

Mindsets really shifting?

Reading with great anticipation, it has been illuminating to me to ponder each of the responses to Alan Berg's informal survey. Given the colleagues he selected to send the survey to, for us old-timers, several of their responses could have been guessed. People primarily stick to their silos -- and that is OK. But when asked transcendental questions about our professional responsibilities beyond engineers and outlooks for the future (to use Alan's concept), would we not expect interviewees to step out from their silos to embrace the greater commons issues desperately calling for action? I am noting that a few of the respondents, in a way, did. But as relates to the XXIst century central issue in such an endeavor, namely the right to food*, our interviewees had nothing to say -- at least not directly. (Yes, the right to food is a maker of development -- paraphrasing Lawrence Haddad). A bit better in the responses fared the mention of the need to address the social determination of hunger and malnutrition, as well as of obesity. Although not mentioned by name, several colleagues did veer off from biomedical and technocratic solutions and ventured into the realm of the social determinants. Last but not least -- it should come as no surprise for those who know me -- I found an across-the-board neglect in the responses to an explicit mention of the political upstream causes of both under and overnutrition. This, for me, made a good part of the responses Alan intended to elicit moot since, according to them, the key issues at stake are being left unresolved for the future. Having listened to Alan's Boston presentation, I feel he took some of the advice received via this survey with a grain of salt.

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*The right to food is derived from the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) that had 171 ratifying parties. (A further four countries, including the United States, have signed but not ratified.) Among other things, the Covenant states that those who ratify it agree to take steps to the maximum of their available resources to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to adequate food, both nationally and internationally. In a total of 106 countries, the right to food is applicable either via constitutional arrangements of various forms or via direct applicability in law of various international treaties in which the right to food is protected. [More of what public health nutrition professionals should know about this right is found in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_food]