



ew & Noteworthy in Nutrition



POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

Welcome back.

There have been two especially noteworthy nutrition “events” since the last *NNN* was issued. The first was planned—the release of the *Lancet* series on maternal and child nutrition. An important part of this *NNN* covers that series and the reactions of a number of actors in global nutrition efforts. The second “event” was not planned—the food crisis that has enveloped much of the world. Given the exceptional importance of what is happening with food prices, the availability of food, and their links with hunger and malnutrition, this edition of *NNN* also covers the food crisis. However, in light of the extensive coverage of this topic in leading newspapers and journals, we offer here only a summary article.

The response to the first edition of *NNN* was heartening. We received much valuable feedback. *NNN* has been downloaded from PRB’s website more than 2,100 times, and 769 people have already joined *NNN*’s unique distribution list. In addition, several people and organizations have submitted articles and information to *NNN*, thus contributing in valuable ways to the preparation of this issue. We look forward to more feedback from our readers, to getting additional subscriptions, and to continuing to receive ideas and articles.

In light of what we heard from readers, we have grouped some articles under a new heading called “Nutrition and Development” to highlight these critical links. We have added a new section to *NNN* called “Nutrition Factoids.”

Much more noteworthy material on obesity was available than could be summarized in this issue. We have highlighted only a few articles on obesity here but will cover more in the next issue, given its increasing importance in so many countries. The next issue will also return to having a number of articles on HIV and nutrition.

We would like to offer special thanks to Elaine Murphy and Tom Merrick for helping to underwrite this issue of *NNN*. Ashley Mills, Jacqueline Posada, and Ashley Vij, former students of mine at The George Washington University, also deserve thanks for their excellent work as contributing writers during their internships with PRB over the spring semester. The Secretariat of the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition and the International Food Policy Research Institute were also helpful in the preparation of this issue.

Please share *NNN* with others and encourage them to sign up for *NNN*’s distribution list (subscription information is on the final page of this issue). If we continue to build readership and find the small amount of funding we are seeking to maintain *NNN*, we are hoping to publish six times a year, as many have said they would like to see.

Best regards,

Richard Skolnik
Vice President, International Programs, and Editor, *NNN*
Population Reference Bureau



ew & Noteworthy in Nutrition



POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

In the Headlines

Lancet Launches New Maternal and Child Undernutrition Series.

In January, the *Lancet* launched the much-awaited series on maternal and child undernutrition. In his foreword to the series, which was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the editor of the *Lancet*, Richard Horton, highlighted the extent to which nutrition has slipped through the cracks and the exceptional importance of rapidly scaling up what we already know are effective interventions. He also called for an agency, donor, or political leader to overcome the fragmented leadership of international nutrition activities and to lead this effort.

The series itself is presented in five technical papers. The first addresses the burden of disease related to nutritional causes and concludes that maternal and child undernutrition is the underlying cause of 3.5 million deaths, 35 percent of the disease burden in children under 5, and 11 percent of the total global burden of disease. The paper highlights the importance of vitamin A, zinc, and sub-optimal breastfeeding to child health, as well as the risk to maternal mortality of maternal short stature and anemia.

The second paper examines the consequences for adult health and human capital of maternal and child undernutrition. It concludes that “poor fetal growth and stunting in the first two years leads to irreversible damage, including shorter adult height, lower educational attainment, reduced income, and lower birth weights of offspring.” Another important conclusion, and perhaps the main new message of the series, is that children who are undernourished in the first two years of life but who rapidly gain weight in childhood or adolescence are at high risk of later developing nutrition-related chronic disease.

The evidence about effective interventions for maternal and child survival is summarized in the third paper and suggests that, if known effective interventions were

In This Issue	
In the Headlines	2
On the Food Front	4
Nutrition and Development	5
Nutrition and Health	6
Programs and Projects	8
Complex Humanitarian Emergencies	8
Other News to Note	9
Nutrition Resources and Education	9
Nutrition Factoids	9
Late-Breaking News	10
Until We Meet Again	10

implemented at scale, all child deaths would be reduced by about 25 percent in the short term. Counseling about breastfeeding, fortification, and improvement of complementary feeding is given a high priority. The paper is optimistic about key interventions to improve maternal nutrition, such as supplementation with iron and folate and multiple micronutrients, but indicates that the effectiveness of these at scale has not been adequately assessed.

Effective action at the national level is the subject of the fourth paper, which concludes that nutrition must be a priority at national and sub-national levels, given its centrality to human, social, and economic development. It further highlights the importance of the “window of opportunity” from conception to 2 years of age, and calls for implementing more rapidly and at scale the interventions already known to be effective.



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

The last paper examines international action against undernutrition, concluding that the present organization of international nutrition efforts is badly flawed, that funding for nutrition is inadequate and improperly targeted, and that a new governance structure for international nutrition efforts needs to be developed.

www.theLancet.com/online/focus/undernutrition

An Unexpected (and Not Completely Appreciated?) MSF Response.

Immediately after the release of the *Lancet* series, Doctors Without Borders (*Medecins Sans Frontieres*—MSF) released a statement titled: “*Lancet* Series on Undernutrition Off Target to Save the Lives of Millions of Malnourished Children.” According to MSF, the *Lancet* correctly highlighted nutrition as a critical and neglected aspect of maternal, newborn, and child health. The MSF statement, however, also claimed that the *Lancet* series undermined efforts to promote critically needed changes in the approach to undernutrition because it failed to take sufficient account of deaths from nutritional edema; failed to endorse the WHO, UNICEF, and WFP approach to home-based care of severe acute malnutrition with ready to use food; and focused too much on hospital-based care of the severely malnourished. MSF noted that the *Lancet* series dramatically underestimated the number of deaths attributable to severe acute malnutrition. The MSF statement also objected to the idea that the *Lancet* series would reject community-based care simply because it had not been tested in randomized controlled clinical trials.

www.doctorswithoutborders-usa.org/pr/release.cfm?id=2436

Science Magazine Weighs In. On Feb. 1, *Science* reported on the “spat” between MSF and the *Lancet*. Journalist Martin Enserink wrote that the editor of the *Lancet* had indicated that for now he would no longer accept articles by MSF staffers. Enserink also indicated that one of the authors of the *Lancet* said that the article *did* recommend treating severe malnutrition at home. The article also reported that MSF staff was split about the appearance of the MSF statement. Enserink suggested that MSF and the *Lancet* should mend fences as soon as possible in the name of serving the nutritional needs of mothers, infants, and children. (Those interested in further exploring this matter might wish to review, among other things, pages 46, 47, and 55 of the *Lancet* series.)

www.sciencemag.org

Continuing Discussions at IFPRI. Given the importance of the *Lancet* series, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) devoted its annual Martin J. Forman Memorial Lecture to perspectives on the series from Jean-Pierre Habicht, an eminent nutritional epidemiologist from Cornell University; Marcia Griffiths, the president of the Manoff Group and well-known for her cutting-edge work on behavior change for better nutrition; and Julian Schweitzer, the director for Health, Nutrition, and Population at the World Bank. Professor Habicht highlighted the extent to which he believes the series severely underestimated the role of nutrition in post-neonatal deaths. He also bemoaned the lack of attention to the needs for implementing nutrition programs, calculating that almost all nutrition inquiry is allocated to improving the biology of interventions and almost none to what he calls “delivery sciences.” Marcia Griffiths noted the lack of information in the series about how interventions can be taken to scale and how communities must be involved in those efforts. Julian Schweitzer focused on the need for the nutrition community to raise political will through clear and concise evidence-based messages that focus attention on the need to rapidly scale up programs that work.

www.ifpri.org/events/seminars/2008/20080225Forman.asp

The *Lancet* Series and India. Meera Shekar, the World Bank’s senior nutrition specialist, used the *Lancet* series to provoke India to pay greater attention to nutrition. In an op-ed in the *Hindustan Times*, Shekar noted that despite India’s recent rapid economic growth, 45 percent of India’s children are underweight and 70 percent are anemic; Indian children are twice as likely to be malnourished as children in sub-Saharan Africa; and inequalities in nutritional status have gotten worse in the last two decades. She also highlighted the need to focus attention on the very young and on the five states that account for 80 percent of the malnourished children.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:21657212~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

The SCN—Building on the *Lancet* and More.

The UN’s Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN), meeting in Hanoi in March, produced a set of Recommendations from its 35th Session. These recommendations assert that reducing maternal and child undernutrition must be included in national action plans if countries aim to meet the first Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty and hunger. SCN cites the importance of implementing proven nutrition interventions on a large scale and the essential role of community participation in achieving high program coverage.



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

Furthermore, food and nutrition interventions aimed at pregnant women and children must become part of regular development assistance to effectively decrease the rate of stunting. The recommendations also highlight the importance of better monitoring and assessment of nutrition programs if countries plan to accelerate the reduction of maternal and child undernutrition and meet the MDG target of reducing child malnutrition 50 percent by 2015. Beyond the above, the conference recommendations also call for greater priority for nutrition in development assistance; higher priority for nutrition among UN country teams; a need for the UN to take the lead in urgently developing measures to counteract escalating food prices; and the need to learn from other programs as consideration is given to how global nutrition efforts should be organized.

www.unsystem.org/SCN/Publications/AnnualMeeting/SCN35/35th_Session_Recommendations.pdf

The Bottom Line on the *Lancet* Series? No poll has been conducted of what people think of the *Lancet* series, its likely contribution to improving global nutrition, and what knowledge gaps remain central to addressing maternal and child undernutrition. If we can develop *NNN* as we would like to, we could conduct such surveys among our readers and report on them in *NNN*! If such a poll were conducted today, however, the results would probably indicate considerable appreciation for the support of the Gates Foundation, the work of the authors, and the willingness of the *Lancet* to publish a series on nutrition. At the same time, there would probably be considerable disappointment over the limited press coverage the series received. Many respondents would also highlight the continuing need for a major focus on *how* to implement nutrition interventions, which many would like to have seen in this series. Finally, people would also highlight the need for continued debate and studies on several issues, including the impact of undernutrition on maternal and child morbidity and mortality; the value of community-based growth promotion; the importance of severe acute malnutrition; and the role of community-based use of ready-to-use foods and foods prepared in the community to address severe acute malnutrition.

Gates Steps Up its Nutrition Funding. In line with its recently developed nutrition strategy, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has begun to increase its funding for nutrition. In January, the foundation awarded US\$38 million to the Global Alliance to Improve Nutrition (GAIN), “to increase private sector engagement in the fight against malnutrition in young children” and “work with private companies and public-private partnerships to introduce nutritious foods for infants and young

children between 6 and 24 months of age.” In March, the foundation issued a call for proposals for “Alive & Thrive.” This program would support the development of delivery models for interventions to enhance infant and young child feeding; new approaches to scaling up and sustaining such programs; the monitoring and evaluation of interventions; and advocacy. According to a foundation news release, Alive & Thrive may be allocated up to US\$80 million over five years. The award of this funding is expected soon.

www.gatesfoundation.org

On the Food Front

The ‘Not so Silent Tsunami’? (as *The Economist* Calls it). As seen in the almost unprecedented coverage of food issues in the media in recent months, food prices are soaring worldwide, bringing about a crisis in a number of countries and substantial impacts on the urban poor and on rural dwellers who cannot take advantage of higher prices for some of their basic food crops. In Haiti, there are reports of people eating cookies made of dried yellow dirt, and food riots led to the ouster of the prime minister. There have also been riots in Egypt, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Senegal, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. The Filipino press wonders if the Philippines can find enough rice for a population now over 90 million and the largest rice importer in the world. The World Bank has declared that 30 to 40 developing countries have already been hurt by rises in food prices. The World Food Program (WFP) calls this “the new face of hunger” and, with an increase of about 40 percent in the price of food worldwide, WFP needs a substantial increase in its budget for food aid just to maintain the levels at which it operated earlier.

With the poor spending 50 percent to 80 percent of their incomes on food and this dramatic increase in food prices (of up to 80 percent for rice and wheat), many poor can no longer afford to meet their basic food needs. On May 14, UNICEF estimated that 100 million additional people are at risk of malnutrition as food prices spiral higher.

The dramatic increase in food prices appears to stem from a “perfect storm” of phenomena, including: increased demand for some food, driven by rising incomes, especially in China and India; changes in diet that have led people to consume more meat, thus increasing the demand for animal feed grains; high energy prices, contributing to rising prices for fertilizer and transport; land being used to grow crops for biofuels rather than crops for food; and climate change and drought, especially in Australia, traditionally one of the largest producers of wheat. In addition, the availability



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

of food internationally is being hurt by bans in a number of countries on the export of some basic foods. In short, the crisis is linked to the increased demand for feed, food, and fuel. (One should note, however, protests by the middle class in India over the notion that they are being blamed for causing the crisis, rather than seeing that the real cause is consumption patterns of people in high-income countries.)

World leaders, meeting at the annual Economic Summit in Davos in mid-January, discussed global priorities in hunger and malnutrition, and have been seized with the crisis since. In the short run, the UN and the World Bank have created a food crisis task force, WFP is urgently looking for additional funds for food aid, and the Bush administration in the United States has offered \$750 million to purchase additional food aid. The WFP has also initiated programs contracting local farmers to produce high-energy commodities to order. In addition, in conjunction with Oxfam and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), WFP has attempted to stimulate local demand through supplying direct cash or vouchers to people in low-income countries. To address longer-term issues, the World Bank has pledged to increase overall support for agriculture from \$4 billion in 2008 to \$6 billion in 2009, and to dramatically increase support for agriculture in Africa. In addition, on May 29 the Bank launched a \$1.2 billion program to get emergency aid to countries affected by the food crisis. Robert Zoellick, World Bank president, has called for a much more holistic approach to food policy in the future that looks at the interconnectedness between hunger, the supply of food, access to food, energy, crops yields, and climate change. The Bank believes this is more effective than regulating food prices. As the global discussion of food costs continues, there now appears to be widespread agreement that new policies must address the social, political, and economic consequences of the food crisis.

Nutrition and Development

Research Most Folks Can Only Dream

About. The *Lancet* series was followed by a number of related articles, including one that may be among the most important studies ever conducted on nutrition and its links with development. An article in the Feb. 2 issue of the *Lancet* by John Hoddinott from IFPRI and colleagues from Emory University and the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP)

compares physical growth and earnings patterns of two groups of malnourished children in Guatemala who received different nutritional supplements as part of a study conducted from 1969 to 1977. Successfully tracking about 70 percent of the original subjects for follow-up, this study found that males receiving the more nutritious supplement in their first two years had, as adults, an average hourly wage 46 percent higher. Nutritious supplements given after the age of 3 did not result in the same improvement in economic productivity for males. Some have suggested that this article should be essential reading for everyone involved in development policy.

www.theLancet.com/journals/Lancet/article/PIIS0140673608602056/fulltext

“This research demonstrates that early childhood nutrition is not only crucial for the physical growth of children, but is also a wise, long-term economic investment,” said co-author Reynaldo Martorell, one of the researchers who conducted the original study in Guatemala. In a Jan. 23 presentation at the Population Reference Bureau, and in a PRB webcast interview that same day, Martorell also noted that “just as we need to invest in infrastructure, we need to invest in children.”

www.prb.org/Journalists/Webcasts/2008/nutrition.aspx

Preventing Malnutrition? Preventing infants and young children from becoming undernourished is more effective at reducing community-level child stunting, wasting, and underweight than treating children who are already moderately malnourished. This is the important finding of the study: “Age-Based Preventive Targeting of Food Assistance and Behavior Change and Communication for Reduction of Childhood Undernutrition in Haiti: A Cluster Randomized Trial,” published in the *Lancet* on Feb. 16. Authored by Marie Ruel from IFPRI and colleagues from Cornell University, World Vision Haiti, and the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project at the Academy for Educational Development (FANTA/AED), this work compared two approaches of targeting food-assisted maternal and child health and nutrition programs: a preventive approach of targeting all children less than 2 years of age vs. a recuperative approach of targeting only children who suffer from moderate malnutrition (underweight). At the time of follow-up three years later, “stunting, underweight, and wasting were 4 to 6 percentage points lower in the preventive group than in the recuperative group.”

www.theLancet.com/journals/Lancet/article/PIIS0140673608602718/fulltext



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

Breastfeeding Is Best . . . for National Development, as Well as for Babies. Nine of every 10 babies get extra IQ points when they are breastfed, say researchers in England and New Zealand who tested the effects of breast milk vs. bottle formula on more than 3,000 children. Breast milk contains important fats that foster brain-cell growth and about 90 percent of children carry the gene that allows for the absorption of this fat. The study, which appeared in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, concluded that breastfed children with the gene were found to have IQs seven points higher than bottle-fed children and the 10 percent of children without the gene. The study noted that breastfeeding did not have any effect on the IQ of children without the gene.

www.pnas.org/cgi/content/abstract/104/47/18860

Breastfeeding Reduces Cancer Risks for Women, Too. The American Institute of Cancer Research, after reviewing 98 studies, concluded that breastfeeding lowers a woman's risk for pre- and post-menopausal breast cancer. "The most likely reason that lactation lowers the risk of cancer is through hormonal changes that delay the return of a new mother's menstrual cycle. Overall, women who experience fewer menstrual cycles over their lifetime can expect a lower risk of breast cancer. Breastfeeding also physically changes breast cells, making them less prone to DNA mutations that lead to cancer."

www.aicr.org/site/News2?abbr=pr_&page=NewsArticle&id=13057&news_iv_ctrl=1102

Obesity Costs. As the prevalence of obesity climbs beyond its present level of 34 percent of American adults, increasing medical costs and absenteeism threaten economic productivity. In fact, obesity costs private employers in the United States an estimated \$45 billion annually, according to a new report, *Weights and Measures: What Employers Should Know about Obesity*. According to labor economist Linda Barrington, research director of the Conference Board Management Excellence Program, "Employers need to pay attention to their workers' weights, for the good of the bottom line, as well as the good of the employees and of society." Obesity is associated with a 36 percent increase in health care spending and more than 40 percent of U.S.-based companies have implemented obesity-reduction programs.

www.conference-board.org/utilities/pressDetail.cfm?press_ID=3365

Calculating the Costs of Obesity. Given the rising costs of obesity, the Academy for Educational Development is developing modules to estimate the impact of overweight and obesity in terms of health care costs, mortality, and productivity. The modules are part of the PROFILES process of nutrition policy analysis, already used in more than 35 countries around the world. The aim of this effort is to simplify analysis and provide advocates with effective tools to promote policies and programs to address obesity. www.aedprofiles.org

Nutrition and Health

The Much Too Slow Diffusion of Innovations. Surprisingly, one-third of the families in Indonesia's urban slums and rural areas do not use adequately iodized salt, according to a new study that Richard Semba, Sasika de Pee, and colleagues published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. The study noted that the single best predictor of the use of iodized salt was the educational level of the mother. Families who were in the lowest quintiles of per-capita household income were more likely not to use adequately iodized salt.

www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/87/2/438

An MI Innovation for Rapid Diffusion. The main reason salt has not been universally iodized in some regions is that a sizable part of all production comes from the thousands of small producers from uncharted rural areas with no road or street addresses, and who are unknown by governments. In West Africa, for instance, half of the salt comes from these small producers. The challenge is how to identify and locate their sites so the salt can be iodized to benefit, say, the 60 percent to 70 percent of all households in Ghana and Senegal now without recommended fortified salt. Employing global positioning systems (GPS) for the first time to systematically locate and assess salt field size (by fixing the GPS coordinates of the boundary of each salt field), the Micronutrient Initiative found it easy to estimate the production capacity, based on local yield data, and then help to design group schemes to enable the small producers to iodize their salt. Without addressing this ground reality, says Venkatesh Mannar, MI president, "we can never achieve universal salt iodization." This is the fundamental (but rarely appreciated) proposition: If you wish to make chicken soup, catch the chicken first." . . . Taking creative new approaches to addressing old problems may be one of the reasons MI was rated so highly by members of the international nutrition community in the survey



reported at the recent SCN meeting. The more than 500 survey respondents were asked how well each of the 16 major nutrition-related organizations or groups of organizations had served the field of nutrition. MI came in second, just a hair behind UNICEF. (More on the survey will be in the next NNN.)

Vitamins: Friend or Foe? A Cochrane review of 67 randomized trials of antioxidant supplements found that beta carotene, vitamin A, and vitamin E increased mortality; and that, while vitamin C had no discernible effect on mortality, in some studies selenium did reduce mortality. There was no difference in outcomes for healthy populations or for those suffering from various diseases. The authors concluded that antioxidant supplements need to be considered medicinal products and studied rigorously before marketing. Their findings also indicate that antioxidants, with the possible exception of vitamin C and selenium, do not improve health or prolong life when given either as preventive or therapeutic agents and that vitamin A, beta carotene, and vitamin E supplements may increase all-cause and cancer mortality in adults in high-income countries. www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab007176.html

Vitamin D and Cardiovascular Risks? People moderately deficient in vitamin D (less than 15 nanograms per millimeter) were 62 percent more likely to have heart trouble than those with adequate vitamin D levels, according to a study published in *Circulation*. Of 1,739 men and women who were followed for five years, 120 people developed heart-related problems and the greater the vitamin D deficiency, the higher the risk of these problems. According to the authors, the study suggests that “moderate to severe vitamin D deficiency is a risk factor for developing cardiovascular disease.”

<http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/117/4/503?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=vitamin+d&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>

Complementary Feeding in Developing Countries. There is no universal “best” feeding program because the needs of a population are context-specific and are influenced by existing factors such as prevalence of malnutrition, food security, and local availability of naturally micronutrient-rich foods. This obvious but often neglected principle in planning feeding programs is one of a number of key findings in “A Systematic Review of the Efficacy and Effectiveness of Complementary Feeding in Developing Countries,” by Kathryn Dewey and Seth Adu-Afarwuah, published

recently in *Strategies and Interventions in Public Health Nutrition*. The authors studied 42 complementary feeding programs, including both efficacy trials and program evaluation reports. They concluded that feeding programs that provide food and a key educational message have the greatest impact on growth, especially in young children. However, feeding programs alone cannot overcome the underlying conditions of poverty and should be implemented alongside strategies of improved sanitation, housing, and health care. The prominent challenge to complementary feeding programs is how to implement an effective intervention that is sustainable on a large scale. Overall studies that provided complementary foods and nutrition education to mothers yielded better results than those that emphasized just food or education. Studies in Vietnam, Brazil, India, and Pakistan showed lower morbidity due to decreased rates of diarrhea and respiratory illnesses, but three interventions saw an increase in morbidity due to unhygienic preparation and storage of foods. The impacts of the studies on micronutrient status varied depending on the micronutrient provided, either vitamin A, zinc, or iron, and whether other micronutrient supplementation programs were already underway in the region.

www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2007.00124.x

Obesity and Cancer. Bad news: Being fat might be worse for your health than smoking, according to “Body-Mass Index and Incidence of Cancer: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Observational Studies,” recently published in the *Lancet*. Findings from the *Expert Report of the World Cancer Research Fund* indicate increased risk due to obesity of common cancers such as breast, kidney, and bowel, as well as blood cancers, myeloma and leukemia, and melanoma. Researchers speculate that excess body fat may cause changes in levels of insulin, sex steroids, and other hormones, leading to malignancies and increased risk of cancer. The link between obesity and increased risk of developing cancers poses huge public health concerns in the United States, where two-thirds of the population is classified as overweight or obese, as well as in many other countries in which obesity is rising markedly. Studies are conclusive on the positive association between obesity and cancer, but it is still unclear whether weight reduction will protect people against cancer.

www.dietandcancerreport.org/?p=ER

www.theLancet.com



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

Big Is Beautiful, or Is it? “The glory of a man is measured by the fatness of his woman,” according to an adage that helps to explain Mauritanian men’s attraction to and pursuit of big women. Traditionally in Mauritania, a woman’s being fat was seen as “sexy” and a sign of wealth and social status. In fact, a 2001 survey of 68,000 women between the ages of 15 and 49 found that one in five had been deliberately overfed. The same survey found that two in five women were overweight. Recently, the government launched a media and educational campaign in hopes of ending the overfed ideal. It teaches women how to count calories and maintain a balanced diet, and encourages an exercise regimen to prevent heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=4322187&page=1>

Programs and Projects

Poverty Reduction Strategies That Lack Strategy.

A dramatic disconnect exists between the importance of addressing undernutrition to facilitate poverty reduction and the extent to which nutrition is actually addressed in poverty reduction strategy papers, known as PRSPs. This was the conclusion of a report dated December 2006, but not actually released by the World Bank until recently, *Mainstreaming Nutrition in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: What Does it Take?* Of the 40 PRSPs analyzed, 29 state that malnutrition is a development problem, but only 14 recognize direct productivity loss to malnutrition. While 90 percent of PRSPs include activities related to food security, lack of access to food is generally not the main contributor to malnutrition in those settings, and 40 percent of countries with micronutrient deficiencies include no micronutrient activities related to the PRSP. Moreover, school feeding was proposed in a third of PRSPs, even though children under 2 years of age are the most important target group.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/HEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/Resources/281627-1095698140167/NutritionInPRSPsFinal.pdf>

Complex Humanitarian Emergencies

Since January 2006, over 50,000 citizens of the **Central African Republic** (CAR) have fled to Chad, Cameroon, and the nearby bush in search of security. According to UNICEF, 38 percent of children remaining in the CAR suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Even while receiving approximately \$1 billion annually, **Darfur’s** child malnutrition rates have increased from 12.9 percent to 16.1 percent in the last year, according to a new United Nations report. It notes that deteriorating food security and poor infant and young child feeding practices account for the rising malnutrition rates, despite the large aid operation.

UNICEF reports that internal conflict in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** has worsened food shortages and increased the prevalence of malnutrition. Vitamin A and iodine deficiency are common among the Congolese, and 71 percent of children have iron-deficiency anemia.

Almost 500,000 people were displaced in **Kenya** following political violence there earlier this year. Even under “normal” circumstances, the Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 43 percent of children under 5 suffered from anemia and 76 percent were deficient in vitamin A. During the political crisis, UNICEF was targeting 50,000 children and 5,600 pregnant women for emergency nutritional assistance.

Somalia’s 30-kilometer **Afgoye Corridor** housed over 200,000 internally displaced people after hostilities escalated last October. A nutritional assessment of children conducted by FAO’s Food Security Unit found extremely high acute malnutrition rates of 20 percent, and apparent signs of kwashiorkor.

Approximately 37 percent of children in **North Korea** are chronically malnourished, and one-third of mothers are malnourished and anemic. Recent estimates suggested that the nation would be short 1.4 million tons of food this year, and nearly 6 million North Koreans are estimated to be in chronic need of foreign food aid. WFP monitoring in North Korea shows that one-third of the population never has enough to eat, half of the population sometimes does not have enough to eat, and only 10 percent to 20 percent always have enough to eat.

Six million **Ethiopian** children are at risk of malnutrition, warned UNICEF in mid-May, in light of rising food prices and crop failures. Almost 130,000 children were said to be in need of urgent therapeutic treatment.



New &
Noteworthy
in Nutrition

Other News to Note

Lifetime Achievement Awards. The UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, at its recent session in Hanoi, presented the first-ever awards for “Outstanding Life-Long Contributions and Service to Nutrition” to Michael Latham and Alan Berg. Professor Latham was honored for his important contributions to advancing the health of mothers and children, initially in Tanzania and Uganda, and then influencing conditions in many other countries as a “master teacher whose students now extend his commitment throughout the world.” Alan Berg was called a “global giant in nutrition history” for addressing nutrition as a development issue and bringing the importance of nutrition beyond the nutrition community. Latham is still associated with Cornell University and Berg is now guest scholar of the Brookings Institution, Wolfensohn Center for Development. Also honored on the 30th anniversary of the SCN were professors Tu Giay and Ha Huy Khoi, in recognition of the National Institute of Nutrition’s role in Vietnam’s success in reaching the MDG on child mortality, and being on track to reaching the MDG on reducing underweight.

www.unsystem.org/scn

King Honors Iodine Champion. Dr. Basil Hetzel, one of the founders and long-time head of the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders, was recognized in February by Thai King Bhumipol Adulyadej for pioneering new treatments to combat iodine-related disorders. The Australian doctor has been involved in iodine-deficiency research for more than four decades. Dr. Hetzel’s research has contributed to universal salt iodization programs that have reached two-thirds of iodine-deficient households.

<http://agedcareact.wordpress.com/2008/02/03/aussie-doctors-work-acknowledged-in-thailand/>

www.unisa.edu.au/hawkecentre/patrons/Hetzel.asp

Not Quite on the Same Wavelength. A controversy has flared in India over the attempt by GAIN to set up an Infant and Young Child Nutrition Alliance (IYCN). The partners in the alliance are multinational baby food manufacturers and packers such as Groupe Danone, Unilever, Wockhardt, and Tetrapak. IYCN’s first meeting on April 15 was disrupted by public-health activists, right-to-food campaigners, pediatricians, and representatives of 15 women’s organizations who are concerned that competition from complementary foods backed by baby food manufacturers might interfere with India’s progress toward improving breastfeeding practices.

www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2509/stories/20080509250912700.htm

Nutrition Resources and Education

Breastfeeding Website. The website by Ted Greiner, arguably the premier champion and communicator about breastfeeding issues, has been recently redesigned and considerably expanded.

www.global-breastfeeding.org

Maternal and Neonatal Delivery Care Practices. *Beyond Survival: Integrated Delivery Care Practices for Long-Term Maternal and Infant Nutrition, Health and Development* has recently been published by the Pan American Health Organization. This report aims to ensure that health practitioners do not miss crucial opportunities to implement simple practices that can affect long-term nutrition, health, and developmental outcomes. The report establishes the evidence base for delayed umbilical cord clamping, immediate mother-to-newborn skin-to-skin contact, and early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding, and describes the short- and long-term benefits for both mother and infant. It provides descriptions of the recommended practices, discusses frequently asked questions regarding their application, and addresses the issue of integration of these practices into standard delivery care in coordination with existing efforts to improve maternal and neonatal survival.

www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ca/CA_beyond_survival.pdf

www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ca/CA_delivery_care_practices_eng.pdf

Nutrition Factoids

Aside from food aid, only \$250 million to \$300 million a year is devoted to addressing malnutrition in developing countries; this is approximately a tenth of the roughly \$2.2 billion a year the international community devotes to HIV/AIDS.

An estimated 30 percent of the Earth’s ice-free land is used directly or indirectly in livestock production. The world’s meat consumption in 1961 totaled 71 million tons; in 2007 it was estimated to be 284 million tons. Reflecting their nation’s increased prosperity, the Chinese now consume an average of 110 pounds of meat annually, nearly two-and-a-half times the 44 pounds they ate in 1985.

Seventy percent of employment in Africa is in agriculture; 75 percent of Africa’s agricultural soils are degraded.

Worldwide, an estimated 1 billion adults are overweight, a third of whom are obese. Obesity has more than tripled in most European Union countries since



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the 1980s and the number of obese or overweight children in the EU has risen from 14 million in 2005 to 22 million in 2007. Mexicans now drink more Coca-Cola than milk.

At an earlier stage of her professional life, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first female head of state and the president of Liberia, worked as the project officer on a World Bank-assisted Brazil Nutrition Project—something that clearly groomed her for the presidency.

Late-Breaking News— Just What You Have Waited For!

Top Economists Declare Nutrition as the Best Development Investment. As NNN was going to press, top economists, including five Nobel Prize winners, reported that providing vitamin A and zinc to young children who lack essential vitamins is the world's best development investment. Operating under the rubric of the Copenhagen Consensus, this panel of eight economists concluded that five of the top 10 investments are related to nutrition: In addition to vitamin A and zinc holding the top spots, micronutrient fortification with iron and iodine was the third best investment, biofortification the fifth, deworming and school nutrition the sixth, and community-based nutrition promotion the ninth. Highlighting what many in the nutrition community have been noting for many years: "The panel ranked solutions to this challenge very highly, because of the exceptionally high ratio of benefits to costs. Micronutrients were the top-ranked and fortification was the third-ranked solution, with tremendously high benefits compared to costs." The next issue of NNN will follow up on the Copenhagen Consensus.

www.copenhagenconsensus.com/Default.aspx?ID=788

Letters to the *Lancet*. The May 24 *Lancet* contains a number of letters about the undernutrition series (see pages 1-4 of the issue), including one from MSF. More on these letters in NNN 3.

www.theLancet.com

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