

**Food, Nutrition and Gender**

**Seminar Proceedings**

**Egtveds Pakhus, 28 April, 2009**

**Organised by Danida, Danish Research Network for International Health -ENRECA Health, Danish Development Research Network and Danish Water Forum.**



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## **Food, Nutrition and Gender Seminar Proceedings**

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**Time and venue:** Eigtveds Pakhus, 28 April, 2009

### **Annexes:**

- List of participants

### **Background:**

Fluctuations in food (and fuel) prices over the past few years as well as the recent financial and economic crisis have intensified problems of food insecurity and malnutrition on a worldwide basis. At the same time, progress made to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal – focused on reducing poverty and hunger - has for various reasons been pushed backwards during these years, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

Women and children; the urban poor and the landless population in rural areas are among the groups facing the most severe problems in terms of securing sufficient food and proper nutrition. Moreover, while women play a major role in producing, processing and preparing food, they are themselves still among the most mal- or undernourished groups in society. Development efforts for changes have not been able to alter this situation.

The purpose of the seminar was to launch an evaluation study on existing knowledge about causes of nutrition problems and interventions in the field. The study "Food, Nutrition and Gender: Lessons learned and recommendations for future action" was commissioned by the Evaluation Department and the Technical Advisory Services in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and conducted by Dr Pat Pridmore and Professor Roy Carr-Hill. Furthermore, the seminar aimed at providing an opportunity to discuss interventions and policies within the area of food, nutrition and gender and make suggestions for future policy changes.

In addition to the presentations and discussions of the findings of the evaluation study, brief presentations of case-studies from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Tanzania, where food policy for some time has been a high priority at national level.

The seminar was well attended by approximately 70 participants from research institutions, NGOs, Danida's technical advisory service, consultant companies as well as from the embassies and students and a journalist from the ... participated and .... It was covered by the media by a radio interview with two of the participants.

### **Opening remarks by Carsten Nilaus Pedersen**

The morning session was chaired by Ole Winckler Andersen, Head of the Evaluation Unit at Danida, and was opened by Carsten Nilaus Pedersen, Under-Secretary for Bilateral Co-Operation, (replacing Ib Petersen) who welcomed the participants and expressed satisfaction with the report in general, and its three recommendations in particular:

- A multisectoral approach to effectively integrate long and short route interventions to improve child nutrition is needed;
- Both short and long term interventions simultaneously must be carried out; and
- The local context is of key importance to any intervention.

Carsten Nilaus Pedersen further emphasised that good nutrition is essential for receiving the first six of the MDGs (if not all) as severe chronic undernutrition if not corrected before the age of 6, is closely associated with loss of productivity and especially for girls

Nutrition can therefore be perceived as a proxy indicator for development which, in the context of the financial, food and fuel crisis, has come back to the top of the agenda.

In a Danish perspective, Carsten Nilaus Pedersen underlined that Danida is supporting nutrition interventions with both the bi and multilateral partners in all sectors, especially through capacity enhancement.

The future challenge is to move the nutrition agenda forward from evidence to action and get impact on the international agenda. So far nutrition has been "...everybody's business and nobody's responsibility, thus 'an institutional orphan'" according to Carsten Nilaus Pedersen. He furthermore stressed that Danida/MFA would work towards ensuring that the recommendations of the evaluation study would feed into the global agenda on issues related to food and human nutrition.

#### **Causes of nutrition problems and interventions: presentation of an evaluation study, by Dr Pat Pridmore & Roy Carr-Hill, Institute of Education, University of London.**

The authors of the study presented the rationale for the study as 'the 3 'f's': the food, financial and fuel crisis' that have brought a heightened political interest in nutrition. Furthermore, they also mentioned the fact that there are 'competitive technical communities leading to a fragmentation of the nutrition agenda' because the consensus on what works only includes short term interventions. Hence, the international community still lack agreement on what works on a sustainable way. Another rationale for the study was that over the past ten year, the HIV pandemic has changed the situation for children dramatically in many sub Saharan countries with direct impact on their nutritional status.

The purpose of study was to:

- To synthesise available evidence on what works (or does not work) and why in programming to reduce child undernutrition;
- To discuss key issues of importance to programming and research.

Methodology:

- Structured literature review;
- Selection and analysis of 58 relevant scientific studies published between 1998 and 2008.

A few key concepts were introduced, in particular 'Undernutrition' (a conditions in which the body does not have enough of the right kind of food measured in underweight, stunting (short for age), wasting (low weight for age) with stunting being increasingly used) and 'food security' (when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe food to meet their own food preferences for an active and healthy life).

The authors presented seven cost effective and efficient short route interventions (defined as interventions with the potential to reduce the nutrition related mortality and disease burden with 25%):

1. Promotion and support of exclusive breastfeeding

2. Complementary feeding
3. Vitamin A and zinc supplementation for children
4. Hygiene interventions
5. Multiple micronutrient supplementations for pregnant women
7. Universal iodization of salt

However, to achieve sustainable gains we need to address the underlying causes by long route interventions that include:

1. Food/nutrient production and consumption (biofortification, horticulture and home gardening)
2. Quality of care given to young children
3. Access to and appropriate use of adequate health services, water and sanitation

Recommendations:

- The wealth of evidence is overwhelming, what is needed is a synthesis of the evidence and implementation of the recommendations.
- Methodology: impossible to Randomised Control Trials on communities because they can't examine the participation and importance of most underlying basic causes. We need methodological rigour but not perfection.
- Standardisation of terminology such as 'community participation'.
- Need to find effective approaches to work with men on gender equality.

Future research should be focused on implementation problems not so much on technical issues.

#### **Q and As**

**Urban Johnson**, The Owls, argued that the authors of the report missed out on important works done previously (in the 80'ies and 90'ies) on child care practices, that they do not fully integrate a human rights framework and that the structure of the report gives a top-down feeling.

**Christine Stabel Benn**, SSI/ The Bandim Health Project, questioned the underlying assumption in the report that undernutrition always leads to child mortality. Children in low income countries are more likely to die of infectious diseases. No correlation between vitamin A and mortality on a global level (as stated in the series of Lancet special issues on nutrition) and can even be harmful in some cases such as children with pneumonia. Some of the basic assumptions of the report seem to be flawed and she argued against the seemingly argument of the study that we do not need better basic research because of a consensus on certain lines of intervention.

The authors replied that the advent of the HIV epidemic had changed the situation for children so dramatically that much of the research conducted in the 80'ies were no longer relevant. Regarding the second question they noted that they did not address child mortality directly in the report but were much more focused on morbidity.

#### **The work of the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) , Dr Francesco Branca, WHO (representing Alexander Mueller, chair of the committee)**

Dr. Branca congratulated Danida and the authors of the report which he found extremely useful. He noted that nutrition and population growth (especially in urban areas) as well as changing life styles, environmental issues, climate change are interlinked and are issues that development partners must

address in a coordinated way. He underlined that there is a new attention to nutrition issues at the international level with the number of undernourished people rising these years. The role of SCN is to provide a response to the challenge of the fragmentation, assist in coordination, create advocacy within the framework of its action plan 2006-10). Read more at [www.unscn.org](http://www.unscn.org)

**IMPROVING FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF THE POOR, MARGINAL AND SMALL FARMERS THROUGH FARMERS FIELD SCHOOL IN BANGLADESH, Quazi Afzal Hossain, Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh,**

Mr. Hossain presented the case of Bangladesh, a country affected by severe nutritional problems. Farmer Fields Schools (FFS) are community based informal schools organised near by the fields for one crop seasons. They target men and women equally and conduct gender disaggregated sessions on vegetable gardening, vegetable pests, integrated pest management, etc. They used postcards in local languages to educate the participants on childhood deficiency diseases, on proper cooking, etc. Mr. Hossain concluded that “Farmers Field School are an effective vehicle in disseminating knowledge and skills that could be used for a wide variety of purposes as in nutritional aspects with very positive impact on women’s decision making power within the household”.

**The Iringa nutrition programme: Lessons Learnt and implications for the future, Urban Johnson, The Owls, former and UNICEF Regional Director,**

The Iringa programme was one out of 8 joint WHO/UNICEF nutrition support programmes implemented during the mid-80’ies, this one in Tanzania. The programme included capacity development, maternal and child health, household food security as well as a research component. One of the most prominent results was that the reported prevalence of severe underweight dropped from 6.3% to 1.8 % in the project area compared to a non-change of nutritional status in the control sites. In the evaluation of the project these results have been ascribe to “...the conceptual framework, the Triple-A approach (assessment, analysis and action) and social mobilization”. Johnson emphasised the genuinely participatory approach by this project where ‘learning by doing’ with the community was central to all activities and where social mobilisation was achieved through community mobilisers (recruited from the community) and facilitators (externally recruited).

Lessons learned included the following: people cannot be developed but will develop themselves under the right circumstances, programmes should be evidence based, participation is crucial, it is necessary to work on a short and long term approach simultaneously, and gender issues (involving women equally) are crucial.

Johnson also advocated for a political awareness where issues such as ‘local ownership’ is crucial leaving no one neutral, and where the difference between lack of political will and wrong information should be fully understood and addressed. He strongly recommended that researchers and policy makers were conscious of “The de-politicization and technologization of the nutrition problem, systematically avoiding the basic (structural) causes of malnutrition”. Furthermore, he warned against the tendency to pack everything into convenient ‘best practices’ because of the false assumption that there are standard interventions that can be implemented everywhere, regardless of the local context.

Finally he called for an end of the dominance of private foundations on the nutrition ‘architecture’ saying that “Everybody wants to coordinate, nobody wants to be coordinated”.

**Charlotte Dufour, independent consultant, Empowering Women and their Communities to Make Nutrition Changes Happen in Afghanistan. .**

Afghanistan is a country characterised by destroyed economic, natural and social capital in combination with lack of governance. This situation has led to extremely high rates of child maternal mortality as well as by chronic malnutrition (iron deficiency), and acute malnutrition. Dufour described the underlying causes as

low diet diversity, improper feeding practices, poor hygiene and poor access to health care services. Breast feeding practices have been compromised by stress and mental health problems of mothers.

Dufour presented lessons from a project based on interventions that included nutritional lessons, capacity building, education of separated groups of men and women. She underlined the importance of 'demystifying' nutrition by integrating it into projects (e.g. in literature circles, school curricula development, health services) in a way where it adds value to ongoing activities. When nutrition is made practical by being connected to peoples' daily experiences of poor health, people are eager to learn more. Furthermore, many NGOs are already working with malnutrition so they are not so difficult to convince to take the subject on board but they need to work within a framework of a clear national strategy. To initiate such a strategy, Governments must be presented with good data and presented with examples of interventions that work.

Dufour warned against an exaggerated focus on nutrients rather than on food because in her opinion excessive use of specially formulated processed foods could be disempowering of people and a threat to public health.

### **Feed back from group work: 'food does the work'**

The participants were divided into four groups with a number of resource persons and facilitators given the assignment to debate the following questions:

1. Global level: How can the different stakeholders, including Denmark, strengthen global leadership to reduce malnutrition and engage local leaders and the civil society in different contexts? Please mention three opportunities.
2. National level: How can different national stakeholders catalyse more effective and efficient actions against malnutrition?
3. Scientific level: How can we use existing knowledge and scientific results to stimulate a more efficient response to the existing crisis?

In plenary the following suggestions were made by the groups:

Global level:

- MDGs: nutrition is an input in the first 6 of the MDGs and a nutrition indicator should be used as a proxy development indicator for all of them: nutrition is a common objective with relevance for all sectors;
- Maintain political momentum and use nutrition as entry point for poverty reduction agenda;
- Improve advocacy, learning from HIV, recruiting 'the Mandela of nutrition'
- Improve leadership by supporting the UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition (currently underfunded);
- G20: advocate to put nutrition on the agenda
- Funding for multisectorial interventions (as Spain, Norway);
- Improve donor harmonisation;
- Encourage Danida to highlight nutrition in existing sector programs and in a revision of Partnerships 2000;

National level:

- Agriculture

- Diversification of crops (mais, whete and rice accounts for most of the world's nutrition)
- Home gardening;
- More research using local resources
- Collaboration with private sector;
- Emergency assistance with free distribution of food is problematic unless to very vulnerable groups to prevent deaths;
- Institutional home for nutrition at highest level, e.g. President's or Prime Minister's office
- Social welfare: unconditional cash transfers and gender empowerment;
- Analysis on nutrition situation and poverty;
- In every partner country, Danida should review opportunities of supporting nutrition interventions in sector programmes, possibly co-financed with others (e.g. the World Bank);
- Translating research findings into policy recommendations (evidence based, experiences, risk taking).

#### Community level:

- Enter into a meaningful dialogue with local communities;
- Encourage civil society to hold government accountable for development promises; and
- Adopt a human rights based approach.

#### Research:

- Strengthen national research institutions and their capacity;
- Include action research and qualitative case studies;
- Involve CBOs, NGOs, faith based organisations, and engage partners at local level in research definition, implementation and dissemination;
- Establish clusters for research that are cross national and multi-disciplinary and make funding streams available for this type of research
- Analyse 'the future of nutrition' in the coming 20 years, e.g. in urban populations;
- Remember that research results should be used as the basis for up to date teaching and shared with students (No research without teaching).

#### **Closing remarks by Klaus Bustrup, chairman, Danida, Urban Johnson, Pat Pridmore and Roy Carr-Hill:**

Roy Carr-Hill made two closing remarks:

- We need to work much more openly and courageously with the private sector in order to obtain results in nutrition in low income countries;
- Right now there is an unfruitful compartmentalisation of nutrition from health sciences which will not end until peer reviewed journals change their publishing criteria.

Pat Pridmore was even more convinced at the end of this day that practitioners and policy makers will not move out of their individual 'silos' until they are forced to, e.g. by calls for proposals based on multisectorial approaches and actions. She also noted that even though gender was in title of this programme it was, once again, neglected during the debates and that it seemed much easier to debate the immediate level rather than underlying causes of malnutrition.

Urban Johnson noted that we sometimes forget the obvious: people live in communities, not at national or regional level and aggregated data at these levels have only mathematical meaning, no descriptive power.

Klaus Bustrup, Chair, Danida, in his closing remarks emphasised the key role of nutrition in the overall development strategy of Danida. He summarised the many lessons learnt during the seminar. With regard to research he concluded that nutrition being a very complex issue there is need for more both basic and

applied research as well as research on linkages. Klaus Bustrup ended the day by expressing his satisfaction with the fact that Danida had put focus on child nutrition. He noted that, for many reasons, it would be a good idea to develop a new overall Danida strategy with a strong emphasis on nutrition. Appropriate nutrition should be a human right and perceived as a good development indicator. It should be demystified and made much more practical in terms of potential interventions. He called for more basic research, case studies and research on how to link different sectors but even more so for sharing of research results. One of the many challenges is that population growth rates in Africa will compromise future development gains for a foreseeable future.

The very last sentence of the day, pronounced by Klaus Bustrup, was “We owe it to children to solve these problems.....”

## List of participants

### Food, Nutrition and Gender: Lessons Learned and recommendations for the future. April 28, 2009.

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