

November blog
Reggie Annan



This month's column is all about nutrition in Africa. I begin above with sunset over the Mara river in Kenya, where I have been recently for last and this month's column. There have been some big events in October. These have included the United Nations Summit in New York to discuss the Millennium Development Goals. First ladies from African countries have also joined in the fight against malnutrition and poverty.

Last month I wrote about the African Nutrition Society and the fourth African Nutrition and Epidemiology Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. I mentioned my expectations for the congress. Are these expectations being met?

The Millennium Development Goals
Do not fail this time

'We must not fail the billions who look to the international community to fulfil the promise of the Millennium Declaration for a better world. Let us meet in September to keep the promise'. UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon said this prior to the UN summit held from 20-22 September to promote its Millennium Development Goals. The summit was attended by heads of state and governments, along with industry, foundations, international organisations, civil society and research organisations.

It has resulted in a big unified effort to accelerate progress on women's and children's health. More than \$US 40 million have been pledged over the next five years for a Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health. This calls for a bold, coordinated local, national, regional and international effort, building on what has been achieved so far. For nutritionists concerned with Africa this should be of great interest. Why? The answer is simple. The MDGs are all about Africa; the biggest problem is in Africa.

WN
**THIS MONTH'S
LEAD FEATURES**

WN
Editorial

BIG TASTY ¡Puede ser precioso de media energía para
avanzar a Big Tasty... Después, elige una
para volver más fuerte a cualquiera!

A whole new theory of
food, nutrition, health

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Commentary

World Nutrition

Carlos Monteiro

**Obesity, disease,
well-being:
The big issue is
ultra-processing**

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Responses

Vitamin A

Michael Krawinkel
Ted Greiner
Umesh Kapil, HPS Sachdev



Having said that, I think there is more than hope after all, to achieve the goals. The level of commitment as shown by the amount of pledges.. Ban Ki-Moon said at the Summit ‘We know what works to save women’s and children’s lives, and we know that women and children are critical to all of the MDGs. Today we are witnessing the kind of leadership we have long needed’.

Indeed. We have for a long time known what to do. It now looks as if what it takes to do what we have to do is available. The eyes of these African children pictured above can be seen to be telling the whole world ‘We are looking up to you. Do not fail us this time’. Read more about the UN summit at <http://www.un.org/sg/globalstrategy>.

Nutrition at the heart of development **First Ladies make their move**

In previous columns I have lamented on nutrition problems in Africa. I have said that the Millennium Development Goals are not being met and why. I have also provided some recommendations, some my own professional opinion but mostly based on the facts. This month, I am full of optimism. There seems to be light at the end of the tunnel and it looks as though we are getting to that light.



Her Excellency Ida Odinga, wife of the Prime Minister of Kenya, convened the First Ladies of Africa Round Table at the opening of the UN MDG Summit, to champion effective solutions to end malnutrition of women and children. The event, hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), highlighted the First Ladies’ commitment to raising awareness of the growing burden of malnutrition. The First Ladies of Malawi, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho and Namibia, as seen above, signed a declaration committing them to put nutrition at the heart of development. The declaration contains six key goals:

- To work closely with heads of state, ministries of health, the private sector, international organisations and various leaders to champion awareness about improving nutrition.
- To urge African leaders to improve food and nutrition security within the context of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, quickly and efficiently.
- To support personally the annual Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day on 30 October.
- To mobilise their respective societies and support advocacy efforts in their individual countries, involving grassroots stakeholders, nutritionists, healthcare experts, farmers and more.
- To call upon world leaders to put improved nutrition at the heart of development, by greater investment and more priority within donor budgets to stimulate and support national actions against malnutrition.
- To invite peers from other regions to join this campaign.

Is all this significant? The Ladies can indeed influence their husbands to make

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The bliss of blackberries
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Brazil battles for health
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Geoffrey Cannon



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How to play Bullshit Bingo
Science and secrets of life
Ernest Hemingway on love
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Reggie Annan



We must not fail Africa now
First Ladies make a move
Passion, capacity, autonomy
World class learning in Kenya
[Access Reggie here](#)

Claudio Schuftan



favourable decisions. More First Ladies need to join this group and be guided by the declaration. More than ever, maternal and child health issues have the highest level of commitment, and nutrition is really high on the agenda. Here is an important but rare 'window of opportunity' for all nutritionists. How long will this opportunity last? Opportunities are not always there, hence the word 'opportunity'. Windows are not always open, they do close. We must position ourselves appropriately to take these opportunities for the benefit of women and children, for the benefit of developing Africa. But just looking at the six objectives set out in the declaration, one thing that for me stands out is partnership. Nutritionists need to be at the helm of affairs but we can't fully address the problems without partnership. The full report of the Round Table can be accessed at <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/news/press-releases/african-first-ladies-sign-declaration>.

Building capacity in Africa

Passion, love, capacity, autonomy



Three pre-conference workshops were held in September during the fourth African Nutrition and Epidemiology Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. Here is news of one, the third biennial meeting of the African Graduate Nutrition Students Network (AGSNet), on which the future leadership of nutrition in Africa depends. Pictured above are the young scholars, with the facilitators and advisors.

AGSNet began in 2002. It provides a forum for worldwide collaboration among African graduate students in nutrition, and among all professionals interested in better nutrition in Africa. Many nutrition issues in Africa are similar from country to country. Hence the need to share ideas and implement joint nutrition programmes so as to deal comprehensively with the problems.

Passion and love for Africa

Prof Anna Lartey, president elect of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, and advisor to AGSNet, encouraged members to be committed and unified. She said: 'It takes a few committed people for anything to work, and hence there is no need to focus so much on the numbers of people participating'. Young leaders should have passion and love for the continent, she said, and the network should provide opportunities for capacity building. It is passion and love that will enable us to persevere. Help may come from outside, but Africans must rise and solve Africa problems. She ended by saying: 'Let us not depend on outsiders to solve our problems, wherever you are, you can make the difference'. What a motivator.

Why are African scholars not publishing?

Two capacity building workshops took place at the AGSNet pre-conference meeting. The first was on how to write quality papers for publication in journals. This was facilitated by Paul Amuna and Francis Zotor, from Greenwich University, London, UK. The second was on how to write successful grant proposals. This was facilitated by Sangita Sharma from the University of Alberta, Canada. Few studies (about 2 per cent) published in journals are authored by Africans and of these, almost half of the lead authors are non-Africans.

I learned four things from this workshop. Before writing a paper, a decision on which journal to address should be based on the journal's own interests, and adhere to the instructions given by the journal. One reason why papers get rejected is because authors fail to address all the reviewers' comments, point by point. As young African scientists, we were encouraged to identify mentors with good publication records, to learn from. Finally I learned that scrutiny of our drafts of our papers by colleagues will serve as very good first filters.

Good leadership in sub-Saharan Africa

The true causes of hunger
Nutrition is a political issue
What do academics know?
How to work with the people
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World Nutrition



BIG ISSUE

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The keynote speech of the AGSNet meeting was given by Olive Mugenda, vice-chancellor of Kenyatta University and the first female vice-chancellor in Kenya. Like Anna Lartey she also was inspiring. Here she is, addressing the congress.

Her speech was in two parts. The first detailed the plans for expansion and development of Kenyatta University into a world class university. We were inspired by her vision and plans, starting with infrastructure and investment in teaching and learning facilities. She told us how difficult it was for her as a woman to be selected as vice-chancellor, close to five years ago. In travelling and studying in leading universities in different countries, she always dreamed to have their facilities in an African university. Now she is making her dream come true.

In only four and a half years she has masterminded 20 major building projects, with very limited resources. Every member of the university now shares her vision. They all now say 'We are building a world-class university', even if they don't know exactly what this means. She attributed her achievements to a very capable team of change agents, who work with her. Her university management, she added, is transparent in financial affairs. She is a true leader.

Getting the messages

In the second part of her presentation, she acknowledged that undernutrition and food insecurity remain major issues in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is hope, she said. What's needed, is more capacity – human, and in terms of infrastructure. Scientists and scholars need to engage with communities and reach out to local and lay people in straightforward plain language that they understand. The demand from communities to know what to do to improve their nutrition and maintain their health has never been so great. 'We should pass simple messages on the development of agriculture to the people right down there. People should be made aware of the fact that the situation is reversible, and that they can help to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger'. Please follow this link for the full report of Prof Mugenda's keynote address <http://www.ku.ac.ke/index.php/news-events/444-scholars-in-africa-asked-to-help-communities-overcome-poverty>.

Malnutrition: Successes and challenges **We already know what to do**



The African Nutrition and Epidemiology Conference has now been held in four regions of the continent. The first was in Southern Africa, the second in West Africa, the third in North Africa and the just ended one in East Africa. The fourth conference started on a very high note. In her opening speech, Wilna Oldewage-Theron, chair of the African Nutrition Society, explained the theme for the congress: 'Nutrition and food security: successes and emerging challenges'. This was chosen, she said, to allow for celebration of successes – as suggested in the smiling faces of the children pictured above, probably reflect these successes. However, plenty of challenges remain.

Urban Jonsson
Michael Latham
Elisabeth Sterken
George Kent

**GET YOUR TEETH INTO
RUTF STUFF**

Problems and solutions

Some big issues were discussed at the conference. One was landscape analyses of countries' readiness to accelerate action in nutrition – more on these below. The need to scale up nutrition interventions was emphasised in presentations and discussions throughout the different sessions. Malnutrition remains a crippling problem in Africa. Undernutrition, including severe acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, is still rife. At the same time, overnutrition and its complications are now widespread throughout. It is common to find obese people with micronutrient deficiencies – the combination of over and undernutrition in the same person, as well as within families and communities.

Do we know what to do? Yes! The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition show that there are policies and programmes that work. These include exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary feeding from six months, as recommended in the UN Global Strategy. There are guidelines for management of severe acute malnutrition. Micronutrient deficiencies can be tackled with supplementation, food fortification, dietary diversity etc. Read more in my [*previous column*](#).

Scaling up interventions

Many of the discussions at the conference centred on scaling up nutrition interventions. Here is an example. Landscape analysis assesses countries' readiness to accelerate action in nutrition. This programme was developed by the World Health Organisation. It has three components. The first is a desk analysis of existing data to develop country typologies for readiness to act – meaning, adequate commitment and capacity. The second component involves country assessments, including reviews of challenges countries are facing, opportunities that exist, and possible actions that need to be given priority. The third component is development of a Nutrition Landscape Information System (NLIS). Read more at www.who.int/nutrition/nlis.

Landscape analyses were initially undertaken in 2008 in five countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guatemala, Madagascar and Peru. The process involved formulating country objectives, establishing a country assessment team, and agreeing on what to do and when, and the scope and budget required. To date twelve countries have been analysed in this way, including eight from Africa.

Landscape analysis brings together WHO global nutrition databases with food and nutrition-related data from partner agencies. It makes it possible to create up-to-date country-specific nutrition profiles, provides user-defined customised data on growth, infant feeding, micronutrient malnutrition, adult BMI, and provides summary data for advocacy.

Adelheid Onyango Werimo of the WHO department of nutrition, health and development, made a presentation at the conference. She said that in Madagascar, landscape analysis found important issues that influenced actions and interventions at the country level. The analysis showed strong political commitment to scale up action in Madagascar. However, there was a problem of poor perception of what malnutrition is, such as stunting not being considered a nutrition-related problem, little coordination among partners, and nutrition not being well integrated into sectoral plans. A large network of community health or nutrition agents existed, but few had professional training in nutrition. The national community nutrition programme covered only one-third of the population with most severe malnutrition.

All this was followed by commitment at prime ministerial level, and the Malagasy government and its partners are now pledged to contribute more human and material resources into scaling up nutrition programmes.

Accelerating nutrition interventions

Dr Werimo said that landscape analysis reveals cross cutting issues, which when addressed can help scale up of interventions. There is need to increase consumer demand and awareness of the extent and severity of nutrition problems, to improve monitoring and evaluation process, to improve translation of national nutrition policies into programmes, to build human resource capacity for public health nutrition, and to promote community-based outreach of preventive nutrition action.

Scaling up nutrition, requires nationally owned nutrition strategies. Countries whose representatives agree and sign documents and policies because a multinational

organisation has requested so, without true commitment, and without adapting to local situations, will fail. Most interventions that work begin small-scale. A multi-sectoral approach, integrating nutrition within related sectors, is also needed.

The Nairobi Declaration

The Kenya conference ended with the Nairobi Declaration. This I believe will guide us for the next two years before this continental gathering takes place again. In my next column I will write about the Declaration and how it can be implemented, and also about some more 'hot topics' discussed in Nairobi. For those who were at the conference in Nairobi, tell us what your highlights were: the response facility is below.

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This column is reviewed by Geoffrey Cannon.

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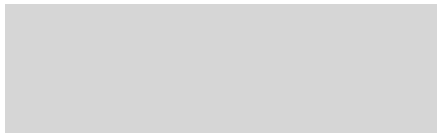
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