

Summary of Side Event 27

The inextricable link between diet quality, food accessibility and global inequality

Organizers:

This side event was organized by the Global Dairy Platform, Private Sector Mechanism-International Agri-Food Network, Philippines, India, Nestle, and the US Dairy Export Council.

Moderator:

Dr. Mitch Kanter, Global Dairy Platform, substituting for Dr. Jujavarapu Balaji, Minister (Agriculture in Embassy of India Rome and Alternate Permanent Representative of India to FAO, IFAD and WFP)

Event Speakers and Panellists:

- Dr. Paul Moughan (Riddet Institute, NZ): The Link Between Diet Quality and Social Inequality
- Dr. Imelda Agdeppa (Food and Nutrition Research Institute, Philippines): Improving Nutrition for Greater Food Security in the Philippines
- Dr. Sylvia Chungchunlam (Massey Univ, NZ): Development of a Model to Generate Affordable, Nutritious Diets in Developing Countries
- Mr. Roger Pelissero (Canadian Egg Industry): Impact of Egg Nutrition in Developing Countries on Regional Health and Economic Opportunity
- Ms. Marie Chantal Messier (Nestle): How Can the Private Sector be a Part of the Solution to Accessible and Nutritious Diets for All?

Background:

In many developing countries, access to healthy foods and the ability to purchase them are often reserved for a select few. In these countries, creating several efficiencies- -efficiencies in purchasing power and availability of nutrient dense foods chief among them, can help to ease the burden of malnutrition by making highly nutritious foods affordable and accessible to the most people possible. Reducing food insecurity and malnutrition can in turn shrink the inequalities in these populations that currently exist.

This side event highlighted 1) ongoing issues in developing countries that limit accessibility and affordability of nutritious foods, 2) data being developed to generate a least cost diet model in developed countries which highlights foods and diets that can supply the most nutrients for the lowest cost, and 3) initiatives instituted by the private sector to provide access to nutrient dense foods to previously malnourished communities.

Summary:

All speakers discussed the ongoing issue of malnutrition in all its forms that continues to afflict all regions of the globe; insufficient food/protein/kcal intake mainly (though not exclusively) in developing countries, and obesity in developed countries. All agreed that access to nutritious and affordable foods were keys if we hope to correct these issues globally.

Dr. Paul Moughan cited recent SOFI data indicating that global hunger remains well above pre-COVID levels, with 2.4 billion global inhabitants facing food insecurity, and more than 3 billion people unable to afford a healthy diet. As a result, we are not on target to meet several of the UN SDGs. Dr. Moughan indicated we need to consider food as more than just calories. Nutritious foods contain ample amounts of high-quality protein, micronutrients, fibers, and bioactives, among other things. He made the point that animal sourced foods can be excellent vehicles for delivering nutrients like high quality proteins that are lacking in many regions of the world.

Dr. Imelda Angeles Agdeppa discussed food security challenges in the Philippines, and government efforts to address malnutrition and food security. Although food insecurity in the Philippines has declined in recent years, it still remains an issue, with 33.4% of the population moderately to severely food insecure. Only 22% of households currently receive enough calories; 55% sufficient protein; and 5% enough iron. Other significant nutrient deficiencies exist as well. Dr. Agdeppa mentioned the need for more research to provide evidence that particular interventions can aid in lowering the malnutrition gap that exists among the population.

Dr. Sylvia Chungchunlam stated that while inequalities in food security are particularly seen in regions of Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean, inequality in nutritional status exists globally. Dr. Chungchunlam described a model she and colleagues have developed for measuring the least cost diet in several countries, and the foods that may be included locally to achieve the most nutritious diet for the lowest cost. She discussed recently published data indicating that in the United States and New Zealand there was a need to include animal sourced foods to achieve a low-cost diet that contained all essential macro- and micronutrients. She is currently applying her model to developing countries in Africa and Southeast Asia to identify the least cost diets in these venues, utilizing local foods. She closed her presentation by indicating that to attain nutrient security in all regions, cost-effective foods that provide essential nutrients to all are required.

Mr. Roger Pelissero, Chair and Acting CEO of Egg Farmers of Canada spoke about the nutritional value of eggs that, coupled with their relatively low environmental footprint and cost, make them an excellent source of high-quality protein and micronutrients for feeding malnourished people in developing countries. Mr. Pelissero discuss a program supported by global egg producers, Hearts for Africa, that commenced ten years ago in Swaziland to build facilities and provide the know-how for local people to generate eggs as a source of nutrition and livelihoods. The program is now serving over 4500 nutritious meals per week and providing over 2 million eggs per year to the community it serves. He suggested that improving nutrition in developing regions in the future will require increased domestic production of high-quality animal protein sources.

Ms. Marie Chantal Messier from Nestle discussed ways that the private sector can work at the country level to improve nutrition in a sustainable manner for millions of people. Ms. Messier indicated that sustainable nutrition is an integral part of her company's global strategy for advancing regenerative food systems at scale. She suggested that for nutrition solutions to work locally, you need to build them with local insight, source local ingredients when possible, and empower people to make smart, nutritional food choices.

Key Takeaway Messages and Outcomes:

- Malnutrition in all its forms remains a global issue, which will continue to make it difficult for countries to attain UN SDG targets.
- While nutrient deficiencies and protein malnutrition remain chief scourges, particularly (though not exclusively) in developing countries, obesity remains a problem even in regions where small percentages of the population receive sufficient calories.
- Seeking ways to attain nutrient adequate diets for a low cost is the subject of ongoing global research.
- Private sector companies and organizations have instituted programs in developing countries that have worked in limiting malnutrition in the regions they serve.
- Ongoing education, research, and program development, instituted at the local level, must be key aspects of future efforts to minimize global malnutrition.