

## Review Article

# Developing new forms of regional support for Sub-Saharan Africa

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Trends in malnutrition continue to deteriorate in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) despite global progress made over the past 50 years in improving the basic human development indicators. One of the major contributing factors to this poor nutritional situation in SSA has been the lost decade of the 1980s due to the structural adjustment and debt burdens of most countries.

The poor economic situation and social crisis in SSA have resulted in an increase in the number of impoverished people, with the majority of those classified as being middle class in the 1970s moving to upper lower class and lower middle class positions in society. The number of those living on the poverty line, at below US\$1 a day, has also increased.

The outcome is a decline in the quality of life, mostly among women and children, with malnutrition and its functional impairments as the greatest consequence. Thus, reducing or eradicating poverty represents the main strategy for nutrition improvement in SSA.

Several UN conferences have provided a basis for developing new forms of regional support for eradicating malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa. The most relevant to nutrition improvement are the World Summit for Children 1990, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992, International Conference on Nutrition 1992, International Conference on Population and Development 1994, World Summit for Social Development 1995, Beijing 1995 and the World Food Summit 1996.

While many nation states in Sub-Saharan Africa are signatories to the declarations and plans of action of these conferences, their implementation have been non-existent or of low priority in many SSA countries. Thus, there is a need to develop new forms of regional support to eradicate malnutrition in SSA countries, making a priority the implementation of these declarations.

The goals agreed upon should provide direction and focus and must be pivotal to the actions of UN agencies in each country. These UN agencies need to work in a coordinated manner with the governments of each country to mobilize resources in implementing concrete actions involving government and its agencies as well as civil society organizations.

The following elements should be part of the strategic plans for developing new forms of regional support for Sub-Saharan Africa in efforts to improve nutrition.

1. Establish and/or strengthen regional, sub-regional and national nutrition research and training institutions for focused action.

2. Establish and/or strengthen national, sub-regional and regional networks of NGOs active in community development programs with emphasis on poverty reduction and nutrition improvement.

3. Promote the use of multi-sectoral, multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to nutrition and quality-of-life improvements through advocacy and integrated programs.

4. Improve the priority rating for nutrition through the relocation of the coordination of nutrition activities from health ministries to national planning ministries as a focal point.

5. Promote inter- and intra-ministerial collaboration in program planning implementation, monitoring, evaluation and advocacy.

6. Identify through participatory research for scaling up, successive community-based integrated nutrition programs within a sustainable livelihoods system.

7. Strengthen government/NGO collaboration in the program cycle in each SSA country.

8. Promote the establishment of regional and national food and nutrition policy frameworks for action.

9. Promote the incorporation of nutrition considerations into development policies and programs.

10. Establish a nutrition surveillance system within the national, district and community level statistical systems to monitor and evaluate changes and trends in the nutrition situation within any country in SSA. This should lead to the publication of updates of trends and risks of the population to malnutrition in these countries.

If these strategies can be implemented by the Administrative Coordinating Committee/Sub-Committee on Nutrition along with the UN system-wide proposal for coordinating action at the country level, the global goals for nutrition can be achieved in SSA in the year 2015.

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