

Policy dialogue summary

Problem of malnutrition in  
Sudan and suggested  
solutions

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The views expressed in the dialogue summary are the views of the dialogue participants; the template format for the dialogue summary was adapted from the McMaster Health Forum.

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Dialogue:

The policy dialogue about Problem of malnutrition in Sudan and suggested solutions was held on June 2013 at the Federal Ministry Of Health Great Hall. Khartoum, Sudan. The policy dialogue was facilitated by Prof. Abdalla Elkhawad, Dr. Louran Z. Ali, and Mr. Talal Faroug Mahgoub

## Summaries of the deliberations:

Several dialogue participants noted the following as major concerns with regards to the problem of malnutrition in Sudan are:

- Malnutrition is major national problem that requires attention.
- Address of chronic malnutrition is priority to improve prevention to protect the nation from the drawbacks of malnutrition.
- Multi-sectoral approach is needed to scale up interventions and promote stakeholders contribution to the problem solving.

### Background to the policy dialogue:

The policy dialogue was convened in order to support a full discussion of the relevant considerations (including research evidence) about a high priority issues. Key features of the dialogue were:

1. Addressing an issue being currently faced in Sudan.
2. Focus on different features of the problem, including the mostly affected groups, areas, etc.
3. Informed by pre- circulated policy brief that focus on options for the approach in addressing the policy issue.
4. Informed by full discussion about the problem factors and possible elements of an approach for addressing it;
5. Brought together many partners who would be involved in or affected by future decisions.
6. Ensure fair representation among policy makers, stakeholders and researchers.
7. Engage facilitator to assist with the deliberations.
8. Allow for frank, off- the- record deliberation by following the Chatham House rule " participants are free to use the information received during the meeting, but neither the identity nor affiliation of the speaker(s) nor that of any other participant, may be revealed"
9. Did not aim for consensus.

Participants' view and experience and the tacit knowledge they brought to the issues at hand were key inputs to the dialogue. The dialogue was designed to spark insights.

### Investing in Nutrition in brief

Recent assessments of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) show slower progress than expected. The global development community recently has recognized that one reason for slow gains in the MDGs is the lack of investment in nutrition, the virtually "forgotten MDG". Research confirms that investing in nutrition significantly multiplies positive outcomes in maternal and child health, cognitive function and educability, human capital, and economic growth and poverty reduction. However, despite the proven high returns, 36 countries carry about 90 percent of the global burden of under nutrition, and nutrition investments are inadequate in many of these countries. To finance the scale up of effective nutrition solutions globally, an estimated \$10.3 billion per year is required.

## **Deliberation about the problem:**

The meeting participants discussed the problem; its factors and implications in details. Problem found to be complex due to the nature of the problem that it is a manifestation of multi factors. Dialogue participants stressed on these nutrition factors: the climate change with its impact on food availability and price, community beliefs and taboos and the existing conflict in different parts of the country and the high poverty rate. Furthermore, the low community and stakeholder's awareness about malnutrition causes, magnitude and its management is great obstacle. Malnutrition is a global problem however it doesn't get the needed global attention. Almost all dialogue participants agreed that malnutrition problem is one of the top priorities for the government's development agenda, not because it is the commonest, but because its effect is very serious and irreversible. Some participants argue that the under estimation of malnutrition importance and seriousness comes from its sensitivity. However, it is a multi-factorial issue with huge complications such as children's low brain development, poor school performance and finally less productivity at individual level. Therefore has lasting effects into adult life, income potential and may generally undermine national productivity and development. This makes stunting as one of the most challenging nutrition issue in Sudan. Thus the resources and coverage of management of the acute malnutrition as whole is very low.

Community contribution is one of the major issues discussed in the problem part. The participants agree that the issue of malnutrition is far beyond the scope of Ministry of health (MOH) alone although MOH is the institution dealing with the problem at its end stage. Throughout the past years major interventions with regards to malnutrition focused on acute malnutrition; however it needs a one coordinated support from the other sectors to address the prevention of malnutrition.

## **Deliberation about the four policy options:**

The dialogue participants discussed the four policy brief options. The meeting agreed on the four options stated in the policy brief as complementary options and with consensus and emphasis on option four as umbrella for the rest of the three options. It found to be important for problem prevention, prevalence reduction and improvement of the treatment. It's a feasible option and possible to be implemented. Furthermore the participants pointed to the importance of scaling up nutrition profile in the government agenda and joining the Scale up Nutrition movement. In addition to, the following issues hampered by the participants:

1. Prevention of malnutrition through community awareness raising to improve the dietary practices, orientation on good food values. TV, radio and mass media play integral role with regards to option one.
2. Development of national strategy for community behavior change. In this strategy we need to utilize the mass media, community and religious leaders hampering on good Sudanese community values and religious believes.
3. There is a need for development of curriculum and training courses on nutrition for the community, school kids up to medical schools, orientation on nutrition programs should include media people. This step is important to ensure good nutrition practices and provision of good advice to caretakers. Training for doctors and nurses on giving nutrition advice is important to orient mothers during their presence in hospitals is important.
4. Improvement of treatment services is needed; improve case identification through regular growth monitoring, proper treatment of acute and moderate cases of protein energy malnutrition and development of good referral system for severe cases. Hospital setup should be conducive for malnutrition treatment through special words and cadres.
5. Research is important to assess the problem at community level, national research priorities and program is needed to assess the ongoing activities and future planning and to make use of the results to inform the decisions.
6. Attention to reproductive health is important; maternal health and child spacing are key and this is the essence of the 1000 days initiatives. Apply proper maternal and child services integration with good health education is important for making progress in the malnutrition prevention and treatment
7. Water availability and sanitation are challenges for nutrition in Sudan. In some rural areas 40% of households income goes to availing safe drinking water so, this issue needs attention and support to improve health and nutrition.
8. Development of national coordination entity is needed and priority. However, the role of communities and private sectors has to be emphasized. Partners and players should have clear term of references. MOH role in this body formulation and leadership is critical. To foster development in the country this body has to be linked to states and local levels to ensure participation and decentralization.

9. Learning from food security process there is a need for raising awareness and sensitization on the issue, sectors plans and legislation to support the coordination body. Also there is a need for a platform for nutrition using the existing wide media sector and telecommunication companies
10. The rising nutrition prices are a challenge. There is a need for investment in the production and marketing the traditionally produced food items especially milk production and fish resources through micro financing or introduction of new technologies to reduce cost, ensure availability and access to wide range of population and profit retain to the producing communities. Revision of government policies such as food subsidies, nationwide application of successful food availability strategies such as food for education and food for health which is successful in some parts of the country.
11. Surveillance system is important. Integration of information system and development of system answers how to monitor both food security and access to food e.g. conditional cash support is important. Timely communication and sharing of information is crucial for information validity.
12. Encourage private sector to produce good nutrition rich products through development of binding food fortification policy, improvement of food industries, and exemption of raw materials from taxes. Furthermore, unification of the certificate of validity and quality to avoid contradiction and delays.

## **Implementation arrangement and way forward**

The participants supported the four policy brief options. However, in the implementation process option four recommended to be step one; the establishment of High level coordination body for Nutrition. This coordination body is composed of all nutrition concerned or related bodies; government, donors, private or community representative bodies. It is planned to work on planning, coordinating and leading the nutrition aspects in coordination as well as creating similar bodies to be established in the states.

The participants pointed to importance of consideration of the variation between states with regards to the severity of malnutrition for proper prioritization or to select the appropriate intervention and avoid challenges during implementation.

The participants recommended establishment of a national committee, representing different stakeholders. The same committee who developed the policy brief should continue in addition to other

members who had not been included before. The main function of this committee is to follow up with the undersecretary on implementation of these meeting recommendations in coordination with different stakeholders to execute the following activities:

- Needs of one multi sectorial coordination body (national strategic plan- national body) this body could be standing alone nutrition body, aligned with (the under process of establishment) food security council or under the planning department of ministry of finance
- Continue on problem dialogue among undersecretaries and ministers of concerned ministries and other higher country leaders
- Development of a national multi sectorial nutrition strategy and nutrition trust fund based on the costed strategy.
- Sudan should do the ground work to join the global nutrition movements such as SUN and REACH
- The proper reflection of the problem to the parliament to lead the advocacy at the minister's cabinet.
- United nation agencies will develop and sign a memorandum of understanding among them to clarify UN agencies roles and responsibilities with regards to nutrition.
- Undersecretary of the FMOH promised to take the meeting recommendations and stakeholders suggestion with regards to development of nutrition multi-sectoral coordination body to the higher levels to be discussed in the council of ministers.

Conclusion:-

- The same committee who developed the policy brief share the meeting minutes and updated policy brief version with all stakeholders within one week from this meeting and steer the process for the above mentioned next steps.