



Multi-Sectoral Approaches to Health and Nutritional Issues

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This issue of **CAJANUS** strengthens the need for a multisectoral approach to health, food and nutrition problems since they overlap with many sectors – health, trade, agriculture, environment, marketing and culture. Ballayram shows that food security is an integral part of a process of nutrition and health development and embodies four major components – food availability, household access, nutritional adequacy, and sustainability. For food security at the household level to exist the household should have access to the food needed for a healthy life for all its members, and should not be at undue risk of losing such access. This concept of food security has advanced beyond the narrow vision of the physical availability of food supplies over time and space to include the socio-economic and nutritional aspects of having adequate economic and physical access to safe and nutritious food supplies. The strategies for increased agriculture production should therefore ensure that the food

being made available supports a goal of providing healthy diets for the population. Food policies that are limited to the acquisition of cheap foods without regard to their contribution to public health and well-being are short-sighted and their consequences could retard human development.

In the global context, national food security policies should therefore (a) include food production and import strategies aimed at population food security and health goals; (b) develop food price policies and practices in relation to household income and earning power; and (c) incentives and disincentives for a food price policy package for improving food security and health.

While on the surface there appears to be little linkage between globalization and breastfeeding, Henry shows that the impacts could be pronounced and profound. When the need for economic gain puts profits before people – there is a major concern for the social sectors such as

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health. In such circumstances the needs of mothers and children can be easily jeopardized. For example, breastfeeding-friendly practices can be lost, while the commercialization of infant feeding practices through breastmilk substitutes can become the norm. Trade agreements should not be used as an excuse not to develop and enforce national infant feeding policies which cover exclusive breast feeding, indigenous complementary foods and the labeling of infant foods and food safety standards. Further, the globalization process must not supersede the international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

The paper by Sarah Jones examines the potential effects of the AIDS epidemic on the levels of undernutrition in Jamaica. Ten recommendations are made to ensure that the gains in recent decades of reducing undernutrition are not lost to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

School feeding programmes are now an important part of the social safety net policy of almost all Caribbean governments. But little is done to evaluate these programmes to obtain maximum benefit from them.

Gulliford and colleagues studied the free school meals programme in Trinidad and Tobago. They made several pertinent observations and conclusions about the objectives, efficiency and policy directions that have implications for similar programmes elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Unlike most studies on adolescents which focus only on their health status, the paper by Halcon and colleagues present unique findings that include issues such as school performance, alcohol, drug use, sexual abuse, moral behaviour, violence, mental health, suicide, body image, among others. The aim was to identify the causes of ill-health in the adolescent. The authors were successful in providing a broad understanding of the factors affecting adolescent health in the English-Speaking Caribbean.

The articles in this issue show that despite the different health problems, the policy approaches are similarly embedded in many sectors that must work interactively to achieve maximum and sustainable benefits from the limited resources available.

