The impact of the food and financial crisis on nutrition in urban areas

by Florence Egal

SCN Networking Event
Rio de Janeiro, 25 March 2010
The context

- Double burden of malnutrition
- Food price crisis, compounded by financial and economic crisis
- Crises will not disappear
- Most of the world’s people live in urban areas
- 70% in 2050
The context

Figure 3: Global cereal prices, 2003–2008

Source: Von Braun, 2008c.
The overall impact of the financial and economic crisis

- Food quality decreases

Cost of Various Diets, Guatemala City, Nov. 2008

Source: IFPRI
How do urban people “cope”? 

- Reduce non-staple purchases, starting with micro-nutrient rich foods (meat, fish, vegetables)
- When possible substitute staple (return to traditional foods?) and get food from rural areas
- Reduce non-food purchases
- Limit size of portions and eventually skip meals
- Incur debt
- Look for other sources of income
- Sell assets
## Potential impacts and coping strategies

**Deterioration of household food security**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livelihood</th>
<th>Diversification / change in livelihood activities</th>
<th>Reduced expenditure on non-essential or luxury items</th>
<th>Children drop out of school</th>
<th>Increased use of child and women labor</th>
<th>Selling of productive assets</th>
<th>Selling of all assets</th>
<th>Reduce expenditures on essential items (food, water, etc.)</th>
<th>Engage in illegal/ health threatening activities as last resort coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning to sell non productive / disposable assets</td>
<td>Out migration (rural to urban moves)</td>
<td>Begin to borrow /purchase on credit, become indebted</td>
<td>Depletion of natural resource base (e.g. cutting trees, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food related – Nutrition</th>
<th>Change to cheaper, lower quality, and less preferred foods</th>
<th>Reduce diversity of food – poor nutrient intake</th>
<th>Reduce size / number of meals</th>
<th>Consume wild foods / immature crops / seed stocks</th>
<th>Begging for food</th>
<th>Skip entire days without eating</th>
<th>Eat items not done so in the past / not part of normal diet (i.e. plants and insects)</th>
<th>Child malnutrition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Favor certain HH members over others for consumption</td>
<td>Reduce diversity of food – poor nutrient intake</td>
<td>Consume wild foods / immature crops / seed stocks</td>
<td>Begging for food</td>
<td>Skip entire days without eating</td>
<td>Eat items not done so in the past / not part of normal diet (i.e. plants and insects)</td>
<td>Child malnutrition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** WFP/Task Force on High Food Price, Adapted from D. Maxwell, R. Caldwell (January 2008)
The overall impact of the financial and economic crisis

- **Increased** poverty and unemployment
- It aggravates hunger and malnutrition
  - More working hours are needed to feed the family
  - The number of malnourished women and children increases
- **Civil unrest and conflicts are on the rise: hunger riots**
Assessing the impact of the crises

- Who and where are the most vulnerable population groups?
- Understand the impact of the crisis for each population group (complex, linked to culture and livelihoods)
  - Food-based coping strategies
  - Non food-based coping strategies (which eventually affect food, health and care)
- Participatory and inter-disciplinary appraisal needed
Shaping an urban response

- Maintain dietary diversity
- Reduce harmful coping strategies

How?
- Facilitate access to micro-nutrient rich foods
- Preserve incomes and create jobs
- Effective health services
- Strengthen social protection
- Support local institutions, civil society and traditional solidarity networks
In conclusion

• We won’t reach MDG1 (and others) if we don’t focus on nutrition
• Strategic planning and networking is required at all levels
• But local authorities are in the frontline and best able to deal with complexity
• “Double strategic planning”
• Together, we will know what to do
Contact us

e-mail: scn@who.int
Website: www.unscn.org

Tel: +41 22 7910456
Postal address: c/o WHO
20 Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland