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FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

VIEWPOINT PAPER

*Benefits and Costs of the Food Security and Nutrition
Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*

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Post-2015 Consensus

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Introduction

The article addresses a serious issue of nutrition, and particularly makes the case for the attractiveness of investment in nutrition as it provides a high a cost benefit ratio. This viewpoint argues that, rather than stunting, underweight is the most appropriate indicator for nutritional assessment as it provides for both weight for age and height for age nutritional indicators that allow for both acute and chronic nutrition status. The paper argues that inadequate nutrition not only contributes to child mortality but also influences morbidity patterns in terms of predisposition to deficiency conditions and opportunist infections that could further deteriorate health as well as increasing poverty in an economic sense. This, it is indicated that it also formed one of the perspectives of the first Millennium Development Goals, not to mention the impact on a national economy as a result of multiple cases.

Viewpoint

The core focus of the perspective paper provided interesting and logical arguments towards overall nutritional assessment, costing. Overall (height for age) stunting was fronted as the most appropriate indicator with concentration on the 1000 days (from conception to the second birthday of the child). However, this subdues the influence of nutritional interventions on the child from the second birthday to the fifth birthday that makes the first 60 months of a child from birth. It also ignores the nutritional vicissitudes or adaptations that could happen beyond. This period has long been indicated as also important to an infant's growth and an opportunity to redeem any nutritional short comings in the early 1000days.

In many rural communities, it is a common practice that mothers conceive before or about the second birthday of a child. This implies withdrawal of breastfeeding which at the time is the primary source of a comprehensive balanced diet and a shift to the normal general household ration and diet behavior. This implies that a child assessed at 1000 days would perhaps register a good score on the height for age nutritional indicator though an assessment done much later, say four years may indicate a stunted child and may not account for nutritional interventions and scores made in the early part and perhaps support in informing critical intervention points in the growth cycle of a child as resources for any intervention are scarce.

It is noteworthy the permanent results of stunting amongst individuals may not consider attempts to improved nutritional changes after an era/ period of nutritious food scarcity for example a prolonged adaption to weaning by a child, hunger/famine, prolonged general illness by another diseases condition and perhaps due to the longitudinal nature required of a stunting assessment, it does not allow for measure of drastic nutrition interventions within the small timeframe that a noticeable change can be achieved.

Stunting as a measure negates the genetic predisposition of communities as a result of primordial genetic makeup or by influences of the environment/adaptation or lifestyle. For example the Batwa and Bakonjo tribes in Uganda are generally short in stature; therefore

utilizing stunting as a measure of nutritional status would regard the entire community / region 'falsely' undernourished; if not comprehensively then at average.

Stunting as a nutrition indicator is an expensive assessment tool as it looks at chronic/long term under nutrition follow up which may not be carried out on a large community of a heterogeneous nature that can ably inform a global perspective, therefore regionally controlled studies are not representative of the global view and thus cannot be used on a universal scale.

The economic benefit: cost ratio perspective sidelines the importance of other underlying factors such as family planning and safe motherhood practices, health services access, Primary health care, and political environment all of which contribute to the preparation of the mother and general care after conception and have key connotations on the health of the mother. For example, the rate of anaemia amongst mothers and the macro and micro nutrient bioavailability prior, during and post pregnancy; all critically affect the nutritional status of a child.

The example indicated as an economic perspective on the homogenous group in Guatemala may not be able to alter a global perspective as various factors affect the economic standards of individuals including education status, entitlements, family status to mention but a few. In many rural African communities individuals may not have the height for age assumed by various scales for nutritional assessment but may have the right weight for height (Body Mass Index) that is a rapid nutritional status assessment tool that could address both issues of chronic and acute nutritional uptake.

Conclusion

In conclusion, underweight is the most appropriate indicator for nutritional assessment as it provides for both weight for age and height for age nutritional indicators that allowing for both acute and chronic nutrition status. It is inconclusive to have a single specific nutrition indicator as a measure for nutrition intervention/ status of an individual(s) as a person with the right height for age may severely be wasted or be underweight that would categorize the individual as unhealthy for example consider a person with an appropriate height for age who caught on a wasting syndrome such as AIDS, nutritional assessments on such an individual would show under nutrition or perhaps consider an entire country because of civil strife has individuals taking lower meal sizes that recommended and in the end realizing mass wasting even though the achieved heights are not changed.

This paper was written by Daisy N. Owomugasho Country Director, The Hunger Project Uganda. The project brings together 60 teams of economists with NGOs, international agencies and businesses to identify the targets with the greatest benefit-to-cost ratio for the UN's post-2015 development goals.

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