

Introduction to Issue 3 of 2019, World Nutrition

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Public health nutrition has always been a combination of technical expertise with political awareness and perhaps savvy. That the wealthy ensure they also have power creates a dynamic that has been in place since the fall of feudalism and its replacement by capitalism. Many national economies have seen an accelerating concentration of wealth and power over the past four decades with the successful implementation of the supposedly purely technocratic neoliberal approaches, including free trade and open markets. This has led to a loss of social stability in many countries. Workers, increasingly stuck in low-end service jobs, are recognizing the system is rigged and that their children have little chance for upward mobility.

We are now observing a complex, but so far largely successful internet-influenced effort in much of the world to point the finger for this state of affairs at “the other”, particularly immigrants. Sympathy for the poor is increasingly converting into fear. This has often been closely tied to an explosion onto the political scene of religious fundamentalism and in the US particularly includes a silent and malignant progress toward dominionism.

As the World Public Health Nutrition Association and its journal *World Nutrition* continue to argue, nutrition problems are closely linked to such political and economic developments. For the first time in decades, the number of hungry people is no longer declining. One of our strongest, most politically savvy supporters, David Sanders, died on August 30. His amazing and impressive life’s work, combined with deep compassion for the poor and marginalized, are reflected in this issue’s letters to the editor.

Almost until I retired four years ago, I always advised students interested in public health nutrition in low-income settings that going in to this field was a bold choice--because funding never came close to matching rhetoric and jobs were few. In his *Good Questions* editorial series in this issue, our Deputy Editor George Kent provides observations and suggestions regarding a relevant question: are we actually serious about ending hunger?

Suddenly the international nutrition landscape has changes: there IS money. But too often it is not there for the right reasons. An analysis of the reasons for this leads to the conclusion that it is largely because the neoliberal empowerment by the wealthy has gradually taken over democratic public space. Decisions on how to spend money in nutrition are no longer made by transparent, accountable agencies, but by philanthropies and companies controlled by the wealthy. The wealthy have always benefited from privatization, long a major goal of “structural adjustment.” Corporate capture of the UN has been their alternative response to the inability of the US Republican Party and others to destroy the UN despite decades of effort. This issue of *WN* includes a declaration from the People’s Health Movement analyzing what is going on in nutrition globally and where we need to go from here to address the social and political aspects of malnutrition in all its forms. We also have a more focused piece by Claudio Schuftan looking at where we are midway in the UN Decade of Nutrition in light of the ICN2 Framework for Action, why and what we need to think about in dealing with the current situation.

Together with David Werner, Prof Sanders wrote a book, *Questioning the Solution*, examining one of the earliest attempts to privatize components of primary health care--oral rehydration solution--proudly trotted out by Ronald Reagan as part of "selective primary health care," a work-around aiming to slot in the private sector and insure they get the lion's share of the funding. And that the people themselves are not the decision makers in how their health care is formulated.

Meanwhile, private sector takeover of the food and nutrition sector has rapidly advanced, with only a few companies now controlling huge global markets in agriculture and in processed food. In public health nutrition in low-income countries, vitamin A capsules greatly expanded funding and thus personnel to the relatively moribund nutrition units in donor agencies like USAID and CIDA, creating academic vested interests as well. This capture of public funding for private benefit has been greatly augmented in recent years by the shift of nutrition funding to ready to use therapeutic and supplementary foods, RUTF and RUSF. In creating the forerunner of the industry-friendly "SUN movement", the World Bank actually proposed that the majority of the \$11 billion it said was needed to tackle malnutrition should go for RUTF. The newest addition to these boons to giant global vitamin companies is multi-micronutrient supplementation in pregnancy, the topic of an editorial of mine in this issue, *Supplementation Fervor*.

This issue contains two research articles examining a critical aspect of public health nutrition, namely infant feeding, and they do so from rarely explored perspectives. Kenyangi et al. take a qualitative look at how one low-income borough in London is promoting improved infant feeding. And Moyo and Schaay also use qualitative means to examine a little-studied issue: fathers' involvement in complementary feeding--in this case in Zimbabwe. This issue's third research article is by Shrimpton and Marinho. Published here for the first time, it explores issues related to zinc deficiency in young children living in an area of intense global concern now--along two isolated rivers in Amazonia, Brazil in the 1970s.

Finally, we include in this issue a timely and slightly critical review of FAO's 2019 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World by a former FAO staff member, Florence Egal.