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Editorial

Turning the Tide: Reclaiming Nutrition Justice Amid Global Setbacks

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As we unveil Volume 16, Issue 2 of World Nutrition, the official journal of the World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA), we do so under a cloud of paradoxes and pressing concern. On one hand, the global nutrition community continues to make strides in research, innovation, and community-driven interventions. On the other hand, the disturbing regression in international development assistance casts a long shadow over these ongoing efforts.

The editorial following this one by **Jain and I** chronicles the cascading consequences on nutrition of the unprecedented withdrawal of global development assistance funding—most notably by the United States and key European donors. The fallout: halted lifesaving programs, fractured infrastructure, and lost institutional memory. These losses are not abstract. They are measured in stunted lives, shuttered food kitchens, and children who will not survive simply because known, affordable solutions have been sidelined.

A currently running **NY Times editorial** gives a single stark example of the harm that just the dismantling of USAID will do. Some 40 million people were helped by humanitarian aid in the 2020-23 Horn of Africa drought, the longest ever recorded in the three countries it spanned — Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Dr. Oliver Watson of Oxford University modeled drought deaths, estimating that without American aid, between 2.1 million and 3.9 million more excess deaths would have occurred. Yet very few people around the rest of the world are aware of these kinds of ongoing life-saving actions.

Against this backdrop of funding attrition, our featured research, reviews, and commentaries provide both a sobering lens and a hopeful scaffold. From sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia, from rural villages to university campuses, the 16 articles featured in this issue—comprising one editorial, ten original research studies, three literature reviews, and two commentaries—offer timely insights that challenge us to reflect, reassess, and act with urgency.

The late Prof. Hans Rosling used to joke with physicians who had pretentions about being able to consult on nutrition by telling them outright that nutrition is far too complex for physicians to be able to cope with. One of the most difficult and time-consuming types of research in our field (and consequently often lacking) is dietary assessment on large-scale probability samples. **Akob et al.** have done two of these in the challenging environment of northwest Cameroon. They highlight persistent gaps in dietary fiber and micronutrient intake, even in communities meeting dietary diversity thresholds. These findings raise important questions about the adequacy of current dietary guidelines and underscore the need for more nuanced interventions. Focusing on another method for diet assessment, **Hammed et al.** challenge the conventional 24-hour dietary recall framework, urging researchers in low-income settings to adapt methodologies such as a 7-day recall to capture habitual eating patterns more accurately.

Ameye and Glatzel's commentary argues for a more nuanced understanding of processed foods—distinguishing between nutrient-rich, minimally processed staples and harmful ultra-processed products—while linking food systems to gender equality, economic resilience, and sustainability in Africa. Even more important is to find ways to increase consumption of whole foods. Two of our papers deal with some of the most nutritious of them, vegetables. **Ejoh and colleagues** report promising outcomes from a school garden-nutrition program in Ibadan, underscoring the potential of experiential learning to shift children's dietary behaviors -- the critical importance of not just teaching about gardening, but also giving children experiences with it. **Oyewole and Olugbodi** assess consumption patterns of indigenous leafy vegetables in Ibadan, revealing how urban lifestyles challenge traditional dietary habits. These foods, consumption and awareness of which is often declining, are not only highly nutritious but also low-cost, often available for free in the wild.

As many past commentaries in this journal have emphasized, food-based approaches need to get more attention in strategies to combat micronutrient deficiencies. One of the most challenging in this regard is iron deficiency. **Agrawal and Kanani** examine relevant dietary issues among university women in India, where iron deficiency is common, calling for targeted institutional interventions.

Two studies look at the potential of using herbal drinks to achieve health and nutrition objectives, while potentially reducing consumption of competing products such as fizzy drinks. **Fauziyah's** study on the flavored "zobo" drink in Nigeria illustrates how sensory preferences can influence beverage choices and open new doors for public health messaging among young adults. In Cameroon, **Ngwa et al.** present a study on the formulation and sensory testing of

similar herbal tea powders using indigenous herbs and flavorings.

The theme of maternal and child nutrition resonates throughout several articles. **Sulayman et al.** demonstrate how even a brief postnatal nutrition education session at a primary health center can significantly enhance knowledge and perhaps some practices among breastfeeding mothers. **Jayalakshmi and Kannan** critique the implementation gaps in India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program in Kerala, revealing structural inefficiencies and a worrying lack of prioritization of child nutrition by an otherwise progressive state. **Awal et al.'s** qualitative exploration of South Asian mothers in London unveils the nuanced intersections of religion, culture, and maternal feeding decisions. **Carsone and Smith** provide the fourth phase of research, determining if the EATS Feeding Assessment can be used as an outcome measure for children with feeding problems.

Reviews and commentary in this issue provoke broader reflections. **Fregene and co-authors** raise timely concerns about saturated fat consumption among pregnant and lactating women in Nigeria, calling for regulatory reforms to curb non-communicable diseases. **Bailey and Okoduwa's** critical review explores how digital platforms, especially social media, could become transformative tools for nutrition equity—if we bridge the digital divide and responsibly harness their power. Finally, **Mughal et al.'s** conceptual exploration of "circadian cuisine," dealing with the relatively new field of chrononutrition, invite us to recognize nutrition not only in biochemical terms but through the rhythms of human physiology over time.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue reflect a shared call to action: we must not allow nutrition to become collateral damage in geopolitical and economic disruption as the xenophobic far right claws its way into power in country after country. Instead, we must reclaim nutrition as a fundamental human right—intertwined with equity, sustainability, and dignity.

Indeed, nutrition is not a siloed science—it is a dynamic field influenced by culture, policy, technology, education, and environment. As such, the kind of interdisciplinary solutions championed by the field of public health nutrition that center communities, equity, and sustainability are our best chance at regaining momentum.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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