

STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS

MY INTEREST IN NUTRITION

Joseph Mutua Mutuku¹

Nutrition, unlike other related disciplines is a more preventative approach to health related problems. With appropriate timing, these problems are solved at their very early stages or even avoided altogether. For instance, while it is much easier to create vitamin A awareness, blindness emanating from it is irreversible and its effects devastating.

In Africa, malnutrition continues to kill millions of children, act as a catalyst to various childhood diseases, exacerbates rates of illiteracy, and unemployment and impedes overall socio-economic progress. Faced with alarming situations of continuously high rates of malnutrition, more and more Africans should be committed to improve the nutritional well being of their people. There could be no better time for addressing the malnutrition problem in the region than now. There is growing recognition of the impact and multiple benefits of improved nutrition on human well being and sustained socio-economic development. Simple, appropriate cost effective and feasible strategies for reducing malnutrition should be used.

Over the past 15 years, no progress seems to have been made in reducing the prevalence of malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, there is an indication that the nutrition situation has worsened because of population growth and policy failures^{1,2}. A third of the world's maternal deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa where an alarming number of babies are born low in birth weight, 40 % of the children are stunted and one out of ten children suffer from acute malnutrition^{1,2}. A high proportion of low birth weight infants is substantially attributable to maternal nutrition prior to and during pregnancy and intrauterine growth retardation- the predominant cause of low birth weight in developing countries and an important cause of stunting. Micronutrient deficiencies are widespread in Africa. An estimated 42 % of African women as a whole, half of pregnant women, and a third of children under age of five years are anaemic and over one million children between the ages of 0 and 4 years are affected by vitamin A deficiency^(1,2).

The challenge Africa faces in addressing the growing problem of malnutrition seems daunting in the wake of other competing priorities such as the AIDS pandemic which Continue to kill many people. With

increased nutrition understanding, the scourge may be contained. However, this may only be achieved if nutrition campaigns are carried out to create awareness.

Recognizing the adverse effects of malnutrition in Africa, I feel indebted to my country in particular and the continent at large. Knowing well that food without consumption is meaningless, the processing technology I have acquired so far should be summed up with the nutritional aspect to make the career wholesome and worthwhile, I feel challenged to borrow best practices in the world to save the continent from this curable problem. The principal aim is to develop a passion and knowledge in nutrition that will assist me to meet the continent's challenges, driving the nutrition agenda at all levels in my country and mobilizing inter-and intra-regional co-operation to achieve the eradication of malnutrition as a public health problem. Of coarse, these will be achieved through organizations like Kenya Coalition for Action in Nutrition (KCAN) of which I am a member, alongside the relevant ministries.

My mentor and lecturer, Professor Ruth Oniang'o has played a key role in inducting me into nutrition. Yes, I had the interest in studying nutrition but I had no idea how to go about it. Through her efforts, I have been able to acknowledge the facts on the ground and the nutritional challenges facing developing countries specifically so, food insecurity.

Kenya Coalition for Action in Nutrition (KCAN), a nutrition advocacy organization has also encouraged me through membership because nutrition is not a one person's affair; it should be everybody's responsibility and business too. Through partnerships and networking, Africa as a continent will overcome most malnutrition and most problems associated with it.

Clearly, without enough nutrition knowledge among scholars, malnutrition will continue to be a reality in Africa, the bulk of which will be felt unfortunately by children who have a right to nutritious and safe food. Without much question, we have a responsibility to ensure that malnutrition levels are reduced to minimum levels as possible; it has happened elsewhere and I believe that Africa is not an exception.

REFERENCES

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¹ B.Sc. Food Science and Postharvest Technology (JKUAT), P.O. Box 60066, Nairobi, Kenya. Telefax: +254-2-249799, E-mail: jomtuku@yahoo.com