

## Editorial

# Making nutrition work for development

Despite significant progress in the fight against malnutrition, large populations in low- and middle-income countries are suffering from hunger and micronutrient deficiencies<sup>(1)</sup>. In various African countries and populations of low socio-economic strata worldwide, additional and better-targeted efforts are needed to break the vicious cycle of malnutrition. Against this backdrop, diet-related chronic diseases are expanding rapidly and require urgent attention<sup>(2)</sup>. In addition, emerging environmental threats such as climate change, population growth, changing social structures and deterioration of natural resources and livelihoods will require new ways of thinking to mitigate the impact on nutritional status.

Fortunately, as explained in an accompanying editorial by Anna Lartey – incoming President for the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) – in the current issue, there presently is a considerable amount of attention on nutrition in low- and middle-income countries. To mention just a few, the launch of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement, the organization of the UN High-Level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases and the G8 meetings during the past years are important events that have placed nutrition at the centre stage of international development.

As this month's issue of *Public Health Nutrition* illustrates, there is no lack of nutrition research from low- and middle-income countries. Research findings from several regions of the world are included; i.e. Africa: Senegal<sup>(3)</sup>, Uganda<sup>(4,5)</sup>, Mozambique<sup>(6,7)</sup>, Mali<sup>(8)</sup>, Sudan<sup>(9)</sup>, Kenya<sup>(10–13)</sup> and South Sudan<sup>(14)</sup>; Asia: Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia<sup>(15)</sup>, India<sup>(16–18)</sup>, Pakistan<sup>(19)</sup> and Sri Lanka<sup>(20)</sup>; the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago<sup>(21)</sup>; and Latin America: Colombia<sup>(22)</sup>. This research reflects the wide range of nutritional issues that low- and middle-income countries face, i.e. the prevention and management of diet- and lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases<sup>(15,17,20,21)</sup>, nutritional deficiencies<sup>(4,5,7–11,13,16,19)</sup> or a combination of both<sup>(21)</sup>. Other papers focus on food security<sup>(14)</sup>, programme evaluation<sup>(12,18)</sup> or on methodological issues such as the assessment of anthropometry<sup>(3)</sup> or dietary intake<sup>(6)</sup>.

Importantly, in the vast majority of these papers, the leading author is associated with an institution based in low- and middle-income countries. Home-grown research is essential to address nutrition in low- and middle-income countries as it generates contextual knowledge for policy makers to take action. It is essential to help policy makers make an informed decision for political action. It is important that this process is rationalized to save valuable

resources, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where funding and capacity are stretched<sup>(23)</sup>. Recent initiatives from the SUNRAY project<sup>(24)</sup> and The Sackler Institute for Nutrition Science<sup>(25)</sup> are a significant start to guide nutrition research in low- and middle-income countries. However, they will require further appropriation in the research community, in particular those working in low- and middle-income countries. An important way to get the priorities right will be to link nutrition researchers with their policy makers and other stakeholders to define a research agenda.

The time is ripe to reflect on the role of nutrition research in international development and policies. *Public Health Nutrition* will continue to publish papers about nutrition in low- and middle-income countries, and from researchers in those countries, and we will continue to serve as a forum for developing ideas to link nutrition research to programmes and policies. Beyond the role that our and other journals can play, we note that for the first time since its creation in 1946, the IUNS will be led by an African scientist. This is important, as the IUNS is the highest body to advocate for nutrition research globally. The upcoming joint FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition and the 2013 IUNS congress in Granada will mobilize a large body of nutrition researchers from low- and middle-income countries. These are unprecedented opportunities for the nutrition community. Critical issues such as the translation of nutrition research into effective action and the development and propagation of sustainable dietary patterns cannot be ignored. RSVP, anybody?

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