
ICN2 PTM: SUMMARY OF FIRST 2 DAYS

Five expert presentations on the morning of the first day addressed a range of topics, including the fact that every region and most countries have increased average energy supplies by 150-200 kcal, and that there has been a change in the composition of diets with increases in the consumption of meat, dairy, fats and oils, sugar, and fruits and vegetables accompanied by less dependence on staples and root crops. Major drivers of this change include globalization, urbanization, increased incomes and increased participation of women in the labour force. For a majority of the population this nutrition transition has been positive with diets in general having improved since the last ICN in 1992, contributing to the fact that we are now living longer and healthier than at any time in human history. However there is a downside. For those who have been bypassed by this development, poor monotonous high carbohydrate diets are causing high levels of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Stunting and micro-nutrient deficiencies are still problems in low income countries with micronutrient deficiencies higher on the agenda than in 1992. For others, over consumption of foods, often those high in fat and sugar, and unbalanced diets have contributed to obesity and the increase in non-communicable disease. In addition, consumption of processed foods has significantly increased in developing countries. Since 1992 obesity has increased also in low and middle income countries. The burden is especially great given that healthcare systems in many MICs are underdeveloped. Overweight is an issue today, with less underweight than in 1992.

Creating an enabling environment was also addressed in the first session, including during a discussion of how correct assessment of the nutrition situation in a given country is essential to effective policy-making, accountability and advocacy. This discussion also raised the point which has been reiterated repeatedly throughout the last two days, which is that data are also needed for effective monitoring, which is crucial to good nutrition governance.

Country presentations on the first day focused on sharing national experiences in scaling up the implementation of nutrition programmes, policy developments and partnerships. Many interventions made during this session were focused on ways to facilitate multisectoral collaboration. Lessons learned include the importance of legislating performance indicators across ministries, and the importance of ministries working together at decentralized level, jointly funded by central and local governments, with strong CSO involvement. This approach builds family-oriented stakeholder networks (e.g. local education, medical) from the bottom up. In so doing, it helps guard against short institutional memory and high staff turnover caused by changes in political administration. The potential of cash transfers and school feeding programs as entry points for nutrition enhancing ag-based programming, and the importance of public private partnerships, as characterized by the "Dutch Diamond" or "Golden Quadrant" idea of collaboration between government, civil society, the private sector, and knowledge institutions, were also repeated themes during this session. School feeding was also repeatedly mentioned as an important entry point for nutrition sensitive interventions during the country presentations, both in terms of providing adequate nutrition to children and in regards to promoting livelihoods of smallholders.

As noted during Session 1, this change of narrative marks a substantial change from 1992, when malnutrition was defined mainly as an issue of anthropometrics, and when obesity and overweight were thought to occur mainly in westernized countries.

A related point which has been mentioned repeatedly over these last two days is the issue of vulnerability and the importance of targeting populations that have not benefited from the positive trends in per capita energy availability and income growth. The call to disaggregate data according to income quintile as opposed to simply reporting national level prevalence rates was made repeatedly by presenters and during interventions from the floor during Days 1 and 2, the goal being to target specific disadvantaged population groups so as to reduce inequality in nutrition outcomes.

Other key points that were made during the session on country experiences can be summarized as follows:

- The importance of getting policies right by making social inclusion, equity, women and children explicit considerations, and by making sure that nutrition is mainstreamed in policies across sectors.
- Partnerships. Bringing together multi-partnerships and making them sustainable.
- Making sure that citizens are at the centre of the policy formulation process and encouraging them to come together in movements to address different aspects of nutrition.
- Advocacy and communication, without which nothing happens. The importance of bringing in the media, and communicating through established nutrition networks and fora.
- Governments acting as inspirers, stimulators, incubators, and conveners.
- The need for evaluation, accountability, transparent information, research, science, especially to monitor and evaluate results.
- The recognition that civil society, parliamentarians and other stakeholders are part of the political process and that political commitment is essential to scaling up nutrition.

Sessions on nutrition enhancing agriculture and food systems began with a discussion of why agriculture is currently not nutrition promoting. Three key reasons were cited, as follows:

- Nutrition is nobody's sector: As such it is a question of ownership. There is no nutrition ministry or sector that is ultimately responsible.
- Nutrition goals may conflict with other goals: If you go to a farmer and say you need to change your behavior, they will say can I make money for this? How does this reduce risk?
- Market signals: The market is not telling us that we need to work for nutrition, also consumer behavior is not rational.

Discussion during these sessions also covered key considerations in the pathways from agriculture to nutrition, namely:

- 1) Food availability in terms of quality as well as quantity (with a caveat that availability does not ensure good nutrition)
- 2) Income can be in kind or in cash
- 3) The relative prices of food as well as food versus non-food goods. (e.g. legume price inflation during the Green Revolution and the point that today the focus needs to be on nutrients as opposed to simple energy supply)
- 4) Time allocation for women: A critical mass of evidence now exists which shows the most limiting factors of nut sensitivity in agriculture is lack of time among women
- 5) Consumer preferences and the issue of palatability (e.g. it is not enough to produce more fruit and vegetables. What is feasible at consumption level?)

- 6) Non-food factors needed to improve nutritional status: access to clean water; childcare; primary healthcare. Interventions in these areas need to be done in conjunction with nutrition-enhancing activities in agriculture.

Emphasis was placed on breaking the 2-way causal link between the processing industry and the consumer. That is, the question of whether the industry is driving consumer demand or vice versa. This issue of consumer preferences and market incentives set the tone for many of the panelists' remarks and interventions during Day 2. The question of what shapes consumer awareness and consumer "wants" was raised repeatedly in later panels, as was the related question of the degree to which food prices affect consumption. Although food prices are an important determinant of demand, there is also some level of choice in most countries.

Discussion also included the potential for realizing "win wins" that leverage agriculture for nutrition without major trade offs to market-based incentives (e.g. reductions in the unit costs of production for nutrient-rich crops and labor saving technologies targeting women). The question of how and whether to involve the private sector was also raised repeatedly during value chain and other sessions.

Other points covered during this session included:

- The question of whether RCTs are an appropriate standard by which to assess the nutrition impact of agriculture and food system based interventions
- The importance of bridging the gap between short term emergency response and longer term development programming. The point was made that successes in disaster management hold lessons that can be applied to nutrition oriented non-humanitarian aid efforts.
- The importance of context in project design
- The acknowledgement that asking frontline workers in agriculture and nutrition to work together is extremely challenging.

Panels on value chains noted that value chains should be used to identify solutions to very specific problems within the context of a broader diet approach. These approaches need to be part of a package addressing malnutrition in all its forms. These panels included discussion of traditional and modern value chains, and of how well-regulated value chains can have a positive impact on nutrition by providing year-round access to micronutrients, improving food safety, and facilitating dietary diversity through fortified-food products for a variety of population groups.

It was noted that achieving this goal creates a number of risks for producers, especially smallholders. These include meeting elevated product standards and quality parameters, and potential low consumer demand for nutritious products.

Addressing the multiple burden of malnutrition requires multi-sectoral action – including in the food system, improving nutrition governance and policy coherence. Food Supply Chains and the policies that affect them influence diets. On the other side, consumer diets and the policies designed to improve them influence food supply chains, of which different types exist. Examples are import ban of trans fats in India and global policy coherence in fats and oil chains.

The public sector can:

- Offset the costs and/or defraying the risks associated with the adoption of new business models by value chains actors.
- Promote consumer demand for more nutritious food, and in particular foods that are naturally rich in micronutrients.
- Develop and supporting mechanisms through which the integrity and failings of value chains can be alleviated.
- Legislate regulations that permit and facilitate the marketing of more nutritious foods on the basis of their potential nutritional benefits, whilst at the same time minimizing the risk of false claims.
- Provide support for and/or put in place mechanisms through which more nutritious foods can be made available, affordable and acceptable to low-income consumers.

As mentioned above, a related and contentious issue that was raised during second day sessions concerns the question of while nutrition has something to gain from private sector participation in well regulated food value chains for nutritious products, what's in it for the private sector? Pro-industry interventions from panelists and from the floor included:

- The private sector is a key player in food systems and can provide valuable lessons regarding how to create pro-nutrition consumer demand
- The "food industry" is actually multiple businesses. The largest 20 food multinationals control only approximately 10 percent of the global supply
- The food industry has a vested interest in promoting consumer health in regards to longevity of profits

Points made in favor of avoiding private sector participation included the claim that the food industry has historically been an impediment to consumer health.

An additional key message regarding food systems and value chains was the question of food safety. As mentioned above, value chains can have a positive impact on nutrition by improving food safety. However it is also important to recognize that risks to food safety increase with the length of the value chain, with perishables being highly subject to spoilage. The importance of traditional wet markets, also discussed in the session on traditional and modern value chains, was noted again, especially in regards to their persistence in MICs, where they have continued to function alongside more modern food supply systems.

A key message from the panel on social protection was that there is little evidence that social protection programmes effectively address malnutrition. This is due potentially to a range of issues including, but not limited to: social protection programmes often do not have nutritional objectives, and so these outcomes are not measured; the target populations are often not those who have the highest rates of malnutrition, but rather those populations with higher poverty rates; the programmes and the studies are not implemented in a long-enough time frame to measure long-term anthropometric indicators such as stunting.

Discussion of these issues raised the following points:

- Social protection programmes often have poverty reduction and equity objectives, however not all social protection programmes should necessarily have nutrition objectives, and stunting should not necessarily be a prime indicator of impact. If nutrition is identified as a potential objective for a social protection programmes, then the design should take into careful consideration the target population, and the aspects of nutrition to be addressed.

- Graduation should not be considered a measure of success of all social protection programmes, as some populations, such as the disabled and elderly, will require continuous access to social protection in order to stay out of poverty and to maintain food and nutrition security. This should be seen within the context of the human right to access to health, education and food.
- The results of the latest Lancet 2013 series points to the importance of targeting adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and children in the first 1000 days. These are key target populations that should be considered in the design of nutrition-enhancing social protection programmes. Greater focus on these populations might offer greater opportunities for direct and indirect nutritional outcomes.
- Ensuring that social protection can become more effective in reaching nutrition outcomes requires coordinated implementation with activities in other important sectors that deal with underlying, ex-ante causes of malnutrition, namely agriculture, health and education.
- Food and nutrition security opportunities are not always seized. To understand why this happens, the different factors influencing food acquisition and allocation behavior of the consumer need to be understood.
- Obesity prevention is considered good value for money as it saves lives, is a good investment, and has the ability to reduce health inequalities; efforts to move consumption towards “healthier diets” should be economically sustainable over the medium and long term.
- There are opportunities for agriculture if we provide the enabling environment and incentives for the right investments to be made – we cannot just rely on health solutions to achieve the kind of development people want.