

Editorial

Nutrition security versus food security

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There is a general consensus about food security (FS) definition: “FS exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” [1]. There is, however, no such consensus about a definition for nutrition security (NS). One suggested definition is “... a person is considered nutrition-secure when she or he has a nutritionally adequate diet and the food consumed is biologically utilized such that adequate performance is maintained in growth, resisting or recovering from disease, pregnancy, lactation, and physical work...” [2]. In the FSN Forum Discussion No. 34 [3] participants agreed “that there is a big difference, but close linkage between FS and NS” and “that FS is a necessary but not sufficient condition for NS.” However, they disagreed on whether NS is a part and parcel of FS or FS is a part of NS. An attempt to clarify which one is an integral part of the other is the purpose of this editorial.

The importance of NS has been highlighted in the theme of the 19th International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) in Bangkok in 2009 as “NS for All” and will be highlighted again in the 21st ICN in Buenos Aires in 2017 as “From Science to NS.” In the “Conceptual Framework of Malnutrition” [4], inadequate dietary intake and disease are considered as immediate causes of malnutrition, while insufficient access to food (i.e., lack of FS), and inadequate care for children and women, insufficient health services, and an unhealthy environment as underlying causes, as stated is in the “Conceptual Framework of the Nutritional

Status at the Household Level” [5]. These two conceptual frameworks indicate that FS is an underlying, and not an immediate, cause of nutritional status. Therefore, FS is part of a web of causation that influences nutritional and health status of the individual.

The relative importance of NS and FS can be highlighted in this simple example. FS is like having physical and economic access to a safe and reliable car, but if the owner (host) does not have a driving license or is incapable to drive, the car is useless. Nutritional literacy and food habits of the host are as important as food accessibility. In many food-insecure regions there are healthy children (so-called positive deviance) and in many food-secure countries excess energy intake and micronutrient deficiencies contribute to many non-communicable diseases such as type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, etc. While FS is not directly involved in individual wellbeing, NS is the pillar of individual health. Through food fortification and improved dietary habits nutrition status can be maintained at a satisfactory level even if food insecurity and poverty continue to exist. However, the importance of FS as one of the underlying causes of good nutritional status should be emphasized.

In conclusion, there is a need for a consensus on a definition for NS and nutritionists should concentrate on NS and treat FS as an integral part of NS. One without the other will not achieve the goal of a healthy society.

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