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URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

Participatory approaches
for
community nutrition

**Dissertation for
B. Sc. Nutrition and Home Economics**

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EUROPEAN HEALTH21 TARGET 11

EUROPEAN HEALTH21 TARGET 11

HEALTHIER LIVING

By the year 2015, people across society should have adopted healthier patterns of living

(Adopted by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its forty-eighth session, Copenhagen, September 1998)

ABSTRACT

Urban Food and Nutrition security is a growing concern in Europe. Rapid urbanization creates new demands for food and nutrition, especial in low- and middle-income countries. This poses new challenges to food and nutrition intervention programmes. The rapid process of urbanization has led to the so-called double burden of nutrition, a situation where nutritional deficiencies exist side by side with the emergence of over nutrition among vulnerable groups in urban areas. This paper examines the applicability of participatory approaches as a tool for planning intervention programmes, and suggests guidelines for a participatory approach to address urban food and nutrition insecurity. Traditionally, nutrition programmes are designed using "top down" approaches. In contrast, community approaches argue that large-scale behavioural change can only be achieved by mobilization of the community. During the 1980's and 1990's a large number of participatory approaches have been developed with the intent of mobilizing rural communities to analyse their situation and take action to make improvements. Participatory approaches provide a valuable framework for enabling people to identify, analyse and mobilize resources within the community to overcome their problems. However, certain problems exist including the type and quantity of data collected and if it can be utilized by decision-makers. In addition, experience of practitioners suggest that participatory approaches are applicable in urban areas, but special attention is needed to address the differences between urban and rural communities.

Keywords

NUTRITION
– COMMUNITY HEALTH PLANNING
URBAN HEALTH
RURAL HEALTH
FOOD HYGIENE
FOOD CONTAMINATION
CONSUMER PARTICIPATION
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Foreword

The WHO Regional Office for Europe Programme for Nutrition and Food Security has produced an Urban and Peri-urban Food and Nutrition Action Plan (UFNAP). The goal of this action plan is to provide communities with ideas that can lead to integrated policies for food, health and the urban environment.

The UFNAP highlights trends in production, processing, distribution and consumption of food, that not only may have negative health effects due to poor nutrition, but also may result in environmental harm, social isolation and depletion of local economies, especially effecting vulnerable groups. There is growing concern about food and nutrition security in central and eastern European countries (CCEE). Their problems may increase during the transition from centrally planned to free market economics. Because communities vary widely within the WHO European Region the best approach is to provide them with the tools to assess their own situation and to take action. To ensure that the assessment, analysis and action strategies are equitable, participation of the citizens themselves and not just the authorities, is a prerequisite. This paper is written to aid this process of citizen participation.

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1. Introduction

The issue of urban food and nutrition insecurity is an increasing concern. Europe is currently the most urbanized continent and the level of urbanization is expected to reach 90% by the year 2015. This rapid urbanization has led to deficiency diseases coexisting with over-nutrition among vulnerable groups. Rapid urbanization poses new challenges for urban households and their food and nutrition security.

Traditionally, interventions aimed at improving food and nutrition security relied on “top-down” strategies. Nutritional problems are conventionally defined by national agencies or experts through questionnaire survey, anthropometric measurement or dietary intake surveys. After defining the dietary deficiencies or problems, national strategies and policies are formulated. These strategies may include definition of dietary goals and public information or education programmes designed to promote healthier dietary habits.

Factors such as interfamily dynamics, inadequate time resources and food culture may be ignored by “top-down” investigative techniques. Although strategies have moved from “nutrient” based dietary guidelines to “food based” dietary guidelines in an attempt to provide multifaceted solutions, the participation of citizens rarely goes beyond answering standard questions. The complex underlying socio-economic factors are often ignored.

Centrally planned food and nutrition policies are necessary, but are inadequate in providing solutions to the complex problems that cause poor nutrition. In contrast, community approaches argue that large-scale behavioural changes are made through community “bottom-up” approaches. Emphasis should be on community mobilisation and organization rather than by the standard means of intervention.

Community mobilization entails the process of sustaining the coordinated participation of all sectors to accelerate an improvement in food security of vulnerable groups. Involvement of citizens may not only be effective in improving food and nutrition security, but may also create social development.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a rapid spread of new methods for inquiry, learning and community empowerment emerged. These participatory approaches seek to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse knowledge about their own situation, and then plan and act. These approaches have proved successful in defining the needs of vulnerable groups and addressing the complexities of their daily lives.

Most of these participatory approaches were conceived in rural areas in developing countries, but there have recently been applications of participatory approaches in urban settings in industrial countries. These participatory approaches can be used to address food and nutrition insecurity and seek solutions at community level in countries belonging to the WHO European Region.

1.1 Aim and objectives

The aim of this paper is to address the possibility of using Participatory Approaches to address urban food and nutrition insecurity by:

1. giving insight into the dynamics of participation and community development related to food and nutrition insecurity;
2. providing a partial inventory of existing participatory approaches in general and to examine special applications that could address food and nutrition insecurity at community level;
3. discussing the applicability of participatory approaches in WHO European Region countries; and
4. providing guidelines for improving community based food and nutrition security that incorporates principles of participatory approaches.

1.2 Scope and focus

The main focus of this paper will be on participatory approaches and their applicability to urban food and nutrition in security. Three specific methodologies will be focused on illustrating the basics of participatory approaches. The scope of this paper does not allow a thorough description of the issues of urban food and nutrition insecurity, but rather focuses on how participatory approaches can be used as an alternative or to supplement conventional methodologies.

Methodology

Much of this paper will be based on the results of a questionnaire (Appendix 1) and the literature provided by and experiences of “Environment Technology and Culture” or ETC - Netherlands (Appendix II) with their work in participatory approaches, both in developing and developed countries.

In addition, information from a pilot project in three communities in London (*The Local Food Economy and Community Mapping*: 1998) and notes from the meeting, *Community Mapping – The Way Forward, Meeting to bring together partners with practitioners to discuss the best way forward for each area* (1998) will be used to illustrate some of the practical considerations in using participatory approaches to address food and nutrition insecurity in urban communities.

Literature on selected participatory approaches and community development is incorporated. Much of the literature on participatory methodologies has been supplied by ETC-Netherlands.

1.3 Definitions

The following definitions are intended, not only to give the reader a better understanding of the concepts of this paper, but also to clarify the specific meaning of these general terms.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is officially defined in *Our Common Future*¹ as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Perhaps a more complete definition is “positive socio-economic change which does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent” (*Our cities, our future*, WHO 1996).

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, The Brundtland Report, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Food and Nutrition Security

Food Security is normally defined as “that all people at all times have physical and economic access to enough food for an active healthy life”(World Food Summit, FAO, 1996), and a more detailed definition encompasses the aspects of sustainable development:

- that production and distribution of food are sustainable
- production and consumption of food are grounded in and governed by social values that are just, equitable as well as morally and ethically sound
- that the ability to acquire food is assured
- that the food is nutritionally adequate, and personally and culturally acceptable
- that the food is obtained (and consumed) in a manner that upholds basic human dignity

(World Food Day cited in *Understanding Food Security through Community Mapping, 1995*)

Participatory approaches

The terminologies used to describe participation are sometimes confusing and intermingled. The term participatory approaches will be used here as an umbrella term for techniques, methods and methodologies that have the primary aim of invoking participation, whether it is the participation of citizens, stakeholders or local authorities.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are not only actors in a process, but stakeholders are those affected by the outcome - negatively or positively - or those who can influence the outcome of a proposed intervention.

All parties should gain from the participatory process, rather than creating winners and losers. There will be an increase in mutual trust by helping to clarify problems and solutions.

Stakeholder dialogue

Stakeholder dialogue should result in finding better solutions for and promoting awareness of social and environmental issues, in order to contribute to sustainable development.

1.4 Overview

Chapter 2: Defining Participation will introduce the ideas of participation in general and within the context of the community's need for organization and development.

Chapter 3: Participatory Approaches gives a brief history of the evolution of Participatory Approaches and a partial inventory of methodologies. Many of these have been devised and applied in rural development projects in developing countries, but will hopefully provide a basis for understanding how these methodologies can be used for intervention planning, assessment of needs, implementation, and evaluation and monitoring within a European context.

Chapter 4: The Applicability of Participatory Approaches is a discussion, both in terms of the applicability to urban settings in developed countries and developing a participatory methodology to address food and nutrition security within communities. This discussion will be based on both literature reviews and interviews with experienced practitioners using participatory approaches

Chapter 5: A Participatory Methodology will provide guidelines to help develop a methodology for a Participatory Approach aimed at improving the food and nutrition security at community level.

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