

Nutrition and Emergencies

Responding to crises

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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.

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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

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