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THE CAUSES OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION:
MACRO AND MICRO DETERMINANTS*

Claudio Schuftan, MD
Department of Nutrition
Tulane School of Public Health
1430 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70112 USA

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Defining Macro and Micro determinants:

If one looks at malnutrition (undernutrition) as the biological translation of a social disease with historical roots, all determinants of the social and economic conditions that lead to malnutrition of a sector of the population will here be considered Macro determinants. Conversely, the more immediate causes responsible for the biological manifestations of malnutrition will here be called Micro determinants.

In a way, this arbitrary classification overlaps with the classification in the Tanzanian conceptual framework (4). Macro determinants in this paper's terminology thus correspond to all the basic causes plus some of the determinants classified as underlying causes in that document (i.e. land tenure and income).

The differences between both classifications actually only represent nuances; no big issue should be made out of these differences. (For yet another analysis of the causes of malnutrition identifying a root cause-poverty-, main and secondary determinants see reference 1).

Nevertheless, a better characterization of the concepts Macro and Micro as utilized here will help clarify and highlight the practical implications of this dichotomization for the planning process. This is the real contribution this paper intends to make.

Characteristics of Macro causes:

Most Macro determinants of hunger and malnutrition are conditioned by the overall policies that govern national economies (both internally and in their foreign trade) in a way that a sometimes vast sector of the population suffers or is relegated to poverty, deprivation and malnutrition, the latter being only one of many characteristics of poverty.

Macro determinants are more "indirectly" related to malnutrition. Macro causes explain most malnutrition in the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production (often coexisting in a given country).

"Malnutrition or nutritional vulnerability is a manifestation of society's inability to produce its livelihood adequately-not because modern medicine rendered it overpopulated, or because agricultural productivity is not sufficiently high. It exists because the strictly modern capitalist commodity (labor power) is not generalized in the world of production to the same degree as is the commodity form in the world of consumption in a situation where the labor market is the least developed of all other commodity markets. This is a social environment in which labor is not favorably positioned in the class struggle and the share of wages in the reproduction of labor in society is low while the basic consumer needs exist predominantly in commodity form, products of an international division of labor. It is in this sense that changes and variations in public nutritional status are determined primarily by the class struggle.

The underdeveloped are societies that produce their own livelihood by producing the livelihood of other societies in the world of commodities. Subject to this imperative, they produce increasingly insignificant parts of their own

livelihood outside the world of commodities; in the world of commodities they consume not what they produce and produce not what they can or need to consume.

The affected populations are likely to include a growing number of landless peasants, seasonal agricultural laborers, small fishermen, and the army of the unemployed. These are the most nutritionally vulnerable not only because they are strategically located in the world of commodities as producers, but also because they are forcefully integrated into it as consumers." (5)

Macro causes usually relate to the major dialectical contradictions seen in a given society, be they related to the class struggle or not. Global political and economic policies governing the functioning of the productive sectors of any national economy, especially the agricultural sector, are closely linked to Macro causes of malnutrition and there is nothing accidental or self-correcting in this situation.

The neglect in the provision of basic services such as health and education to vast sectors of the population also falls in this Macro frame. If one could characterize Macro determinants negatively, one could say that they correspond to those causes perpetuating malnutrition that are not touched, removed or redressed by traditional nutrition intervention programs.

The fight against hunger and malnutrition becomes, therefore, eminently a political and not a technical struggle. Technology is hardly the adequate point of departure to achieve the deep structural changes needed to end hunger and

malnutrition; the right political approach is the better point of departure. Nutritionists are rarely trained as social scientists and therefore use social theory implicitly rather than explicitly (6). This is where the challenge lies in searching for the missing ideological link.

In terms of their relative importance in determining malnutrition, one can safely say that removal of a few (or even one) of the main Macro causes has more potential to alleviate malnutrition than acting on many Micro determinants simultaneously.

Macro determinants are nowadays very frequently mentioned and identified by most planners when analyzing specific situations, but the plans they device seldom attack these determinants frontally. Mentioning poverty as a cause of hunger is not enough. Thinking about malnutrition in economic terms does not automatically assure commitment to something being done about it either. As a matter of fact, sometimes accurate economic diagnostic procedures are not followed by economically oriented policies and, not unfrequently, the calculated indicators are used rather to maintain status quo.

Characteristics of Micro causes:

In broad general terms, Micro determinants of hunger and malnutrition would be all its "other" determinants, the ones more directly related to malnutrition as a physiological condition. The latter include health, environmental and educational

determinants, among the most frequently identified and selected for direct intervention by "western" planning approaches.

Emphasis on this technical approach to nutrition planning also has justified in the past the need for western-trained experts who often come with ready-made tools for analysis, therefore, artificially analyzing reality in terms of pre-determined categories. Every expert brings his own view of development with him and his development programs will reflect that ideology. The influx of foreign experts tends to a mystification of the planning process.

Taken together, Micro determinants lead to a package of solutions or interventions that pretend being apolitical or free or immune of ideological connotations or influences.

Nutrition workers are influenced by the experiences they have had in the different political systems in which they have operated (7). Cultural and ideological bias is, therefore, unavoidable. People tend to think of themselves as apolitical: but there simply is no such thing. Despite the fact that the spectrum of choices is a continuum, in the last instance, one either condescends to the system or one objects to it - totally or partially. Any of these are political stances.

Directing efforts to overcome Micro causes often ends up with a collection of palliative solutions that do not delve into or touch the conditions that perpetuate hunger and malnutrition in a community. Nutrition planners keep inventing new 'more

comprehensive', or 'multi-sectorial' approaches to old problems as if these would change the major contradictions and the distribution of power within the system that is causing the problems to begin with. The so often taken approach, with pat solutions, to the malnutrition problem gives unrealistic hopes for the outcome of said interventions.

Diagnosing the causes of hunger and malnutrition:

It should be clear that we cannot agree on the content of nutrition planning if we do not share the same explanations of why people are poor and malnourished. Different socioeconomic contexts call for different nutrition planning approaches. These should be designed according to how far governments represent the underprivileged and how deeply they are committed to social equality. Only in countries with governments committed to quite radical social change can nutrition planners concentrate primarily on the more technical aspects of nutrition planning.

The preceding characterization of Macro and Micro determinants of hunger and malnutrition does not imply that only Macro causes have to be identified and acted upon in each specific situation. An appropriate final diagnosis of hunger and malnutrition will include a mix of Macro and Micro determinants. If possible, the same should be tentatively (but explicitly) weighted in terms of their relative contribution to the incidence and prevalence of malnutrition, even at the risk of some subjectivity.

The challenge for the planner is to determine, in each national (or regional) context, how much and what kind of Macro changes are necessary, if the Micro changes are to have improved prospects for success.

This unequivocally means that any plan or program geared towards ameliorating malnutrition as a public health and social problem will have to include a (hopefully weighted) mix of interventions directed towards Macro and Micro determinants.

What is actually needed is a comprehensive solution on the demand side, rather than on the supply side of the malnutrition problem (8). Failing to address measures to solve the major Macro determinants, as is so often seen in western planning, will, on the other hand, lead to palliative and temporary solutions at best.

The technical measures themselves are not a tool for income redistribution; they may have a partial redistribution impact as a side-effect, assuming that they reach the low income target group as defined by a poverty line.

Does, then, western planning promote the status-quo or does it promote significant changes? Frequently western planning has left things basically as they are. There are many examples in the world in which sophisticated planning techniques have been, and are used, without having any really significant impact on development and on the nutritional status of the vulnerable groups. All too frequently this planning has led to a worsening

of the standards of living of considerable sectors of the population.

In this context, the role of the nutrition planner is beyond doubt a delicate one. As an outside observer he should help the local people and local officials see things from another angle - help them to explore their contradictions, perhaps being softly critical, and have them come to their own new conclusions, hopefully without creating false expectations. Sensitization and advocacy skills are perhaps more important to his success than technical know how.

There are good reason, then, to ask planners to go beyond the more obvious determinants of malnutrition in their analysis of causality and to differentiate Macro and Micro determinants. This, because the type of strategy or plan that should follow such a comprehensive diagnosis should be geared, first, to define a set of specific activities directed to address and remove or minimize the effect of Micro determinants - a classical approach - followed by an estimation of the potential of such a package of interventions to solve or address the major problems of hunger and malnutrition. To this should be added:

a) a listing of the Macro causes identified together with a brief discussion of why and how each one of them contributes to the persistence of malnutrition, so that anybody can understand these links, and

b) a list of possible interventions aimed at removing some of the structural bottlenecks or constraints that are ultimately determining a state of chronic hunger in some sectors of the population. (For a more detailed description of this approach see the case study on Cameroon and Liberia presented further on in this volume.)

Proposing Solutions:

Since poverty is an important underlying cause of malnutrition, attacking poverty's determinants will be the only way to overcome malnutrition as a social problem. To put it in the same terminology used earlier, malnutrition as a social disease can not be cured through medical interventions, (not even in a wide comprehensive package) nor can it be cured through the latter plus a package of agricultural interventions.

Redistribution of wealth and the consequent increase in purchasing-power of the needy masses is a necessary, though not sufficient, solution to world hunger (assuming that income increased faster than food prices). Consumer expenditure is one of the best indicators of poverty. It can, therefore, also be used as an indicator of malnutrition (1). But poverty wears many other masks as well (i.e. cultural and educational deprivation, poor health, low sanitation) and each mask has its own indicators. We should not be tempted, through lack of perspective, to try to improve the indicators of the masks only, without doing anything about the real face of poverty which is

socioeconomic deprivation (or rather privation, since the poor have never had any wealth to begin with).

Many planners have divided the activities they finally propose into two groups: "recommendations" and "interventions." The former, often related to needed Macro changes, are worded in very general terms, are usually vague and have no specific implementation budget set aside; the latter, often relate to Micro determinants, are prepared in more detail, have a fixed dead-line and are usually budgeted for implementation.

The directness with which planners should state the need for corrective measures directed to Macro determinants will depend on the political environment in which they are working.

The problem with many planners is that, although they recognize poverty as the main cause of world-wide malnutrition, they do not focus their implementation strategies on how to directly attack this underlying problem. Often this lack of focus is related to the fact that they feel such efforts extend beyond their professional control, and if they work in the international arena, they feel that political, and professional risks are high (9).

Many planners feel that their positions in academe, government or international or private organizations might be jeopardized if they 'come out of the closet' with more radical positions. They take a "survivor's" attitude. The result of such a position is more paliative interventions that do not

affect hunger and malnutrition. We have to stop thinking that we cannot contribute much to the selection and implementation of non-nutritional interventions because they are outside our immediate field of expertise. Only in extreme cases, really, do planners experience the classic contradictions faced by political activists.

In its mildest form, Macro determinants can be exposed by listing the possible interventions that flow from the analysis of them under a title that could read something like: "Conditions under which interventions addressing the more immediate (or ultimate) causes of malnutrition will have a better chance of having an impact." (see reference 10). This should be followed by a (subjective) estimate of the potential of each Macro intervention to ameliorate malnutrition. The idea is to compare and contrast the potentials of the latter with the potentialities of the package of Micro interventions to achieve the same or similar goals. In other words, what this kind of a presentation tries to emphasize is that if Macro determinants are removed (or minimized), interventions geared towards removing Micro determinants have a manyfold better chance to have a real and lasting impact.

This method of presenting nutritional data forces us to keep in mind that present interventions in the nutrition area leave a pending balance for which only more directly oriented socioeconomic redistribution measures will be a long-range solution.

The above being the mildest form of making this point clearly, there are many other, more direct ways of highlighting the need for structural changes to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. The attitude and commitment of decision-makers towards eradicating hunger and, of course, political and ideological constraints will determine how far the planning team can go in its recommendations.

Although all this may sound very formal and irrelevant, in terms of finding the best way to present the need for deep socioeconomic changes in the most tame or least offending, but nevertheless forceful way, aiming at getting something meaningful and lasting done about hunger and malnutrition, there seem to be very few other (non-violent) ways to get this point across.

The major problem with this approach is that it might look too politically radical to some governments. If this is the case, then the particular governments are most probably not genuinely interested in solving their problems. This may be difficult to determine, given the frequency with which governments pay lip service to their commitment which in the end turns out not to be genuine.

At the very least, a presentation such as the one here proposed has an educational value, by documenting with some hard evidence things that politicians and decision-makers have probably known all along. (We wrongly assume that decision makers are rational, righteous and pious and will bend in front

of hard scientific evidence or react to outrageous injustice.)

Technicians who have participated in the planning process may gain a new consciousness, though, as a consequence of using this approach, a fact that is of value per se and that makes the effort worthwhile and somehow better than a mere exercise in futility.

It needs to be added, here, that the replacement of the capitalist system has not necessarily been the original aim of the more radical in our profession. They only intend to pursue those changes that they believe have a real potential for solving malnutrition. If the changes called for could be accepted and implemented by the prevailing system, the system itself would not necessarily become the target. But since the necessary changes cut deep into the basic structure of society and sometimes challenge the current political and economic order, they are in conflict with the capitalist system and its basic principle - profit maximization.

The role of ideology:

Nutrition seems to be as good (or bad) an entry point as any other (employment, education, energy, natural resources, ecology, etc.) to get involved in questions of equity in our societies, if it is used as a tool. Since the constraints in equity are structural in nature, criticizing them from any angle, initially, should lead us invariably to the core of the social structural problems. Nutrition can lead to global considerations if not

made a single-issue goal. Advocates of such a limited approach to nutrition often look at constraints from a quite narrow perspective, a fact that seldom leads to more equity. There are too many substitutes for in-depth political action in single-issue politics that lead nowhere. The worst is that many people do not see this difference and a lot of political motivation and sometimes talent in scientists or lay people is lost because of a pseudo-ideological approach to global issues. Single-issue politics suffers from a lack of global vision of society and, in particular, a lack of will to make systematic historical changes (11).

The flaw in our thinking is that the solution to the malnutrition problem is not in nature, but in ourselves, in our approach to the fundamental social relationships among men (12). Malnutrition should not be attacked because it brings mankind utility, but because it is morally necessary (Emmanuel Kant). What we need to fight for is equity not utility. Poverty should not be seen as an evil, but as a basic injustice to be corrected.

The ideology and weltanschauung of the individual searching for the determinants of hunger and malnutrition (largely determined by his/ her social class extraction) play a vital role in the contents of his/her final in-depth analysis. (One seems to see only what one wants to see.)

It takes an initial conscious (intellectual and emotional) decisive step to bridge the ideological gap and break with the ideology of one's upbringing. Once a certain level of consciousness is attained an action-oriented attitude usually follows. At that point there is a convergence of ideology and action which makes the difference between taking an observer's versus a protagonist's role. Knowing about injustice does not move us; becoming conscious about it generates a creative anger that calls for involvement in corrective actions. The latter can only happen within the framework of an ideology consciously acquired.

In the context of development, then, ideology carries the additional connotation of commitment - both emotional and intellectual - and action-orientation. Thus ideology is not simply a body of ideas determining goals, but also includes the instruments, strategies and tactics to be used in planning for economic and social change (13).

Objectivity in the analytical stages of the planning process is nothing but a myth and since the solutions proposed will heavily depend on the final diagnosis of the causes identified, there is no assurance that by following the procedures described above for the identification of Macro and Micro determinants one will end up with a better, more comprehensive plan to ameliorate hunger and malnutrition in any specific situation. The future implications of this center on at least two issues:

a) will the outlook for eliminating hunger and malnutrition in the world be any better without a concomitant process of political maturation of the people involved in nutrition planning? (or, are changes going to take place because of or despite nutrition planners?), and

b) should more efforts be directed towards denouncing the futility of ongoing food and nutrition programs as a first step of a new, more militant approach?

The possible answers to these two questions are again ideologically charged.

In trying to solve the problem of malnutrition, intraprofessional responsibility should not be neglected. This means pooling together the genuine and honest predisposition to action of nutritionists, ethically or politically motivated, if they are to fulfill their potential role as change agents. The latter has to begin through a process of critical analysis of professional affairs and goals with their inherent contradictions. This very process should, hopefully, show to what extent overall activities in the field of nutrition can be channelled to achieve a real, final impact in ameliorating malnutrition anywhere, in a reasonable timeframe. Basically, nutritionists should be searching for a new ethos, a professional, political ethos.

The sense of responsibility found in many scientists as a motivation, does not seem to be sufficient to see necessary changes occur; it leads to a dead end. It may solve the conscience problems of the person who devotes his time and effort to do "something" to solve malnutrition; however, it seems to have little effect on the real problems of the poor and the malnourished. An emotional commitment is loose and romantic; ideological commitment is militant.

Many of our colleagues' positions lack political perspective. A genuine concern for the poor even as part of a holistic approach does not seem to be enough if it is not channeled in a political and ideological way.

The concept of being socially responsible is nothing but a euphemism for what really should be political responsibility (do we really have a choice not to take political sides?) A political commitment is important precisely because governments function as political entities (7).

Political forces are fought with political actions, not with morals, or with technological fixes. In the long run, there will have to be moral changes on the part of those who enjoy the luxuries of affluence. The question is, will these lead to ideological changes in some? (7). We have already passed the era when we asked basic nutritionists to become more applied researchers; now we are asking them to become more socially conscious and more committed as real change-agents, leaving

behind a lot of epidemiological preciosity or snobbery. Depoliticized science is not science in the real service of man (Franz Fannon).

Training more nutrition planners as we have traditionally done will certainly not solve the problem. The fact that more and more countries are setting up nutrition planning units or cells at the ministerial levels is not a guarantee by itself either.

The new nutrition planner must be aware of his political role. He must be very well politically oriented because nutrition planning is never politically neutral. Although most nutrition planners have generous and humanitarian objectives, they are, in fact often reinforcing the existing centralized structure.

A critical look at nutrition planning:

Nutrition planning as a technique, popularized more or less 10 years ago, had the exciting attractiveness and potential of widening the horizon of nutritionists in the analysis of the food and nutrition system responsible of generating and perpetuating malnutrition. Nutrition planning applied a systems analysis approach that forced the planner to look for determinants further removed from the actual phenomenon of malnutrition as it presented itself in front of his eyes.

Nutrition planning in general tried to understand the deeper nature of the problems of the poor, especially the rural poor. It opened an avenue to sensitize the planners about the importance of Macro determinants in the process leading to malnutrition.

Nutrition planning was thus a more comprehensive and multisectoral approach to solving malnutrition than any strategy used before. Because of its broadly-based approach it is much closer to a political approach (in the classical sense of the term) to the problems behind malnutrition. Therefore, nutrition planning had additional potentialities for change over any of the approaches used before. (On the other hand, nutrition planning - as does any form of economic planning - necessarily reflects primarily the objectives of the group in power.)

Nutrition planning, both as it has been developed in the West and implemented in the Third World, suffers from the basic flaw, that while it sometimes challenges the existing structure and demands for change, it offers no concrete model of an alternative future.

What we seem to see 10 years down the road is that strong ideological barriers have prevented many nutrition planners to change their emphasis significantly and redirect priorities towards the removal of Macro determinants.

In other words, through nutrition planning the planner was confronted with evidence that suggested more radical interventions (meaning going to the roots of the problem and not necessarily in the pejorative sense of the word radical used in everyday politics). If planners chose not to go that route they were deliberately skipping the issue, not at a subconscious, but at a conscious level. This has tended to make their contradictions more visible, less sustainable and less bearable. This is the major new dimension that nutrition planning offered and that has seldom really been exploited, whether because the planners have not been able to find or point out the Macro causes or, because, even if nutrition planning helped them to find those Macro causes, they did not know what to propose to attack them. This may explain some of the disillusionment seen with nutrition planning.

We need to think about ourselves as political human beings working as technicians, remembering that global change does not begin at the global level, but starts with individuals (14). Many nutritionists have initially been motivated to simply transfer knowledge; the need is now to start focusing more on the social dimensions of the problems of mass poverty and hunger (15). They need to act as humanists before acting as nutritionists. An important requirement for this is to seek knowledge about the real world and not only about the world we would like to see (16). One cannot build on wishful thinking. It is precisely a misunderstanding of reality (or a partial

understanding) that often reinforces the amoral position of some nutritionists. Or, some of them may not really want to understand; they have, all too often and for all the wrong reasons, already made up their minds about one reality. The social reality is not like a laboratory; many variables in it are unknown and unforeseen and when we look at them it is often in the wrong way, searching for the statistical "whats" instead of analyzing the human "whys" (17).

Used as a technical tool nutrition planning offers no real solution, no matter how much new coordination between different sectors (i.e. health, agriculture, education) it succeeds in setting up at any or all levels. To continue pushing suprastructural measures is to perpetuate the problems. It will mean a waste of scarce resources and precious time in the vast majority of cases. Time and money are too precious to continue playing nutrition or development games that lead nowhere in terms of real improvements for the target population.

Critically speaking, nutrition planning will continue to offer us only a good diagnostic tool, a good framework to consider alternative intervention strategies and a basis to validate ideologically stained policy decisions. If we ritualize nutrition planning as a technique only, we have a good chance not to solve the problems at hand. Since the final consideration will continue to be a question of Weltanschauung, of ideology, in terms of equal rights and opportunities for people in the world, it will partly depend on what position we, who are involved in

the matter, will take in the near future. If we do not move towards genuine changes, changes are going to come in spite of us, the question is how and when. History may give us the answer.

Working with the community:

If little can be expected from nutrition planning at the central level, then community (grassroot) level organization around food and nutrition issues may be the only viable answer in the long run.

Popular participation is absolutely basic for success in nutrition planning and planners have disregarded this central issue persistently. (A tree cannot grow through the action of external forces; it requires the activation of its internal forces). The process has thus to be decentralized from the ministerial levels. In a way, this is a completely new approach to nutrition planning, opposed to the classical top to bottom management of programs.

What is needed is more dedication to work directly with the poor so they can tackle the causes of their poverty and malnutrition themselves. This calls for nutritionists to go, as much as possible, back to field work and out of their offices or labs. Only there can the strengths needed for a change in direction and perspective be found. Knowledge and scientific power created in institutions away from people are returning to the people and affecting them. The gap between those who have social

power over thinking -an important form of capital- and those who have not, has reached dimensions no less formidable than the gap in access to economic assets (15).

Nutritionists need to learn from the people and from their perceptions of the problems, establish links with local mass movements and participate in their consciousness raising.

The participation of the affected population begins with creating awareness that they have a problem, to be followed by ample discussion about what can be done about it. The types of possible solutions will always be twofold. One set of problems can be dealt with by the organized community itself; the other set requires government or outside intervention. It should be the organized people themselves, with the help of the planner, that look for the appropriate channels to obtain the needed outside help.

"One of the touchstones of community organization is consciousness raising. Every activity impinges on consciousness and every rise in the level of awareness of the people results in a better organized community. But working with the poor always leads to the dilemma of whether one can sacrifice the sufferings of a group of people in the expectation that this very same situation may lead to a raised level of consciousness and the emergence of some social anger that can provide the basis for a more militant community.

The average community is confronted by the problems of economic welfare. Most of the time the people expect an organizer to improve their economic conditions. On the individual level, the problems of death, illness, malnutrition and sanitation cannot be dismissed by the organizer

even while he realizes that organizing a community means raising levels of consciousness, confronting basic structural problems and not merely improving physical conditions.

It is only through praxis that political consciousness can be strengthened and it is only when people are convinced that change is in fact taking place that they will listen and learn the abstract concepts that must be actualized in experience. Unfortunately, the poor are unused to the practice of conceptualizing and abstracting. The mental frame of generations of hand-to-mouth existence is one that is rooted to what a person can immediately see and hear.

Like long-term political development, it is much more difficult for people to understand the workings of society since they are unused to participating in the determination of their own lives." (18).

In the context of Macro and Micro determinants the above means that in our work with the community we have to pass from a mutually shared analysis and understanding of the local Micro determinants of malnutrition -which should be more easily identifiable and perceived by the community at the beginning- to the analysis and understanding of the local and then general Macro determinants of that condition. For the latter to be possible, the community will probably have to go through a slow process of political maturation before effectively gaining conscience about the role of the more difficult to understand social and economic constraints that determine malnutrition in their milieu.

People have to be made aware of their problems first in a specific (concrete) and then ideological context. The exposure of Macro constraints should, in a first instance, lead to generating social commitment to needed structural changes. It is important to demonstrate to the masses that it is in their power not only to change the physical reality that surrounds them, but the social reality as well (15).

There are three levels of possible involvement in field work: (6) In a first level, one solicits the participation of the community in a given project. Discussions occur and some token improvements are offered to the community by the outside team. The aim is to change people's attitudes and to motivate them to improve their condition. Participation has turned out to be harmless for the vested interests and is, therefore, a regular appendage of every government project. A second level calls for outright consciousness raising of the population; a dialogue is called for to discuss the contradictions of the social structure. However, it has to be noted that in improperly motivated hands this can be reactionary or reformist. At the third level, an effort is made towards the mobilization of the masses. The field staff gets involved in organizing movements around lower class interests to strengthen the community's bargaining position; this may be in the form of cooperatives, trade unions, farmers' associations or any other measure that effectively empowers the poor.

In terms of encouraging, promoting and implementing corrective measures by the community, the challenge is to work with them to translate felt needs -understood as generally shared concerns or sense of want- into effective demands -understood as the actual investment of human, financial and/or physical resources to fulfill said needs. Felt needs have to be converted into concrete issues so that a course of action to address them can be mapped out. This may involve concrete actions such as developing functional knowledge about people's rights, or, when solutions have to be sought outside the community itself, challenging public agencies, landlords or other powerful people or institutions, filing specific demands or claims or influencing policy making through active and aggressive advocacy and lobbying.

As was already pointed out before, a new type of community oriented nutrition planner is needed for this herculean task: one that plans for people to get organized to work with him in solving the problems. We need to move in the direction of training nutrition planners as trainers of others so that their own experiences can be reproduced at multiple lower levels in each country, given the limited geographical coverage per planner that this approach from the bottom inherently has.

The shortcomings of this approach are many, not the least of which is the fact that it is a very slow process, based on mutual trust in each community and that its replicability is, therefore, also very slow even in the best of cases.

The dangers, of course, are also significant, especially when the political environment is hostile.

We all know that our world is troubled, but what do we really do about it? Why do we expect others to bring about changes? Things will begin to change only if we are able to analyze the present situation openly and without bias. Only through such a process will we be able to generate the needed momentum to promote real changes in and by the masses.

Not being "realistic" is a judgement that history can change. What might sound unrealistic today can very well become true tomorrow, if we work for it with decision.