Nutrition and Emergencies
Responding to crises

WIDER Development Conference, Helsinki
23-24 September

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HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF NUTRITION EMERGENCIES

• 19th century: Malthus (1798) wrote of inevitability of massive famines

• Mid-20th century: great famines in Asia (India; China 1958 killed 30 million)
  – Erlich (1968) echoed ideas of Malthus
  – However, Sen (1981) introduced capabilities approach and entitlement failures to understand human deprivation and famine

• Late-20th century: Africa famines induced by drought (e.g., 1 million death in Ethiopia mid 1980s)
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF NUTRITION EMERGENCIES

• 21st century: refugees and displaced persons in failed states
• In 2015 65.3 million people (51% of whom are children) displaced:
• 1 in 113 worldwide displaced by conflict/persecution. Why so many?
  – Long lasting and persistent conflicts, e.g., Somalia and Afghanistan
  – New conflicts past 5 years: e.g., South Sudan, Ukraine, Syria
• Addressing needs of internally and increasingly internationally displaced persons increasingly involved:
  – diminished role for, and interest of state and formal sector institutions
  – more reliance on NGOs and indigenous institutions
NEW URGENCY IN NUTRITION EMERGENCIES

• Donor funding for emergency nutrition programs much greater than non-emergencies, and growing rapidly in magnitude unlike non-emergency funding
  – e.g., children <2 years receiving special nutritionally enhanced food products from WFP emergency ops increased from 55,000 to 4 million from 2008 and 2013

• Recognition and concern that that emergency programs receive far less scrutiny in terms of evaluation and economic analysis of what works and program impact.
IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS OF EMERGENCIES

• Prominence and visibility, and related humanitarian response covers a wide range:
  – some acute catastrophic events are highly visible; others are low-visibility/unheralded emergencies that receive little international attention

• Duration: short-term acute; chronic protracted

• Internal stable population or internationally displaced

• Degree of destruction of systems and infrastructure
  – e.g., short-terms draught versus nature disaster that destroys roads, houses, water systems, etc.
Distinction between emergencies and non-emergencies

• Most important distinction are in terms of time dimension - suddenness - and espoused goals of response
  – emergencies: reduce short-term mortality and life-threatening malnutrition at all costs;
  – chronic malnutrition: promote sustainable and evidence-based approaches, considering opportunities costs, negative (and positive) externalities, priority setting, etc.

• Emergencies becoming longer in duration and chronic in nature
Distinction between emergencies and non-emergencies becoming blurred

• Both caused by
  – Disruptions of food production and supply chain
  – Loss of livelihoods
  – Drought, floods and environmental crises -- climate change and ecological disasters
  – Epidemics and new disease vectors, e.g, HIV, ebola
  – Acute poverty due to economic shocks and crisis
  – Inability to provide basic curative and preventative health care, water and sanitation
  – Disruptions in food supply chain
  – Poor care and feeding practices
COMMON MANIFESTATIONS

• Wasting (acute malnutrition) and stunting
• Micronutrient deficiencies
• Low birth weight
• Diarrhea and other infectious and communicable disease
• Obesity?
Distinction between emergencies and non-emergencies

• Invariably short/long terms goals merge:
  – achievement of longer term goals prevents or mitigate impact of emergencies
    • better nourished children more resilient
  – emergencies transform into longer term challenges and chronic malnutrition
    • lowers human capital through school dropout, loss of savings, etc
    • destroy institutions and infrastructure, and sources of livelihoods
    • food aid and sedentary lifestyles in refugee camps can contribute to obesity
Distinction between emergencies and non-emergencies

- **LACK OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES AND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO NUTRITION EMERGENCIES**
  - scale and urgency of need
    - Economist not good at evaluating large programs on short notice
  - perception that any response a good response
  - dominated by humanitarian concerns that neglect or reject concerns about best practice and adverse unintentional consequences
  - challenges of collecting data, metrics and other causal analysis that links interventions with outcomes such as reduced mortality
  - great diversity of contexts and complexity often not fully understood
    - externally validity difficult to show
Future Challenges

• What is role of economic policy research
  – traditional areas for evidence based economic research, including program evaluation, are far more limited in scope than for dealing with chronic nutrition problems
    • no time to set up RCTs
    • lack of observational and baseline data and other sources of model identification, such as good instruments.
Future Challenges

– many research questions fall in other spheres

• operations research focusing on logistics, delivery systems and scale up of programming

• tools for surveillance and early warning systems

• bio-medical issues such as appropriate ration sizes and therapeutic foods and ready-to-use for acutely malnourished infants and children

• messaging and behavioral change

• politics and conflict studies
Future Challenges

• Chronic malnutrition (stunting and micronutrient deficiencies) represent a silent emergency, greater in scope than acutely malnourished
  – 169 million, or approximately 30 percent of children under < 5 are stunted

• Facing competition for resources since perception is that emergencies can’t wait, but chronic malnutrition can

• Addressing these problem requires first dealing with humanitarian crises