

NSA

Disease-Related Malnutrition

Finding solutions to the nutritional dilemmas in Africa for child health: HIV/AIDS orphans, poverty and hunger

T Atinmo and D Oyewole

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Problems related to nutrition are critical constraints to economic growth and these have been exacerbated with HIV/AIDS epidemics, leading to a phenomenal increase in the number of orphans in Africa. There are intertwined linkages between poverty and hunger and these undoubtedly impinge on child survival. Finding solutions to nutritional dilemmas in Africa needs to go beyond non-nutritional divides and it should be realized that improving nutrition in developing countries is both humanitarian and an economic imperative. Sustained poverty reduction will require economic growth centered on labour-intensive, employment creating policies and technologies in the atmosphere of political stability. However, economic growth can be slow process by which to reduce poverty, but there is no guarantee that growth alone will adequately improve the incomes of the poorest in society. Therefore, it becomes necessary to institute strategies, which would not only focus on economic growth indices but also include programs that will better the living conditions of the people, with special consideration for children.

African countries need to identify with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) if sincere nutritional care is to be provided for the people to improve their well-being and production capacity. Therefore, it is appropriate for national governments and their development partners to initiate different "better life programs" (BLPs) to facilitate and ensure that citizens have access to the tools that will allow them meet their food and nutritional requirements.

Better life programs, which are forms of social protection services, will provide the necessary support to cushion the excruciating effect of poverty including opportunities for HIV/AIDS risk-reduction and insurance role. The fact that tax system in most African countries are not reliable in terms of collection and management suggests the need for an equity sharing processes, which can easily be linked with BLPs in terms of income and resource redistribution. BLPs may include school-based feeding programs targeted at school-age children, subsidy on basic commodities like food and services including provision of portable water, power supply and agricultural inputs. In addition to these, creating employment opportunities and setting up of social health insurance scheme will complement arrangement to enhance better living condition. It is suggested that introduction of micro-credit and enterprise promotion will also boost the relevance of BLPs.

The individual and private organizations also have roles to play in finding solutions to the nutritional problems militating against child health. Family adoption of birth spacing method will reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and improve caring capacity. This is considered as individual responsibility, which could be facilitated by provision of basic health care services. Private organizations need to design appropriate technology and low cost products that could be sold at affordable prices to marginal income earners in order to facilitate their accessibility and affordability of the product. NGOs and community-based organizations can organize initiatives to provide care for sick parents and orphaned children. They can also assist in monitoring impacts of BLPs and play crucial role in setting up early warning systems and rapid response systems around shocks.

Lastly, the impetus to execute large scale BLPs that will benefit the children is strengthened by availability of resources, organizational structure of the relevant institutions and political support from the home government. Expectedly, the people who are likely to benefit from BLPs interventions tend to be relatively poor. Thus, the interventions, in addition to their intrinsic value in reducing child inadequate nutrition, are likely to provide important gains in terms of reducing current poverty and increasing future productivity.