



MALNUTRITION

and its risk factors in urban settings

ISSUES: Malnutrition remains a serious health problem with consequences that are too grave to be ignored. It is the single largest contributor to child mortality worldwide. 15% of the global burden of newborn and child mortality occurs in countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. About 50% of deaths among children under 5 years of age are attributable to mild to moderate malnutrition. While problems of under nutrition still exist, the burden of overweight, obesity and diet-related chronic disease is increasing, especially among high-income and middle-income countries.

Several micronutrient deficiencies (iron, iodine, zinc, calcium, folic acid and vitamins A and D) are still being reported from many countries of the Region, particularly among vulnerable groups, including children and women of childbearing age. More than one third of the population in the Region is anaemic. Problems that exacerbate the nutritional situation in the Region include the following:

- lack of clear political commitment for nutrition action and/or failure to turn political commitment for nutrition problems into tangible action;
- absence of a policy framework and institutional capacity to plan, implement and monitor sustainable nutritional programmes that respond to the multisectoral dimensions of nutrition problems;
- recurrent conflicts and natural disasters;
- disproportionate allocation of health budgets, often at the expense of preventive strategies such as nutrition;
- abandonment of traditional diets in favour of fast foods, resulting in the reduction of dietary diversity and often a less nutritious diet.

SOLUTIONS: The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean will support countries in:

- Securing political commitment for nutrition
- Supporting a healthy start by promoting and protecting the nutritional wellbeing of women and children
- Ensuring a safe, healthy and sustainable food supply
- Promoting food with adequate micronutrient content
- Providing comprehensive information and education to public
- Carrying out integrated actions to address risk factors related to noncommunicable disease
- Strengthening nutrition and food safety programmes
- Improving nutrition services and building capacity in the health sector
- Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and research
- Building capacity for nutritional care and support in emergency situations.

THE WAY FORWARD: World Health Day 2010 provides an occasion to promote the importance of nutrition in health and development. The Regional Office has developed a draft regional strategy and action plan for nutrition which will drive improvement in the nutritional status of populations in the Region by promoting on the national development agenda and providing a framework to help countries decide on nutrition actions appropriate to different country contexts. The strategy and action plan aim at helping countries identify, develop, prioritize and adopt nutrition interventions that could help in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.



World Health Day 2010
Urbanization and Health



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