

Report of the inauguration meeting of the Network for Capacity Development in Nutrition Central and Eastern Europe

Draft

13-14 February 2006

Budapest, FAO SEUR Office

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Background and justification

The meeting was a follow-up of the kick-off meeting for a capacity development initiative on food and nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe held in Budapest, 19 May 2005, which considered the desirability and possibility to establish a network in this region as a part of SCN Capacity Development Working Group. It was decided in 2005 that a Network inauguration meeting will be organized to discuss the needs of the countries.

Regional networks already exist in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Southern Africa. The regional initiative in Eastern and Central Europe is thus the last of the planned networks on capacity building initiated by SCN working groups. Intensive networking of governmental institutions and cooperation in the field of training and research are considered very productive modes of functioning; a regional approach is needed to maintain the regionally driven agendas. Thus the network in Central and Eastern Europe is the newest network facilitated by SCN and the UNU Food and Nutrition Programme. The workshop was organized in cooperation with and support of the FAO SEUR.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Formally initiate the Network on Capacity Development for the CEE countries within the capacity development initiatives of SCN, UNU and other European research and training institution.
- Present and discuss the profile of challenges identified by participants.
- Identify follow-up activities in order to facilitate the initiatives of the Network in the field of capacity development in the CEE region.
- Identify strategic elements to meet the capacity development plans of institutions and individuals in the region.
- Prepare a presentation of needs and strategies to be presented at the 33rd session of SCN in Geneva, March 2006.

Participants

The meeting was attended by participants from 10 countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, FYR Macedonia, Hungary, Norway, The Netherlands, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovakia. FAO SEUR staff members also took part in the event.¹

Minutes of the workshop

Mr Tomasz Lonc, Policy Officer welcomed the participants on behalf of Ms Maria Kadlecikova, FAO Sub-regional Representative for Central and Eastern Europe, who was on duty travel. He referred to several important developments in the CEE and CIS sub-regions of importance for the Network's activities related to the period of transition to a market economy, the changing role of governments and the private sector. The disappearance of the former cooperative and state farms' rural infrastructure and social services and shifts in jobs and income patterns, combined with emergence of rural unemployment and poverty, present new challenges for nutrition advice and extension. It is to be noted that for the majority of the countries in the Sub-region, gradual harmonization and approximation of national legislation as well as training, extension and public education campaigns on adequate nutrition, with the EU technical assistance programmes and projects are priorities. Food safety and quality remain priorities in FAO activities in the Sub-region, combined with enhancement of nutritional and added-value characteristics and compliance with international standards and actions to avoid nutrition-caused diseases (Twenty-Fourth FAO Regional Conference for Europe, 2004). The technical expertise of national specialists in the transition economies that could share the recently accumulated experience was emphasized. FAO has established a presence in the Sub-region through the Sub-regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the proposed new Sub-regional Office for Central Asia. SEUR is ready to support further follow-up meetings of the Network, whether organized in Budapest, or in other countries, depending on the focus of the Network activities and the needs of specific countries.

Dr Fre Pepping presented the history of capacity development activities in other regions, and mentioned the needs in CEE countries. He also presented examples that can be useful as a start. The workshop participants presented their country profiles and their views about possible necessary actions to be taken.²

A report to the next SCN is expected (12 – 17th March 2006 in Geneva), Dr. Mirjana Pavlovic will attend, and give a presentation about the activity plan of the working group for 2005/2006.³

Current situation in Central and Eastern Europe

Summarizing the country presentations the main characteristics of nutrition and life style in CEE countries were identified as follows:

Foods and meal pattern

¹ The list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

² The presentations are attached as Annex 2.

³ The detailed programme of the workshop is attached as Annex 3.

- Irregular meal pattern
- Low intake of certain food groups - particularly fruits and vegetable, milk products and fish
- High intake of total fat (in particular saturated), sugar, and salt
- Low intake of vitamins: folate/folic acid, and minerals e.g. calcium, iron, iodine (except in countries having programmes on salt iodisation)(Relevant for some countries)
- High level of alcohol intake in some countries
- Low breastfeeding rates.

Nutritional and life style related public health problems

- High prevalence of NCD – hypertension, atherosclerosis, CHD, CVI, certain cancers, diabetes mellitus, etc.
- High level of overweight and obesity.
- Dyslipidaemia.
- Low level of Haemoglobin, although some data are lacking.
- Generally low level physical activity, in particular in urban areas.
- Increasing osteoporosis in both genders, in particular with increased age.
- Eating disorders in certain groups may increase, in particular in younger girls.
- Consumption mega doses of food supplements; lack of information about risk of mega doses.
- High level of smoking.

Overview of food and nutrition challenges in CEE countries

Concerning the contact between ministries, governmental organisation and the existence of policy documents, in spite of several similar features, there were considerable differences, too. The discussion brought forward the following topics:

National nutrition action plans

Several countries have recently developed plans or are in the process of formulating those: Bulgaria (2005), Macedonia (2004), Bosnia (draft waiting for approval), Hungary (2004), Slovak Republic (1999), Romania (draft waiting for approval), Czech Republic (approved), Serbia & Montenegro (none).

Food based dietary guideline

Guidelines are considered as very important for all the countries. Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia, Hungary, Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic have such guidelines.

RDA

Such normative documents are considered by the Network as clear responsibility for governments. The following countries already have RDA: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary, Slovak Republic, Romania, and the Czech Republic.

National food database

Food databases are considered essential for any type of dietary assessments, nutrition

epidemiology, monitoring and policy planning and assessment. Not all the countries had food databases, and some national databases were based on other countries' compilations. Countries having food databases were Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovak Republic, Romania, Czech Republic, and Serbia & Montenegro.

Training of professionals on academic level

Higher education and training in nutrition is a prerequisite for policy, strategy and program development. Such trainings were modest in many countries, and only a few of the countries had special education of nutritionists.

Education and promotion (for the public)

Education of the public is one of the most frequently used action programmes to influence the nutrition awareness of the population that may have significant impact on the choice of food and the public health. During the discussions it was clear that the promotion is mostly a part of national action plans for food and nutrition.

Governmental level

At the governmental level a clear feature emerged described as resistance or neglecting of addressing nutrition issues. More specifically the following problems were identified:

- Engagement of ministries and public agencies in food, dietary and nutrition related issues is lacking due to lack of funds (official explanation).
- Lack of a national nutrition strategy, or action plan (e.g. based on WHO Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity, or Food and Nutrition Action Plan for Europe), except Hungary and Bulgaria.
- Lack of contact and collaboration between responsible ministries (e.g. Ministry of Health, Agriculture, Education, and Research) and institutions working in the field of nutrition (except for Bulgaria and Hungary).
- Lack of coordinated activities at national and regional level in nutrition and nutritional status monitoring (except Bulgaria and Macedonia).

Is there an adequate nutrition education and training of professionals in CEE countries?

Throughout the deliberations of the Network it became clear that the gap in capacity in nutrition education is major challenge. Those challenges included:

- Inadequate knowledge of nutrition among medical specialists.
- Insufficient international training in modern nutritional epidemiology.
- Lack of international training in modern clinical nutrition.
- Insufficient training of nutrition in schools and universities.
- Insufficient knowledge of nutrition in the population.
- Nutrition is only a part of other trainings (mentioned earlier).
- Inadequate education and curricula of nutrition in medical faculties e.g. incorporated in hygiene. Nutrition is now considered to be a part of specialization in hygiene.
- Lack of 'pure' nutrition education at academic level.
- Inadequate knowledge of nutrition among health professionals working with the

- population.
- Lack of in-service training of nutrition.
- Lack of methodological approaches and software for data collection, assessment and analyses.

Conclusions and recommendations based on the country assessments

Taking into consideration the present situation, special attention should be given to:

- reduction of obesity and related diseases,
- improvement of dietary habits of population,
- improvement of nutritional status of population,
- improvement of education and dissemination of information,
- increased research in the field of nutrition,
- develop the food data base, and
- harmonize research, evaluation and monitoring of the nutrition situation.

Possible elements of a common strategy for the network and possible actions for improvement of capacity development in CEE countries are suggested as follows:

The participants presented ‘what needs to be done’ based on their own assessment and experience. After a thorough discussion the following features emerged:

National nutrition action plan and strategy with international collaboration

- Training of health officials and policy makers.
- Establish the National Nutrition Centre in each country to coordinate activities on national level and collaborate on international level.
- Workshop on development of joint (regional) methodology for nutritional status monitoring through existing health statistics reporting system.
- Workshop on development of joint (regional) methodology for dietary intake and food habits data collection analysis (software) and evaluation.
- Workshop on establishment of joint (regional) approach to development of national physical activity guidelines.
- Workshop on establishment of joint (regional) approach to development of school policies and guidelines on nutrition.
- Initiate pilot projects to address some of the issues identified during the meeting to prepare the proposal for application for the additional cost for next year.
- Continue work on the development of national food and nutrition policies and action plans.
- Formulating food, nutrition and health goals addressing most important problems (target groups, age, gender, special viewpoints) and factors to change: nutrition (habits, structure, etc.), lifestyle habits (smoking, alcohol consumption), physical activity, priority list - „cost benefit” for the effectiveness.
- Standardisation and collaboration on recommended dietary allowances (RDA) in Europe and their use in everyday practice for health professionals in diet modelling.
- Standardisation of food consumption and nutritional situation monitoring on national level (Action, initiate, carry out, monitoring, evaluate).

- Work on the development of dietary guidelines for different population groups.
- Collaborate with food industry to produce more choices of healthier low fat, vitamin and mineral enriched foods.
- Establish the Food data base with software for nutrition planning and evaluation of the dietary and nutrient intake.
- Nutritional epidemiological surveys – studies based on the same methodology and protocols.
- Nutrition Intervention Studies – based on national experiences, common methodological-guide to act for Europe.
- Cooperation with food industry to improve the quality of national diet according to WHO/FAO recommendations of healthy nutrition to increase the production of "healthy food", i.e. low fat products, low calories, low sugar, low salt or high micronutrient content, vegetable fibres etc.
- Improved consumer information in order to implement the healthy diet recommendations. Food labels should include the declaration of nutrition content.
- Get commitments of UNU, FAO, UNICEF and WHO to support the network in order to improve the nutrition situation in this region.
- Stimulate and establish regular children growth and nutritional status assessment monitoring.
- Stimulate the establishment of national monitoring system for nutritional status, especially for vulnerable groups as pregnant women, lactating mothers, infants, pre-school and school children, elderly people and social margin groups.
- Stimulate standardization of nutritional situation monitoring.
- Establish strong capacity development network based on internet to exchange information and enhance collaboration between countries in the region (e.g. Food and Nutrition portal of the AgroWeb Network - <http://agrowebcee.net>).
- Monitoring of nutritional status, dietary habits and food intake, as well as chronic non-communicable diseases related to nutrition.
- Conducting specific programs
 - i. to prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases
 - ii. to prevent and control micronutrient deficiencies
 - iii. for socio-economically and nutritionally vulnerable groups
- Collecting data on positive and negative influence of food on health.
- Actions to guarantee sufficient quantities of quality food for all population (Food security).
- Harmonization of the national legislation with relevant international standards and harmonization of Codex Alimentarius Commission standards and EU Directives. Strengthening, rationalization and definition of competencies and responsibilities in the system of food control.
- Actions for prevention of food born diseases and chemical contamination (Food safety).
- Prevention of deficiencies of microelements and vitamins:
 - i. prevent the decrease or elimination of iodine, iron, calcium, deficiencies, and the vitamins A, D deficiencies and vitamins of the B group
 - ii. the involvement of food industry in the production of fortified food.

- Create background for basic agriculture and food processing to produce healthy and safe foodstuffs.
- Introduce legislation for promotion of the “health beneficial” foodstuffs.
- Put in practice the concept of developing of all forms of public catering,

Target groups of nutrition education

Main target groups of education according to FNAP should be health professionals, professionals related to regular education and food industry, children, school children, students, all population.

Educational and training activities in nutrition for professionals

- Needs of common training courses for relevant professionals within health, food and nutrition in CEE countries about nutrition.
- Nutrition for medical professionals, expert dietician’s postgraduate studies, health visitors, welfare officers.
- Conduct health education and health promotion through mass media about nutrition and health promotion focusing on lifestyle modification.
- Standardize education and training programs in nutrition for medical professionals (undergraduate and postgraduate studies).
- Provide education in the area of food and nutrition at all levels (incorporate nutrition in the curricula of elementary and high schools).
- Training of primary health care professionals and family doctors on nutrition.
- Training of nutrition/health professionals in practical performance of individual and group nutrition counselling.
- Training of nutrition/health professionals in development of promotional skills and using media in promotion of nutrition and raising awareness among population/ population groups.

Educational and training activities on nutrition for students

- Completing the post-graduate training on the medical specialty Nutrition and Dietetics through additional short-term courses on the topics.
- Improvement of nutrition education of students from medical universities.
- Improvement of nutrition education of students from the higher institutes of food industry, students from the specialty ”Nutrition, catering and hotel business instructors” and students from catering schools.
- Elaboration of modern training materials on nutrition and dietetics for the newly established specialty in medical colleges “Consultant on breastfeeding, healthy nutrition and dietetics”.

Educational and training activities on nutrition for the population

- Dissemination of the data from the monitoring at national and local levels through seminars, workshops, publications, Internet, mass media.
- Publishing, promotion and dissemination of National Food Based Dietary Guidelines.
- Development and implementation of a training program and materials on healthy nutrition for the different population groups.
- Breastfeeding promotion and promotion of healthy nutrition.
- Engagement of NGOs in nutrition promotion activities.

Educational and training activities for students, school children and children

- Elaboration and introduction of modules for training on healthy nutrition in the curricula for the Pedagogic specialties in colleges and universities.
- Elaboration and introduction of modules for training on healthy nutrition in kindergartens and for schoolchildren of 1-12 grades.
- Active involvement of the “Health promoting schools” network in training children for healthy nutrition.
- Stimulate the whole approach in school canteens to improve diet and quality of school meals (increase fruit, vegetable and low fat dairy products consumption).

Capacity building in food safety control and improvement of knowledge and skills of food producers and traders in the field

- Establishment of a National Training Centre on food safety, for training of experts engaged in development of legislation on food safety, inspectors and laboratory staff, food industry and trade operators, etc.
- Organization of basic and refreshing courses for state inspectors, food producers and traders, in conformity with the adopted food legislation.

Disseminating information

Scientific level

Conferences, workgroups, networks
Professional Expert Society work
Academy of Sciences, Committee work

Governmental level

Nutrition and health policy makers
Parliamentary work - legislation
(national, in the EU overlapped)

Population level

Education of appropriate age groups
Media and communication.

Food Security - Actions to guarantee sufficient quantities of quality food for the global population

- Improvement of the soil quality, climatic conditions, agricultural and zoo technical potential to meet local food demands as well as possible. Food resources will be released at the national level.
- Influence farmers to increase livestock, and vegetables production (e.g. greenhouses) as well as sunflower, soy, orchards and vineyards.
- Development of ecological food production, in the system of sustainable agriculture.
- Support the initiatives to improve of small and medium enterprises for food production.

Actions to prevent food born diseases and chemical contamination

- Control the level of chemical and biological contamination of food.
- Surveillance of food borne diseases.
- Data collection of use and intake of food additives.
- The implementation of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points System – HACCP.

Actions to stimulate the scientific research in the field of nutrition

- Programmes and research studies in nutritional epidemiology.
- Establishment of National Institute for Food and Nutrition.
- Increase the number of experts in nutrition and diseases linked to nutrition.
- Develop new higher educational units (colleges), for training experts in nutrition and diet, in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Research.

The Conceptual framework for capacity building in nutrition in CEE presentation is attached as Annex 5.

3rd Network meeting for a capacity development in nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe

Next meeting will be held 16-17th November 2006 in FAO SEUR.

Annexes:

1. List of participants.
2. Program of the 2nd Network meeting for a capacity development in nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe.
3. Country profiles: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia.
4. Presentation of suggested actions from the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro.
5. Presentation: Conceptual framework in CEE countries.
6. Plan of activities in 2006-2007 -Network for a capacity development in nutrition in Central and Eastern Europe.