

WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

MITIGATING THE NUTRITIONAL IMPACTS OF THE GLOBAL FOOD PRICE CRISIS

SUMMARY OF A WORKSHOP

In 2007 and 2008, the world witnessed a dramatic increase in food prices. The global financial crisis compounded the burden of high food prices, exacerbating hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. A workshop held July 14-16, 2009, sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and PepsiCo Foundation, discussed strategies to mitigate the negative nutritional effects of the food price crisis on vulnerable populations.

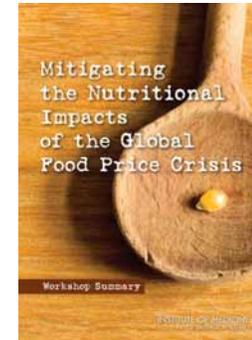
THE DUAL CRISES: TANDEM THREATS TO NUTRITION

Per Pinstrup-Andersen of Cornell University explained that price volatility and rapid food price fluctuations most significantly affect the global poor. According to Dr. Pinstrup-Andersen, such price volatility is predicted to increase in the future. The World Bank's Hans Timmer forecasted that more than half of the global economic recovery from the current downturn will come from developing countries; protecting and promoting the growth of developing countries' economies, therefore, serves the interests of rich and poor countries alike.

Ricardo Uauy of the University of Chile noted that decreasing household income has a disproportionate effect on micronutrient intake and thus the *quality* of diets, rather than quantity; families forced to feed themselves with less purchasing power tend not to decrease the staples in their diets (rice or grain), but instead the vegetables and animal products are eliminated. International Food Policy Research Institute's Marie Ruel explained that poverty itself is a strong indicator of how people will be affected by soaring food prices. Dr. Ruel further noted that female-headed households are the most vulnerable of all and may be forced to cope in ways that deinvest in children and have lifelong effects on those children's development and future earning potential.

A ROLE FOR NUTRITION SURVEILLANCE

Nutrition surveillance mechanisms can play a role in predicting and preventing future crises, as well as documenting the impacts of crises to inform programs and policies. A number of presenters spoke of the need to aggregate data, compile it quickly using new technologies, and deliver it to the food security and nutrition community for decision making. Several workshop participants emphasized the need to develop in-country capacity (of governments and nongovernmental organizations) to conduct their own surveillance in order to ensure acceptance and use of the data collected.



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THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISES

There are a number of new players in food security and nutrition who require leadership and coordinating mechanisms to function efficiently and without overlap. Ruth Levine of the Center for Global Development recommended that a high-level mandate for institutional change should set the expectations for how institutions should allocate roles and work together. Dr. Levine also stated that additional resources for bolstering institutional capacity within the United Nations and other agencies would be needed to respond to such a mandate and that serious engagement of the private sector should be fostered. The United States government can play an important role in the fight to end global hunger; there is a renewed sense of political will to address these issues, and a number of initiatives are underway.

THE WAY FORWARD—THEMES FROM THE WORKSHOP

The following themes that emerged during the workshop are not intended to be and should not be perceived as a consensus of the participants, nor the views of the planning committee, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), or its sponsors.

- The current crisis presents an opportunity to motivate donors and engage affected country governments in efforts to address undernutrition, hunger, and food insecurity in vulnerable populations.
- There is a window of opportunity with women and children where known nutritional interventions will be most effective and have a long-term payoff, as described in the 2008 Lancet series on maternal and child undernutrition.
- There is a call for better quality data, but also a critical need to move forward with proven programs and policies to mitigate hunger and malnutrition immediately.
- Both short- and long-term investments in global food and agriculture systems need to be committed.
- Mechanisms to help vulnerable populations cope with food price volatility and to prevent future shocks are required.
- It is important to draw upon the expertise of governments, NGOs and civil society, the private sector, foundations, and the broad spectrum of actors in the international nutrition and agriculture sectors.
- The roles of the multiple UN agencies that work to promote the food and nutrition security of vulnerable populations need to be clarified.
- Fostering engagement with the private sector may yield new expertise and resources.
- A stronger voice from indigenous NGOs is needed; these NGOs could benefit from capacity-building efforts to encourage ownership and political involvement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .

This brief was prepared by the Institute of Medicine based on the workshop summary *Mitigating the Nutritional Impacts of the Global Food Price Crisis*. IOM planning committees do not issue, review, or approve individual documents. The responsibility for the published workshop summary rests with the workshop rapporteurs and the institution. For more information, visit www.iom.edu/globalfoodcrisis. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, with no additions or alteration. Copyright ©2010 by the National Academy of Sciences.