

LETTER TO THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

WHY NO “WORLD NUTRITION DAY” CELEBRATION?

Kindly permit me to share my burden in the last 4 years with members of the society through this platform; on the issue of questing for a day to be set aside by the world bodies like FAO, UNICEF and WHO, etc as “WORLD NUTRITION DAY” or at least modification of the current World Food Day to “WORLD FOOD AND NUTRITION DAY” as it has been done for many other matters of global importance. In 2009, I made a move by writing a letter to the Director, FAO but no reply was received. Last year, 2011, I presented the same issue for consideration among the FARA-net group members (this is an internet consortium, whose members are drawn from Agriculture, Nutrition, Biodiversity group, Social scientists, Veterinary experts, Home Economics specialists, etc) and the support for change by FAO to include nutrition as part of the current World Food Day celebration was overwhelming. Members, through this forum suggested a change to World Food and Nutrition Day” instead of creating another calendar for World Nutrition Day and this should be celebrated the same day of the year—16 October. There was reinforcement on the matter latter last year, before the World Food Day celebration, when a Radio journalist from Zimbabwe became so passionate about the issue that he asked me to respond to some sets of questions and provide him more information for the need for this move. My responses to his questions are presented below:

I wish to respond to your seven questions as stated below sir:

Question 1: Briefly tell me a bit about your professional background?

I hold a PhD degree in Public Health Nutrition from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. My other qualifications include MPH degree in Health Promotion and Education, M.Sc. and B.Sc. degrees in Human Nutrition from the same University. I am also a Nigerian Registered Dietitian. I have obtained many training certificates in many fields including Research Methodology, Programme Monitoring and Evaluation, Community Development, Bio-ethics, etc. Currently, I am a lecturer at the Dept of Health Promotion and Education, under College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. My research focus is mainly on public health nutrition, reproductive health issues and health promotion activities including community development programmes. My research outputs are reflected in some of my research publications, which feature articles on nutrition and reproductive health related issues.

Question 2: Why is nutrition a burning issue for you?

I need to respond to this question by providing an encompassing definition of Nutrition, which I believe will assist people to understand my passion about its promotion: Nutrition holistically defined as “*study of food nutrients, their sources, metabolism, functions and deficiencies and all other factors influencing food availability, accessibility, affordability and utilization*”—(Oyewole, 2007-- *PhD Thesis*). Nutrition is an amalgam of natural and medical sciences, social sciences and arts. With this definition, the strong link between Nutrition and Agriculture becomes more accentuated. The latter is the source of food that is central to human existence. However, there is no debate on the fact that having all the good foods the world offers may not

guarantee good nutritional status, which is the essence of healthy living. Therefore, the field of nutrition acts as a bridge, linking agriculture to medicine. It provides information on what farmers should plant in relation to what people should eat to remain healthy. Problems of double burden of diseases that is now ravaging the world, has a strong link with nutrition. Nearly all non-communicable diseases have close association with lifestyle, which nutrition is very fundamental. Anecdotal information is revealing clearly now that level of country development is nutrition induced! World Bank and other reputable international agencies use nutritional indices as a measure of national development of any country e.g. level of stunting, wasting and undernutrition provides information on chronic, acute and mixture of the two respectively on duration of food deprivation/hunger in any community. This is also a reflection of level of economic development, corruption, and national stability/security. One of Nigerian past leaders was quoted as saying “a hungry man is an angry man” (sic—this man is a time-bomb, ready to explode anytime, posing a threat to security of other people!). It should be noted that the World Bank or any other international bodies have never used food production indices as a measure of national development! Adequate nutrition in pregnancy and first 2 years of life often refers to as “Window of Opportunity” in Nutrition parlance, has been linked with good health in adulthood, reflecting Barker’s Foetal Origin of Adult Diseases Hypothesis. Many studies have established good nutrition in childhood to good educational development. The summary is, as the food is produced, information is needed on which is good for consumption for a particular age group, in what form and quantity and with what combination. Nutrition provides this information and also creates market for agricultural products. For instance, when good nutrition information is made available on any agricultural food products, the demand for such products automatically soars! This is a window of opportunity begging for attention to be tapped by farmers who may be complaining of glut in the market. When a nutritionist provides information on consumable food items, people become more aware and they usually subscribe to buying such food items.

Question 3: What do you think declaring a world nutrition day will do for a food secure world?

As explained above, food security does not guarantee nutrition security. Presently, the global annual food production is enough to meet the food requirements of the world population but the gory picture of level of malnutrition (over and under nutrition) is evidenced for everyone to see. What is actually lacking is all embedded in the definition of nutrition as provided in the previous response. What declaring a world nutrition/world food and nutrition day will do includes the fact that it will create a curiosity among people who will be forced to ask if there is any difference between food and nutrition as the new name will indicate. Also, it will open doors for sensitization of stakeholders working with international bodies and local government agencies to know that having food does not translate to good nutritional status, which is the ultimate goal of the food we consume. It will make the stakeholders realize this gap that nutrition is ready to fill i.e. making information available on the “concept of eating right or healthy eating”. This may not require high level of income but basic knowledge on what and how to eat to remain healthy. If this day is declared, many will have the opportunity of getting information on what roles nutrition play in family and national development and what can be done to make the foods we have support our healthy living.

Question 4: What is wrong with the current World Food Day?

There is nothing wrong with promoting issues relating to food but food alone in the journey towards good health is comparable to walking on one leg, which means achieving the main aim may not be achieved in a light year! The current World Food Day focuses majorly on food production but undermines the best approaches to its utilization. Information on healthy eating, which embraces what, how, why and when foods should be eaten to maximize the benefits in the food is not usually a component of World Food Day. In addition to this, it added to the delusion that people have in distinguishing between food and nutrition. Food is a concrete entity but nutrition is an abstract discourse, which makes it difficult for people to separate from food. The two must go together to be effective. People can talk about food in terms of palatability, which is one of the messages being provided during the World Food Day but little will be mentioned about the nourishing ability of the same food. This shows one of the weaknesses in the present World Food Day programme.

Question 5: Do you think people are eating healthily, especially in Africa?

The obvious answer is NO! However, this is not peculiar to African continent alone. So many factors may be responsible for people not to eat healthily. These include lack of foods, lack of information on how food can be made more available, even in the cities through urban agriculture and poor access to nutrition information. Access to nutrition information will assist in making the best use of the available food, including right food combination approaches. There are other factors that may influence healthy eating, which include cultural disposition, health condition, poor sanitary environment, methods of food preparation and storage among many others. The surest way to eat healthily is when the food is available and there is adequate nutrition information concerning its consumption with consideration for the socio-cultural milieu.

Question 6: Would you say nutrition is given the same priority and level of investment as food security?

Not quite. Presently, many national and international agencies are more concerned with food security at the expense of nutrition security. The problem is that some find it difficult distinguishing food security from nutrition security. For food security, it states a condition when food is made available every time and all year round. However, nutrition security states a situation when food is available every time and all year round in the presence of sanitary environment, access to basic health care and knowledge of care at the household level. This shows that nutrition goes beyond food production but considers environmental factors, access to basic health care services e.g. immunization and care e.g. exclusive breast-feeding, complementary feeding, etc. In terms of level of investment, much investment is given to food security and that of nutrition security is diffused and sometimes difficult to be estimated. In many instances, none is given to nutrition security. I wonder if any African country can present an estimate of expenses on promotion of nutrition security in the last 5 years to show the level of investment. It is however possible to see catalogues of documents on how much was given to farmers to purchase fertilizers or trained manpower in agriculture over the last 10 years in some of these African countries. It is doubtful too, if international agencies also have documents to show their level of investment on nutrition security.

Questions 7: What solutions do you propose?

The following may be feasible solutions to Nutrition issues

- i. Capacity building in nutrition by training more manpower in the field
- ii. Develop a programme to show the link between agriculture and nutrition in the school curriculum
- iii. Engage professionals in the 2 disciplines to work together for a common good
- iv. All components of food production should be nutrition oriented, since the ultimate goal is healthy eating for good living
- v. Development of good indicators of nutrition security that can be used for monitoring and evaluation of programmes
- vi. Sensitize stakeholders in the food sectors on the need to be nutrition oriented
- vii. Create access to nutrition information for the populace through appropriate and common communication channels
- viii. Many professionals claim to be involved in nutrition but none wants to take up responsibility. Nutrition programmes should be handled by the professionals in the field to promote its course
- ix. Budget should be allocated for nutrition programmes in every nation and an annual celebration should be created for this
- x. The whole world should declare a Nutrition Day or at least modify the present World Food Day to become World Food and Nutrition Day

After this presentation, he published the discussions on their international magazine. See the attached folder ([link to the reprint](#))

The reason for posting this Letter-to-the-Editor is for us at the home front to support the move as a continental body, to give nutrition more leverage than what it is presently. If the World could dedicate a day for the celebration for Diabetes, No Smoking Day, Workers' Day, etc, I guess nutrition deserves such too. Thank you.

**Yours faithfully,
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