



## ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE NUTRITION SECURITY FOR ALL AND FOREVER

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We need to bring about a paradigm shift in policy formulation from attention to food security at the aggregate level to nutrition security at the level of each child, woman and man. Nutrition security can be defined as physical, economic and social access to balanced diet, safe drinking water, environmental hygiene, primary health care and primary education. Thus, it involves both food and non-food factors from the point of view of professional and public action.

Physical access can be assured only if countries adopt the strategy of an ever-green revolution based on enhancing productivity in perpetuity without ecological harm. This will call for mainstreaming ecological principles in technology development and dissemination. Population rich, but land hungry countries have no option except to produce more food under conditions of diminishing per capita availability of land and water and expanding biotic and abiotic stresses, including the consequences of climate change.

Nutrition security safety nets for the economically under privileged population should be based on a life cycle approach, starting with pregnant mothers and ending with old and infirm persons. Attention to maternal and foetal under nutrition is particularly urgent, since in many developing countries every third child born is under weight. Such low birth weight children suffer from many handicaps including impaired cognitive abilities. Denying a child, even at birth, an opportunity for the full expression of his/her innate genetic potential for mental and physical development is the cruelest form of inequity. Therefore those engaged in nutrition education and intervention should give priority to pregnant women belonging to the economic and socially underprivileged sections of society.

In a life cycle approach, the 0-2 age group requires particular attention since such children can be reached only through the mother. Even in India where there is an extensive Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the 0-2 group is often bypassed since ICDS interventions start with the nursery school upwards. For children in the age group 6-18, there is need for School Noon Meal Programmes which can provide the needed micro and macro nutrients. Such Noon Meal Programmes can be organized with community participation.

Food scientists can help in spreading nutrition literacy and in proposing feasible and affordable methods of achieving nutrition security for all. For example, home grown food is the best option in predominantly agriculture countries, since this will stimulate concurrently both production and consumption. Horticultural remedies can be applied for nutritional maladies, with particular reference to micro nutrients like iodine, zinc, iron and Vitamin A. Such community nutrition security systems can help nations to leapfrog in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goal in relation to hunger.