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## Non-formal Nutrition Education

—Dr. Muhammad Kabirullah

**M**ALNUTRITION is a widespread and gradually increasing problem in Bangladesh. A comparison of the National Nutrition Surveys conducted in the years 1962, 1975 and 1982 shows that consumption of nutrients has decreased with time. Daily average calorie intake per person has decreased from 2301 in 1962 to 1943 in 1982, showing that average consumption is 85% of the requirement, and 76% of the households are deficient in calories.

Protein consumption also fell from 58g in 1975 to 48g in 1982. 77% of the households are deficient in protein. Shortage of micronutrients is widespread except for thiamin and iron. Less than 5% of the population consumes an adequate quantity and quality of food.

The deficiencies most severely affects the children, pregnant and lactating mothers. About 61% of the children (0-5 yr. gr.) suffer from second and third degree malnutrition. 57% of the children were found stunted and 20% were found wasted. 47% of the pregnant and lactating mothers were found anaemic.

### Causes

The nutritional problems of the country have been analysed by a number of experts from various angles to find out the inherent causes. Recent nutrition survey (1982) reveals that prevalence of under-nutrition is highest in the near-rich income group than the poorest indicating that the lack of nutrition education is the main cause of under-nutrition in this group. Under-nutrition in the poorest group is due to both lack of nutrition education and poverty.

An interaction between family income and mother's education in relation to nutrition was quite apparent. Some experts also emphasised the importance of nutrition education of the mothers as one of the long term policy measure to improve the nutritional status of the children.

From these analysis it appears that lack of nutrition education coupled with poverty is basically responsible

for virtually every case of malnutrition. Many cases of under-nutrition could be prevented if mothers knew how to make the best uses of what food they have in their kitchen in terms of food distribution among the members of the family and nutrition value of various foods. Again, the recent nutrition survey shows that in food allocation within the family, children and mothers are discriminated against adults. Ideally, the situation should be opposite. In a family, choice of food is strongly influenced by socio-economic condition, custom, habit, religion and prejudice. Again, most of the families are also influenced by the concept of "Food for Prestige" and do not know to select the right kind of food items that will provide them with required nutrients and do not know the concept of food economy in terms of cost of the food and nutrient content in the food.

People living in a cash earning economy do not know how best to utilize their family budget for food. Although Nutrition Survey 1982 has stated that income and expenditure on food have some positive influence on dietary intake and nutritional status, some expert has reported that there was a threshold point where without nutrition education only the increase in family income cannot improve the nutritional situation. A farmer's family does not know how to plan his farming according to the nutrient need. This has been reflected in a number of surveys. Further, the level of general education in the family normally does not affect the food and nutrition situation in the family.

All the above reviews of the nutritional situation of the country and the inherent causes of the situation indicate that nutrition education is indispensable everywhere and in all social strata irrespective of income, profession and level of general education. People should learn what they should grow or buy and how to cook food properly and serve in the family according to the need, and utilize the

resources they have in their family kitchen, so that they can help themselves solve and combat the nutritional problems.

There may be a debate whether nutrition education should be formal or non-formal. Actually both the approaches are workable with different groups of beneficiaries. Formal education system has its limitations in respect of the system itself. It follows a definite line of approach with a unified and disciplined beneficiaries. It is almost a static process within the framework of a syllabus. The educational materials used in a formal education system has their limitations in terms of clarity, understanding and meanings to the general people. Formal nutrition education system can be well applied within the academic sphere, for a formal academic degree. But education to make the people educated about the utility of knowledge cannot be done with the formal system. So, most of the formal education is followed by a field training or in-service training.

In case of nutrition education, the emphasis goes to the background of the beneficiaries. Parents and head of the family are the beneficiaries of the education and they must learn how to utilize and apply the knowledge in every-day life under the influence of various inter-related and opposing factors. The aptitude of the parents or head of the family do not suit the formal system. Because parents will learn not an academic degree, but for practical use of the knowledge. Nutrition education should be aimed at changing the age old food culture, prejudices, taboo, habits, custom which the formal system cannot do. Only the non-formal system can change these.

**Objectives:** The main objective of the non-formal nutrition education is to make people aware so that they understand and solve their problem by themselves. And in doing so, people need motivation, change of habits, and lifestyle to suit the need. These changes should be step-wise so

that they can adapt to the changed circumstances without any major cultural or social interference. However, some of the major objectives of the non-formal nutrition education may be listed below:-

1. People should be made aware of their nutritional problems and the inherent causes should be clearly defined and isolated. The dimensions and consequences of the problems should be clearly clarified to the beneficiaries.

2. People should be made aware of their existing resources with a view to redistributing the resources according to the appropriate needs.

3. People should be made aware so as to discover and explore newer resources within the family to meet the shortfall.

4. People should be made aware of the food and nutritional need of the members of the family.

5. People should be taught about the nutrient contents of various foods and the food economy.

6. People should be taught to have better basic sanitation, safe water, environmental hygiene, immunization against communicable diseases, personal and community hygiene, use of fallow land around the houses and crop diversification to grow the right kind of food that will supply the required nutrients for their family, poultry raising, kitchen gardening, fish culture, proper care of the children, old people and also to keep the family within reasonable size so that the improvement achieved is not eaten up by the increased family size.

7. Further, people should also be taught to solve the problems created within the family, society and community that will interfere with the development programmes.

The objectives listed above, mostly cover the majority of the needs. But more objectives may be included and some of them may be dropped depending on the factors and circumstances that regulate the living of the people and also on the aptitude of the people concerned. (To be continued)