

Nutrition News for Africa

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Scaling up nutrition: A framework for action

Bezanson K, Isenman P; Food Nutr Bull 31: 178-186, 2010

Introduction

In this month's NNA we depart from our usual focus on technical aspects of nutrition programs, and feature instead a recent call for markedly expanded global action in nutrition programming. The authors of the document specifically state that the paper is intended "principally for policy makers and opinion leaders rather than nutrition specialists." Nevertheless, we feel that the paper represents an important landmark because of the consensus achieved among international agencies, national governments, civil society organizations, philanthropic organizations, academic programs, and private sector companies regarding the central role of nutrition for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). More than 75 agencies have already expressed their support for the document (see: <http://www.unscn.org/>).

Key points in the report include: 1) the need for nutrition programs to be designed at the national level, with consideration for the country's specific needs and capacities; 2) the importance of focusing on scaling up of interventions known to be effective, with emphasis on children less than two years of age from the time of conception; and 3) the desirability of using an inter-sectoral approach, with attention to food and nutrition security, social protection, and health care. The report further recognizes the need for increased resource mobilization, nationally and internationally, to permit the implementation of this agenda.

Other important themes that were reviewed are the complementarity of direct nutrition interventions (such as breast feeding support programs and micronutrient supplementation) and broader approaches that address underlying causes of malnutrition, such as gender inequality, high rates of non-literacy, and poor sanitary infrastructure. Successful planning and execution of the latter approaches will require greater inter-sectoral coordination and policy coherence, as well as holding non-traditional sectors, like agriculture and education, accountable for improved nutrition outcomes.

The document also recognizes the critical need for human and institutional capacity development to allow this expansion in nutrition programming to proceed rapidly, and it highlights the importance of more rigorous evaluation of intervention projects and country programs. These issues were also addressed in an earlier edition of NNA (see NNA June-July, 2009), but national governments and donors have been slow to respond to the plea for greater investments in capacity development and applied research. The report concludes that a greater sense of urgency is required to pursue this agenda, a sentiment with which we heartily concur.

NNA Editors' comments*

This policy brief is “must reading” for anyone involved in advocacy for global nutrition. The report succinctly presents the justifications for why greater outlays for large scale nutrition programs – and related capacity development and program evaluation – are essential for achieving the MDGs. Hopefully, the broad consensus that has been demonstrated will motivate greater attention to and investment in these issues.

* These comments have been added by the editorial team and are not part of the cited publication.