million children die each year as a result of undernutrition. Furthermore, billions of people suffer from vitamin and mineral deficiencies, especially of iron, iodine, vitamin A, and zinc. Good nutrition is also constrained by inadequate safe drinking water and sanitation.

At the same time, obesity and other nutrition related chronic disease are becoming a serious problem, even in low income countries. More than one billion adults worldwide are overweight, of whom 300 million are obese. These issues are often rooted in poverty and coexist in communities, some in the same households. While under-nutrition kills in early life, it also leads to a high risk of chronic diseases and death later in life. This is the

double burden of malnutrition, with common causes: inadequate fetal, infant, and young child nutrition compounded by exposure to energy dense, nutrient poor foods, and limited physical activity.

The greatest opportunity for effective interventions comes from pre-pregnancy to 24 months of a child's age. Schools also provide a natural setting for effective interventions for older children and the promotion of adequate nutrition to future mothers. Malnutrition, in all its forms, amounts to an intolerable burden, not only on national health systems, but on the entire cultural, social and economic fabric of nations, and is the greatest impediment to the fulfillment of human potential.

Despite the impact of malnutrition in all its forms on mortality, morbidity, and national economies, only 1.8% of the total resources for health-related development assistance are allocated to nutrition activities. Of the World Bank's total assistance to developing countries, only 0.7% is for nutrition and food security, and at country level, even less. Adequate food is a human right and good nutrition is essential to achieve the aims of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. Collaboration among the health, agriculture and education sectors is particularly important in capacity building. Without progress in addressing malnutrition, these goals will not be realized.

Building and strengthening capacity to address global food and nutrition problems is essential to a sustainable solution.

We have come together to place capacity strengthening and development to improve nutrition at the center of the solution to this global problem.

We urge UN organizations, bilateral agencies, international NGOs, and other donor agencies:

To act individually and together through the UN SCN to prioritize investments in the advanced training of human resource and institutional capacities required to prevent and control all forms of malnutrition throughout life. This will contribute substantially to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, preventing death and disability while promoting health and well being.

To include in their human resource recruitment, policies that mitigate the depletion of the limited pool of trained professionals. They are critical for sustaining national and regional actions in food and nutrition. A Nutrition Capacity Development Fund should be set up by all stakeholders and dedicated specifically to developing and strengthening individual and institutional capacities in food and nutrition.

This could be achieved by requiring that every project include two percent in its budget towards this fund. These resources could be disbursed with input of development partners within a regional and sub regional context. If professionals are hired from a developing country, UN and other development agencies should compensate the fund for these costs. These resources will serve to train one or more replacements.

In addition, every project should have an inbuilt component of capacity building that would be measurable at the end of the project.

We recommend that national governments:

Commit to establishing or strengthening institutions that can contribute effectively to the solution of food and nutrition problems through research, training and outreach programs. These institutions should be adequately funded and have policies that attract young leaders in this field, promote career development of staff, and support and encourage those who actively contribute.

Commit, in accordance with the UNU/IUNS model, to strengthening human resources capacities through a national system of advanced training to address food and nutrition problems. This encompasses especially training at all levels including the community, community leaders, program implementers, researchers/teachers/ program planners and policy makers to the highest level. Each level will acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and commitment in nutrition science, communications and advocacy, social marketing, industrial research and development, policy and planning.

We propose networking with civil society, especially community based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to:

Advocate for the building and strengthening of national and regional capacity to address food and nutrition problems in accordance with local needs.

Adopt policies that promote, support and sustain the capacities of individuals and institutions necessary to address food and nutrition problems.

Hold governments at all levels to be responsible for effective implementation with regard to capacity development in food and nutrition.

We call on the private sector, especially the food processing industries and food services to:

Mitigate the depletion of the limited pool of trained professionals, critical for sustained national and regional actions in food and nutrition by participating in the proposed Nutrition Capacity Development Fund and contribute to its objectives by sharing information, and research expertise for capacity building and education.

Support development of national and regional capacities to address food

and nutrition problems, including responsible marketing practices and the development of healthier foods and beverages that will contribute to good nutrition throughout life.

We will work together to:

Reposition nutrition as central to national development.

Increase the investments in nutrition at global, national and local levels to address the double burden of malnutrition with a single agenda.

We present at this meeting:

Pledge ourselves to all of the above and to continue to work together, as members of the UNU/IUNS/INF Regional Task Forces on Capacity Development in Nutrition in consultation with UN, international and bilateral agencies, national governments, private sector, NGOs, civil society and other constituencies.

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