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## Thematic Session 2

### What action should the regions take to counter the spread of malnutrition?

18 January 2010 – 14.30-18.30

## SUMMARY

**Chair:** Mr Paul Carrasco, President of the Latin American Organisation of Intermediate Governments (OLAGI)

**Coordinators:** Mme Florence Egal, FAO Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division and Marie Imbs, Food Safety Policy Officer, FOGAR

**Rapporteur:** Dr Babacar Ndoye, Director General of the Food Technology Institute, Senegal

*In a world affected by the food prices crisis of 2008 and the financial and economic crisis of 2009, the issue of malnutrition is again making the headlines. Despite all the efforts made, especially over the last 10 years, not only has the progress hoped for not been achieved but the situation has in fact become even worse. In most of the world's regions, people in both rural and urban areas are suffering from the dual burden of malnutrition: the persistence or worsening of macro and micro-nutrient deficiencies, and epidemics of chronic nutrition-related illnesses. This situation is unacceptable both from a human point of view and regarding the immediate and long-term development consequences and social costs, which central governments should not tolerate. The purpose of the workshop was therefore to inform participants both about international issues and regional experiences, in order to forge a dialogue, to lay the foundations of a network and to discuss the specific steps that need to be taken in order to give the regions the means they require to play the role that only they can play.*

*The following summary outlines the various contributions by experts and regional and local representatives, the key points made during the debates and the recommendations made by the session's participants on how to increase the number of regional initiatives aimed at countering food insecurity.*

### A. Summary of the presentations:<sup>1</sup>

1. Efforts to counter malnutrition: current perspectives and recent experiences, **Mme Florence Egal**, Expert on food security, nutrition and livelihoods, FAO

Food crises, riots and the financial crisis have had a harmful effect on food, leading to changes in diet and the development of chronic diseases. Local development has a key role to play in meeting the tackling this problem. A well-defined partnership between regions is also necessary. Efforts to reduce malnutrition are the first step in the fight against poverty. Those responsible for food security and public health must work together at local level in order to eradicate malnutrition. Most financial partners are concerned by nutrition and wish to coordinate between public health and agriculture. A participative approach is necessary, based on human rights, targeted efforts at regional level, further decentralisation and the involvement of civil

<sup>1</sup> The full presentations made by the various speakers are available on the Background Documents section of the summit website: <http://www.regionsfoodsummit.org/>

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society in order to set up lasting schemes to alleviate malnutrition. **Tackling these issues at regional level** will make it **easier to identify problems, plan actions be carried out and readjust existing programmes.**

## **2. Antioquia Province (Colombia)**

The role of Antioquia Province and other local authorities in managing and delivering the MANA food security programme, **Ms Dora Cécilia Gutierrez Hernandez** and **Dr Patricia Monsalve**, Responsible for food security and nutrition at the Municipality of Medellin Council, Antioquia Province (Colombia)

Health and food safety policies must be coordinated with a national policy to alleviate malnutrition. Colombia has managed to develop a participative policy focusing on health and nutrition. In each region, a multidisciplinary committee answering to the regional council has been appointed. This committee is responsible for malnutrition issues. Several communities within a given region and with different crops are targeted. This diversification helps to improve nutrition at regional level. Antioquia Province's success shows that it is vital to have a policy establishing the main priorities and for local authorities to deliver these local level. The pre-requisites for success are: careful listening by those in power, the identification of areas where there is malnutrition, and regional autonomy. This approach helps to develop the right responses with regard to identified needs. Lastly, development at regional level has the advantage of being participative.

## **3. Eastern Region (Paraguay)**

Improving household nutrition and organic food use in over 900 households in the Eastern Region of Paraguay - Nutritional strategy, **Ms Venus Caballero**, Head of Action Against Hunger for food habits and customs in Paraguay and Head of the Women's Organisations Support Project

According to the NGO Action Against Hunger, malnutrition is linked to a reduction in food availability, the poor nutritional value of foodstuffs and the lack of nutritional education. Studies have been conducted in order to gain an insight into eating habits and profiles, which have made it possible to produce guides on approaches to food, based on rural modes of life. This work has been accomplished in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and civil society in order to train trainers and produce kits and manuals on good food practice. These kits have been designed in a participative fashion and user feedback has been taken into account in order to improve them.

## **4. Eastern Region (Cameroon)**

The role of nutritional education in the fight against malnutrition, **Mr Elie Zoyem Koulong**, Agronomist, Regional Coordinator of the FAO's National Food Security Programme for the Eastern Region of Cameroon

Nutritional education has a fundamental role to play in efforts to counter the spread of malnutrition. Through nutritional education, we can improve eating habits and encourage food diversification and good food hygiene practices. This focus on nutritional education is vital, because understanding food and related matters can promote local products, the use of suitable forms of cooking and development of new recipes. The regions are devising detailed strategies to counter malnutrition, which put emphasis on local crops and public-private partnerships.

- ❖ Local development has been organised in most regions at a political level, but much remains to be done on a financial level if decentralisation to be effective.
- ❖ The seasonal nature of food safety should also be taken into consideration by regions where agriculture is based on rainfall levels.

## **5. Waspam District (Nicaragua) - Catalonia Region (Spain)**

Partnership for the identification of shortages, the improvement of food diversification, training and respect for traditional customs, **Mr Abdon Espinoza**, Project Leader at the FAO Representation, Nicaragua

This scheme is in the Autonomous Region of the Northern Atlantic in Nicaragua, which is extremely poor and has very limited crops and insufficiently diversified production. It seeks to improve diversity and increase inhabitants' sources of revenue in order to improve nutrition. Schools for farmers have been opened in order to facilitate contacts between farmers and traders. Experimental fields are used in order to demonstrate the work. Trained farmers then have the task of disseminating knowledge acquired in other areas. This model, which has been successfully designed to meet the needs of local areas, has helped to develop food security.

## **6. Titao Department (Burkina Faso) and Maradi Region (Niger)**

Malnutrition in the Sahel countries - a seasonal and recurrent problem with young children: perspectives, **Ms Nathalie Ernoult**, Nutritional Programmes Manager, *Médecins Sans Frontières*

Aside from remedial strategy, there is a preventative strategy through nutrition in order to tackle the immediate causes of malnutrition, which affect individuals, and the underlying causes which affect the community. There is the “hungry season” issue, and participative strategies can be used to avoid this. During this season, it is necessary to activate social safety nets (distribution of vouchers, money and food to families).

Treatment of cases of malnutrition can no longer take place in centres for conventional nutritional recovery. It is now decentralised at community level. Communities are developing their own production units for additional food, with their own labour, thereby enabling them to generate financial income.

### **7. Kampala District (Uganda)**

The role of urban agriculture in alleviating hunger and malnutrition; lessons and experience from the regions of Uganda, **Mr John M Behangaana**, Secretary General of the Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU)

The development of gardening and urban and peri-urban agriculture is a potential way of countering food insecurity in the population, and above all of dealing with food shortages. Experience shows that it is not necessary to possess a plot of land in order to produce one’s food and alleviate malnutrition. In Kampala, 50% of land is used for urban agriculture. 85% of households have backyard gardens and 75% of the people involved are women. This subsistence agriculture helps to counter the spread of malnutrition. The remaining 25 to 26% of women work in growing and developing edible mushrooms. Urban agriculture at regional level is not supported and those in government would benefit from organising this, because for example 40% of production in Kampala is generated by city. Peri-urban agriculture is also highly developed in other countries. Dakar produces 60% of the vegetables consumed in Senegal. The development of urban agriculture can help to reduce malnutrition.

## **B. Summary of the debates and recommendations**

During the talks and discussions that followed the presentations, some key data emerged, which can be summed up as follows:

### **I- GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

The action of the regions in the food security field must seek to ensure that “all people, especially the most vulnerable sections of society, and at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food, enabling them to meet their energy and micronutrient requirements in order to maintain a healthy and active life”

The discussions thus showed that any strategy adopted by the regions in the food security field should therefore focus on the availability of food, the stability of supply, household access to food and durability and its nutritional value and quality, to meet nutritional requirements and protect people’s nutritional and sanitary health, their food habits and the environment. It must also take into account the political and institutional aspects of food.

One of the consequences of food insecurity is malnutrition in its various forms. It has a very bad impact on the health of individuals, the community and the development of the region. Bearing this in mind, if they are to develop, the various regions must:

- have clearly defined strategies to counter the spread of malnutrition based on forecasts that are shared by the whole range of stakeholders (public-private partnership for a comprehensive analysis of the regions’ situation);
- develop plans and programmes to guarantee food security in the long term;
- promote support for decentralised planning;
- promote the use of local foodstuffs in a sufficiently diversified manner through an effective policy on production and processing by the different stakeholders concerned (including urban and peri-urban agriculture);
- promote culturally-acceptable local cooking recipes;
- promote nutritional information and education for local people;
- develop school canteens with menus that exclusively use local products with high nutritional value and make them accessible for the children of poor parents in order to encourage their attendance at school.

## **II- KEY DATA IDENTIFIED**

### **2.1- REGIONAL AUTONOMY**

**2.1.1-** The fundamental role of the regions in efforts to counter the spread of malnutrition and ensure food security. To do this, it is necessary:

- to develop local finances to exploit existing potential in such a way as to remove the regions from the erratic cycle of public finance,
- to release potential, creativity and imagination are required, so there is therefore a need for exchanges of knowledge and skills.

**2.1.2-** The regional level is deemed to be relevant in efforts to counter the spread of malnutrition because the poorest people can be found at this level and their needs must be given priority in order to avoid endemic malnutrition. Efforts to meet the requirements of this category entail:

- a participative analysis involving all stakeholders,
- scientific and technical validation,
- efforts to ensure consistency.

**2.1.3-** Promotion of agriculture at various levels

- support for farmers to raise their awareness about consumer requirements (training, etc.),
- encouragement of links between cities and the countryside to improve the distribution channels for local products, which can help limit the effects of speculation by certain distributors and create partnerships between regions.

### **2.2- INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL PEOPLE**

- Discussions on the diversity of value systems and regions' particular characteristics,
- Education in nutrition and communication,
- Learning.

### **2.3- DISCUSSIONS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE POLICIES**

**2.3.1-** Consistency between national and regional policies

- Transfers of resources (the decentralisation of taxation was mentioned)

**2.3.2-** Cooperation between regions on the basis of net comparative advantages:

- Public sector and private sector;
- Political sector
- Involvement of civil society.

**2.3.3-** Development of a participative and consensual approach when preparing development plans

**2.3.4-** Project and programme management developed in a participative fashion with very precise objectives.

## **III- RECOMMENDATIONS**

**3.1.** Documentation and roll-out of successful experiences (to move beyond pilot phases)

**3.2.** Participation of local people is fundamental in strategies aimed at countering food insecurity

**3.3.** A systemic (holistic) and intersectoral approach due to the fact that malnutrition trends are dependent on the seasons

**3.4.** Partnerships (multidisciplinary approaches such as the systematic integration of nutritional aspects into food security policies)

**3.5.** To extend nutritional education at the level of:

- Schools: teachers must be asked to talk about it
- Opinion leaders (marabouts, healers, etc.)

**3.6.** Improvement of market distribution channels

**3.7.** The regions must negotiate with central governments and raise the need to adapt policies at territorial level to ensure greater effectiveness

- 3.8. Efforts to counter the spread of malnutrition require the promotion and consumption of locally-grown products
- 3.9. The involvement of families
  - Organise planning as far as men and women are concerned
- 3.10. To organise a municipal fair and the dissemination of experiences
- 3.11. Monitoring as a major principle in order to ascertain progress made and identify what still needs to be done.