

News & Views

Nutrition Goals for Asia – Vision 2020: Report of the IX Asian Congress of Nutrition 2003

The saga of Asian Congress of Nutrition to compare country exercises with respect to the programmes for the improvement of Nutritional status of populations in the Asian countries begun way back in 1971 at the First Asian Congress of Nutrition held at Hyderabad, India. Also discussed was the need to promote awareness of the latest advances in Nutrition Sciences and utilize them for National Development as well as to foster fraternity among the Asian Nutritionists. The Congress was again held in India after traversing many Asian Capitals during over the last two decades. Nutrition Goals for Asia – Vision 2020 was the theme of the IX Asian Congress of Nutrition held during February 23-27, 2003 at New Delhi, India. The meeting held under the auspices of the Federation of Asian Nutrition Societies (FANS) was organized by the Nutrition Foundation of India (NFI) and the Nutrition Society of India (NSI). It was held under the direction of Dr C Gopalan, doyen of Nutrition Science and President, NFI. About 1400 delegates from all parts of the world attended the Congress among whom over 1000 were from 25 Asian countries.

The goal of achieving Optimal Nutrition and Health for human development in Asia by 2020 appeared to be a reality during the Congress. The comprehensive scientific programme consisted of five Plenary Sessions, three Plenary lectures, five simultaneous symposia on six occasions. In addition, a total of 350 oral presentations were made during 10 free communication sessions and about 500 posters were presented. Thus, the entire gamut of multidisciplinary area of Nutrition was projected by coverage of diverse discipline of Agriculture, Food Science and Technology, Community and Public Health, Genetic, Molecular Biology and Technology, Biotechnology, Food Safety, Toxicology, Risk Science, Medicine, Dietetics, Biochemistry, Education and Animal Science. Though the congregation was by and large attended by scientists and budding scientists, it included Administrators, Policy makers and Technologists, Social Scientists, Dieticians, Academicians.

The Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Government of India, Dr KC Pant, highlighted the Asian dilemma of malnutrition and infection as well as the increasing incidence of degenerative diseases such as Diabetes, Coronary Heart Disease and Cancer due to urbanization, changing lifestyle and food habits.

Dr C Gopalan set the tone for deliberation of Congress, during the first Plenary Session on 'Changing Nutritional Scene in Asia', by calling for a paradigm shift in the objectives to Nutrition Security instead of Food security, child health instead of child survival and education and imparting of skills instead of just literacy. The changing nutrition scene in North East Asian

countries like China, Japan, PDR Korea and Republic of Korea was addressed by Dr Ge Keyou of China, of South East Asia by Dr.E.Siong Tee of Malaysia and that of West Asia by Dr A RO Musaiger of Baharin.

Delivering Gopalan Oration of the NSI, Dr C Chunming of China stressed the important role played by Nutrition in accelerating economic development. Srikanth Memorial Oration of the NSI was delivered by Dr M S Swaminathan. According to him, it is possible to devise an integrated strategy for the elimination of hunger, which should involve the introduction of a life cycle approach to nutrition needing appropriate intervention and nutritional safety net pro-gramme.

The Plenary Session on 'Newer technologies for Augmenting food production' consisted of presentation on GM foods by Dr SK Datta of IRRI, Manila, Dr GS Kush of USA; Biofortification by Dr H Bouis of IFPRI, Washington as well as Dr J Hunt of ADB Manila and on Fishery production by Dr MJ William of Malaysia. Another Plenary Session on 'Nutrigenetics and nutrigenomics' threw light on recent advances in genetics and genomics. Dr Simopoulous of USA urged that dietary intervention must be based on understanding of the frequency of genes in the population.

The scientific basis of the traditional health promoting foods such as spices, soybean from Asian countries like China, India and Korea were presented. Besides two novel plenary sessions viz., meet the Professor: Nutrition Vision for the future with presentations from Prof John Waterlow of UK and Dr MK Gabr of Egypt and Science industry interaction with presentations from Dr FS Solon of Philippines and Dr Soekirman of Indonesia were also held. During one of the plenary lectures, Dr.Sook He Kim of Korea pleaded for the elimination of cultural and traditional bias or discrimination against women in Asia. Professor M Wahlqvist provided evidence for factors such as integrative indices of food intake, with a plant food intake, regular fish consumption, and physical activity, if successfully incorporated early enough should reduce frailty and disability in an ageing population. The success stories of China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand in improving food and nutrition security through addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition at both macro and micro level can guide future food security and nutrition planning, opened Dr K Tontisirin of FAO. Delivering a keynote address on Nutrition as a human right, Dr CA Florentino of the Philippines indicated that the initiatives taken by individuals and groups to exercise their rights provide inspiration and valuable lessons for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food and nutrition.

Besides the above plenaries, 30 Symposia on topics in area of Food Safety, Nutrition in relation to Agriculture, Reproduction, various Clinical conditions, Education, different micronutrients, obesity, cancer, fortification, Food technology and disaster, etc. were held wherein distinguished speakers from several countries presented papers.

The Scientific discussions during the Congress were centred around not only on current nutrition scenario in different regions of Asia on evolving problems, such as shift in patterns of nutrition related disorders and effect of urbanization, but also suggested solutions taking into account practical needs of specific countries of the region. The solutions suggested included:

- (i) Using emerging technologies such as Information Technologies for which Asia has a leadership in the whole world today and Biotechnology for which Asia has a strong scientific talent base;

- (ii) Using traditional knowledge and wisdom existing in many of the Asian countries;
- (iii) Increase awareness of the Community particularly by working together;
- (iv) Carrying out appropriate research including in frontier areas of science. There was a high level of discussion on Frontier Science areas combining basic and academic aspects, policies, programmes and their implementations, intervention and technologies.

Clear goals such as attaining nutrition security, in addition to food security both at the individual and household level as well as among different segments of the populations were suggested. There was optimism that solutions could be found and targets achieved in time.

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