

Implementation by FAO of some of the recommendations of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children

Both FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) made concerted efforts to ensure that the preparatory process of the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) was complementary to the objectives of the World Summit for Children (WSC). The ICN and the World Food Summit follow-ups have continued to promote effective collaboration to achieve the complementary goals of all these conferences.

FAO support for the follow-up to the WSC has been active, consistent and effective. FAO stresses the crucial need for protecting and promoting the nutritional well-being of children. This is accomplished through the strengthening of the capacity of vulnerable households to serve viable economic and social units able to provide adequately for all family members. The identification and promotion of sustainable solutions to nutritional problems is pre-eminent.

FAO's activities contribute directly to the broad WSC objectives of improving children's livelihoods and social well-being, achieving sustained and equitable growth and human development.

In fact, Commitments One, Two, and Seven of the WFS Plan of Action make reference to the WSC, focusing on the need to establish institutional and legal structures and in placing special emphasis on children's nutritional needs, including the importance of breast-feeding for infants.

Commitment Two refers to the implementation of policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and for improving physical and economic access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food, and its effective utilization. To this end, Governments committed themselves to developing, within available resources, well-targeted social welfare and nutrition safety nets to meet the needs of the food insecure, including children. Moreover, the commitment extended to promote access to, and support for, complete primary education, including, where appropriate, school feeding programmes, with particular attention to children in rural areas and to girls.

Commitment Seven makes reference to the adoption of action within each country's national framework to enhance food security and to implement the World Food Summit Plan of Action. To this end, particular commitments were made to establish sustainable mechanisms to collect information on the nutritional status of all members of communities, especially the poor, women, children and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, to monitor and to improve their household food security.

Special references to children and the World Summit for Children in the World Food Summit Plan of Action are as follows:

Under Objective 1.4: To encourage national solidarity and provide equal opportunities for all, at all levels, in social, economic and political life, particularly in respect of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and persons.

- (c) *Enact legislation and establish institutional structures that provide opportunities for youth and enhance the special contribution that women can make to ensuring family and child nutrition with due emphasis on the importance of breast-feeding for infants;*
- (d) *Give special attention to promoting and protecting the interests and needs of the child, particularly the girl child, in food security programmes, consistent with the World Summit for Children - Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York 1990.*

Under Objective 2.2: To enable food insecure households, families and individuals to meet their food and nutritional requirements and to seek to assist those who are unable to do so.

- (c) *Develop within available resources well-targeted social welfare and nutrition safety nets to meet the needs of the food insecure, particularly needy people, children, and the infirm.*

Under Objective 2.4: To promote access for all, especially the poor and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, to basic education and primary health care provision in order to strengthen their capacity for self-reliance.

- (c) *Promote access to, and support for, complete primary education, including, where appropriate, school feeding programmes, with particular attention to children in rural areas and to girls;*

Under Objective 7.1: To adopt actions within each country's national framework to enhance food security and enable the implementation of the commitments of the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

- (f) *Establish mechanisms to collect information on the nutritional status of all members of communities, especially the poor, women, children and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, to monitor and improve their household food security;*

FAO's Committee on World Food Security (CFS), mandated by the WFS to monitor the national, sub-regional, regional and international implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action, conducted in 1997 a first review of action taken by governments and development partners to implement the WFS Plan of Action, and established in 1998 a work plan for subsequent reviews leading to, in 2006, a major broad-based progress assessment of the implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action and a mid-term review for achieving the target of reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015. This year, the CFS at its 26th Session considered reports submitted by governments and international organizations on

progress in implementing the “people-centred” Commitments of the Plan of Action (Commitments One, Two, Five, and relevant parts of Commitment Seven). The reports of CFS on monitoring the implementation of the WFS Plan of Action are regularly transmitted through the FAO Council to the UN Economic and Social Committee.

With regard to the World Food Summit follow-up at country level, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has mandated FAO and IFAD, in close cooperation with WFP, to provide leadership to the ACC Network on Rural Development and Food Security. FAO provides the Secretariat for the Common Country Network on Rural Development and Food Security. This now comprises 68 national thematic groups which are operating within the Resident Coordinator System and contribute to the Common Country Assessment and the UN Assistance Framework. UNICEF is one of the 20 UN agency members of the global network which provides support for the Thematic Group and it is normally represented in these groups, which also address issues dealing with children.

Among ongoing activities being implemented by FAO that have contributed specifically towards the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children, are the following:

NUTRITIONAL ASSESSMENT

The Nutrition Country Profiles (NCP) provide concise analytical summaries describing the food and nutritional situation of children in individual countries, with background statistics on nutritional status (mainly children under 5 years) and food-related factors such as agricultural production, and selected economic and demographic indicators. The information is presented in a desegregated fashion to the extent possible, emphasizing trends and sub-national differences where data is available.

A major programme being currently undertaken entitled Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) allow the country to design and target efficient interventions to reach the undernourished and the vulnerable.

HUMAN NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

At the First World Congress on Calcium and Vitamin D in Human Life held in Rome, Italy, in October 1996, scientists from around the world discussed ways to improve intakes of these nutrients among all population groups and to promote proper growth during infancy, childhood and adolescence. They emphasized the importance of adequate amounts of vitamin D and the need for foods rich in calcium as the best way to ensure adequate intakes and help prevent such disorders as poor bone formation, poor growth and loss of bone mass.

A Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Human Vitamin and Mineral Requirements was held in September 1998. The purpose of the consultation was to provide current knowledge on several vitamins and minerals. Individual recommendations are given for (1) Infants:

Premature, 0-6 months, 7-12 months, (2) Children: 1-3 years, 4-6 years, (3) Pregnancy: First trimester, Second trimester, Third trimester, and (4) Lactation: 0-3 months, 3-6 months, 7-12 months.

A Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Carbohydrates was held in April 1997. Of special concern to the consultation were the diets of infants and children.

NUTRITIONAL EDUCATION

Nutritional education resource materials are being prepared for school children and for all family members and these will form part of school curricula in developing countries.

FOOD BASED DIETARY GUIDELINES

A publication entitled “Preventing Micronutrient Malnutrition - A Guide to Food-based Approaches - A Manual for Policy Makers and Programme Planners (1997)” has been prepared for preventing and controlling specific micronutrient deficiencies and has been widely distributed.

The Organization also published “Improving Nutrition through Home Gardening 1995”, which focused on countries in the South-East Asia sub-region and other versions are being prepared for Latin-America and Africa. Both of these publications have a bearing on the overall nutritional well-being of children.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

FAO is particularly concerned with ensuring and increasing household food security, and to this end, has been implementing nutritional improvement programmes, as well as school and supplementary feeding programmes that explicitly have an impact on children.

“Field Programme Management – Food, Nutrition and Development” is a publication that was issued by FAO in 1999 promoting the production of nutrient-rich foods and in this respect, providing dietary advice and encouraging community development activities that could have an impact on community status and household food security.

Similarly, the Organization published “Agriculture, Food and Nutrition for Africa”, a resource book for teachers of agriculture on household food security.

Furthermore, two projects on improving household food security and nutrition are being implemented in the Luapula Valley in Zambia. Since ‘night blindness’ is common among children in this region, these projects serve to augment the supply of Vitamins A and E through an increased supply of crude palm oil. In the Southwest Pacific, especially in Samoa and some of the outer islands in Tonga, a number of dairy development projects are also being implemented to

increase the amount of fresh, pasteurized milk available for home consumption (particularly for mothers and children) and sale.

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS

The Codex Alimentarius Commission regularly reports on items that have implications for the nutritional well-being of infants and children. At present, Codex is working on the following areas:

- Standard for Processed Cereal-Based foods for Infant and Young Children
- National food safety policies regarding the protection of infants and children
- Establishment of separate maximum residue limits (MRLs) for adults and for infants and children for raw commodities
- Cumulative risk assessment related to the sensitivities of infants and children to pesticides
- Draft Revised Standard for Infant Formula which includes recommendations for breastfeeding.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF WEANING FOODS

Weaning foods are often contaminated and are a major cause of diarrhoea and associated malnutrition in developing countries. Fermentation is an affordable technology for the preservation of these foods. A joint FAO/WHO Workshop conducted in Pretoria, South Africa, to assess the risks and benefits of fermentation as a household technology, concluded that lactic fermentation can contribute to the safety, nutritional value, shelf-life and acceptability of foods for infants and young children.

Fermentation is a major component of FAO's work in the area of post-production biotechnology. FAO is currently in the process of documenting a number of traditional fermentation technologies, with the objective of promoting wider interest in the development and improvement of technical, nutritional and safety concerns associated with these foods. FAO also highlighted the need for improvement in fermentation technologies in developing countries at an FAO/IFT Symposium convened at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists in Chicago, Illinois.

HORTICULTURE

In March of this year (2000), FAO began executing the "School gardens in support of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS)" project, which aims to increase production and consumption of horticultural food crops to improve diet and ensure food security to school children through the establishment of sustainable, low-input school gardens.

INCOME GENERATION

Syria has a strong component that focuses on income generation and employment for local community members, particularly women. Training for women groups on possible income generation activities has been initiated and activities have also been initiated to promote community participation, with the aim of ensuring greater sustainability of outputs, related to range management/rehabilitation and wildlife conservation. These activities will seek to generate income for the family, particularly for women and children and help to improve family buying power for food items.

As a follow up to the initiatives undertaken during the first phase of the project the consolidation phase will strengthen the links with the Bedouin women and when possible facilitate their access to literacy activities and sowing courses by facilitating relations with other international agencies such as UNICEF. Guidelines will be produced for the government for alternative income generation activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned activities, FAO is preparing a booklet for schoolchildren on the "Protection and Use of the Savannas of East Africa" that will contribute towards children's understanding of their environment and its sustainable use, as well as a paper on "Rural children living in farm systems affected by HIV/AIDS: Some issues for the rights of the child on the basis of FAO HIV/AIDS studies in Africa".