Empowerment and Governance: Basic Elements for Improving Nutritional Outcomes

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Executive Summary

Sustained progress in reducing malnutrition will not take place until a wide range of development institutions begin to address good governance and local empowerment as issues that promote the poor’s access to important nutritional benefits. This paper advocates that nutritional assessments, analysis and action cycles pay more attention to basic determinants of nutrition related to governance and power and not focus exclusively on the immediate symptoms of malnutrition among the poor created by a system that cannot deliver the necessary nutritional assets to the poor and the exclusion of the poor as participants in the process of developing nutrition programming. This paper argues that the best way to hasten and accelerate reductions in malnutrition is via broad-based nutrition programs that focus on governance and empowerment.

Although malnutrition levels have dropped considerably in the last 25 years, the extent and depth of food insecurity and malnutrition remain high. Selective child survival interventions and technically focused nutrition interventions have made a major contribution, however further gains could be achieved by tackling the governance and empowerment as basic causes of malnutrition.

Sustainable nutritional outcomes are more likely to be achieved when the community is empowered to control processes of development. This will involve shifting the focus from a basic needs approach that treats the community as a passive recipient of technically derived solutions to a participatory approach that treats the community as an active participant in its own development. Such a shift in approach highlights the importance of participatory processes such as governance, empowerment and political capital. This perspective allows us to see that access to resources and entitlements that help individuals and communities meet their nutrition and health needs are largely governed by power relationships that have political dimensions.

Improving local governance is a political and institutional process that contributes to the efforts to reduce malnutrition by enhancing the range of development choices available at the local level and through the inclusion of various stakeholders. The kind of good governance advocated for in this paper is accountable, transparent and receptive to local participation. Good governance embodies the elements of the rule of law in the context of basic freedoms and the sharing of power.

Local empowerment is one of the key building blocks of good governance. Empowerment can be viewed as increasing the political capabilities of the poor, including personal political capabilities, self-confidence, capacity for community organization, recognition of dignity, and collective action. Viewed in this way, empowerment is a critical dimension to sustained malnutrition reduction and poverty alleviation.

Given that power relations influence access to assets and entitlements, it is important to determine how political capital is distributed. Political capital is defined broadly as the mobilization of material and social resources to enhance the ability of an individual or
group of stakeholders to acquire and wield political power in their favor. Inequalities in political power are ultimately tied to inequalities in economic assets and social networking. In the context of this paper, the political capital of the poor is enhanced through a local governance style that responds to the interests of the poor through inclusive democratic and participatory arrangements.

Improving the outcomes of nutritional programming depends on the structure of government. Existing governance systems often reflect the interests of the most powerful. Unequal political power can translate into persistent poverty and malnutrition. Corruption and the capture of the benefits of public goods by the rich can go a long way to explain the lack of voice and participation of the poor, and why the benefits of economic growth do not trickle down to the poor. Decentralization does not always lead to good governance. This is especially true if the local power structure is biased against the poor, or the local capacities are so weak that the qualities of the services are extremely deficient. In order for the poor to be effectively mobilized to make contributions to nutrition projects, there needs to be an environment that enables the participation of the poor in governance. An enabling environment includes the tolerance of local government for the voice of the poor, the credibility of public officials, the predictability of government programs, and respect for the rights of the poor (Moore and Putzel 1999).

Efforts to enhance participation by the poor in nutrition programming through good governance can of the hindered by corruption and the capture of benefits by local elites. Corruption is likely to be significant among civil servants when rules and laws are not transparent, and easily manipulated. The capture of program benefits by elites is the result of an imbalance of political capital at the local level. Good governance is closely linked to the rule of law and non-discrimination. When the rule of law is transparent, predictable and uniformly applied, the opportunities for civil servants who hold positions as gatekeepers to precious goods and services to practice corrupt rent seeking behaviors will be reduced (Dethier 1999).

Efforts to promote empowerment opportunities are grounded in removing the obstacles of bad government. These include eliminating unnecessary regulations, bureaucratic roadblocks, and corrupt rent seeking civil servants that prevent the poor from obtaining necessary services (Shepherd 2000). However, improvements to government are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for creating good governance that can reduce malnutrition. Good governance is likely to occur when there are strong partnerships between local government, the private sector and civil society.

Establishing effective institutions for good governance and local empowerment will not be simple. Institutional reforms are required that empower the poor to participate in local and national decisions, that make government officials accountable, and ensure that the poor receive legal protection. To be effective in reducing malnutrition and poverty in a sustainable way, the tools of democracy, participation and freedom of choice and the capacities to use these tools must be made available to the poor.
Table Of Contents

Executive Summary ......................................................................................................................... i

I. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1

II. The Role of Good Governance in Reducing Child Mortality, Malnutrition and Poverty .......................................................................................................................... 2

III. Given the Importance of Political Dimensions to Reductions in Malnutrition and Child Mortality, Why Has Such a Focus Not Been Integrated into Programming Approaches? ............................................................................... 4

IV. Governance and Empowerment: Building Blocks of a Rights-Based Approach to Overcoming Malnutrition ......................................................................................... 5
   A. Governance ...................................................................................................................... 6
   B. Empowerment ................................................................................................................ 8

V. Structural Constraints to Good Governance and Empowerment ..................................... 11
   A. Corruption .................................................................................................................... 11
   B. Capture of Benefits by Local Elites and Problems Associated with Decentralization ........................................................................................................... 12

VI. Incorporating Empowerment and Governance in the Programming Cycle .................. 13
   A. Holistic Analysis .......................................................................................................... 14
   B. Strategy and Design .................................................................................................... 18
      1. Capacity enhancement ............................................................................................ 19
      2. Linkages .................................................................................................................. 20
      3. Empowerment ........................................................................................................ 21
      4. Advocacy ................................................................................................................ 22
      5. Nutritional Outcomes .............................................................................................. 23
   C. Monitoring and Evaluation .......................................................................................... 24

VII. Summary ............................................................................................................................ 26

References .................................................................................................................................. 28

Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Causes of Malnutrition in Society ...................... 3
Figure 2: Livelihood Framework for Analysis ........................................................................ 16
Table 1: Traditional versus CLEAN design approaches ...................................................... 25
Empowerment and Governance:
Basic Elements for Improving Nutritional Outcomes

I. Introduction

Global malnutrition levels have dropped considerably in the last 25 years. Between 1970 and 1995, the number of children who were malnourished declined from 204 million to 167 million, and the prevalence of malnutrition fell from 46.5 percent to 31 percent (Smith and Haddad 2000). These declines can partly be attributed to great advances in the eradication of certain communicable diseases, great strides in literacy and women’s education, significant gains in agricultural productivity and improvements in the health environment. However, the greatest obstacles to improving nutritional outcomes are those related to creating good governance and promoting the participation of the poor in nutrition programming through empowerment. Malnutrition is a multidimensional problem that requires an integrated approach that includes issues of governance and empowerment.

The extent and depth of food insecurity and malnutrition in the world at the turn of the century remains unconscionable (Pinstrup-Andersen et. al. 2000). It is estimated that one sixth of the world’s population do not have access to sufficient food. Over one billion people worldwide still survive on less than one US dollar per day. Over two billion people suffer from iron deficiency anemia, and another two billion suffer from iodine deficiency disorders. In addition, more than 250 million children suffer from severe Vitamin A deficiency. It is estimated that 36 million individuals are living with HIV/AIDS and the disease is spreading rapidly to Asia (Flores 2001). HIV/AIDS has devastating nutrition and economic consequences. Tuberculosis and malaria are also on the rise. Even under the most optimistic scenarios, as many as 128 million children would remain malnourished by the year 2020 (Smith and Haddad 2000). Clearly the health and nutrition problems that confront us today indicate that much more needs to be done.

Messer, Cohen and Marchione (2001) point out that the global situation after the end of the Cold War is riddled with conflicts that have been the cause and effect of hunger. In Southern Sudan, violence has left 2.6 million people vulnerable to malnutrition if the demand for food assistance is not adequately met. Losses in the capacity to produce food due to conflict in parts of sub-Saharan Africa range from 3.4 percent in Kenya to over 44 percent in Angola. Most notably, rates of child malnutrition and mortality are especially vulnerable in conflict situation. Not only is hunger a result of conflict, it can be the cause of conflict. For example, droughts in the Horn of Africa in the 1970s, 80s and 90s devastated food production capacities of politically oppressed populations, resulting in the outbreak of civil wars. Famine and the inadequate response by the Ethiopian government in the 1970s contributed to the pressure for its overthrow.

Economic globalization has consequences for malnutrition rates related to economic growth and food availability. Globalization is defined here as “the spread of international markets for goods, services, capital, and labor and the emergence of new institutions and network organizations that operate easily across borders” (Paarlberg 2002). Some
economists would argue that trade liberalization leads to reductions in malnutrition because of the tendency for increased employment opportunities, increased food availability and lower food prices. Besides trade liberalization, globalization brings international debts and structural readjustments that can leave governments hard pressed to deliver necessary services to the poor. This economistic approach to understanding the effects of globalization on malnutrition misses several important issues related to the distribution of power and access to resources. A closer assessment of globalization and its effects on different segments of the population would show that with the benefits of globalization there are significant losses. For example, in Bangladesh and the Philippines where globalization has been a powerful force, the landless and the poor are experiencing a decline in their standard of living. Nutrition programs need to be aware of their position within the context of these global forces and how changes at the global level can affect nutrition at the local level.

The persistence of these nutrition and health problems is juxtaposed with a decreasing volume and redistribution of aid finance. Official aid has dropped 21 percent in real value since 1991. As resources have shrunk, development investments have migrated to sectors and populations with higher potential for market development (Marchione 1999). Competition for public funding has led to a fragmentation of development efforts such that scarce resources have become sectoralized. For example, health and nutrition problems are rarely viewed in a holistic manner, and are often addressed from a disease focus (diarrhea, TB, HIV/AIDS, etc.), a nutrition focus (micronutrients or malnutrition), a special population group in the life cycle focus (maternal, pre-natal, child), or in special contexts (refugees, urban) (Pelletier 2001b). Sectoral competition for scarce resources has also led to competition between line ministries, leading to a situation where resources have become diffused and applied at too low of an intensity to have an impact. The growing trend of sector-wide approaches is actually working against multi-sectoral interventions that often characterize community-based nutrition programs. Serious consideration should be given to the fact that the optimal way of funding health and nutrition research (i.e. earmarked funding, primarily technical focused solutions) may not be the optimal way for overcoming malnutrition (ibid.).

Although the emphasis on selective child survival interventions has been responsible for saving many lives, further gains could be achieved by broad-based efforts to reduce general malnutrition in addition to selective health and nutrition interventions. Technical focused programs have tended to level out in their impact on malnutrition and poverty reduction (Rahman 2001). Meta evaluations carried out by researchers at Cornell University have indicated that by simply reducing the prevalence of malnutrition by five percentage points could reduce child mortality by about 30 percent and under-five mortality by 13 percent (Pelletier 2001a). Such broad-based efforts not only include combining nutrition interventions that address immediate and underlying causes, but also tackle the basic causes that lead to poor nutritional outcomes. To identify new avenues for improving nutrition outcomes, we must identify elements in the development process that serve as both obstacles and opportunities for improving nutritional outcomes. This paper explores ways that nutrition and poverty programs can benefit from a broad-based effort to address the basic causes of malnutrition (Figure 1). It is proposed that
transformative advances in public health and nutrition can be brought about by including a focus on empowerment and governance in broad-based nutrition programs. Sustained progress in reducing malnutrition will not take place until a wide range of institutions begin to address governance and empowerment issues that deny the poor access to important assets and processes.

This paper discusses the importance of addressing good governance and empowerment in the participatory development process in order to achieve increased reductions in malnutrition. It begins with a discussion of governance and empowerment and how they need to be factored into a participatory development framework. This is followed by a discussion of the major structural constraints that could impede the application and success of these types of approaches. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ways that such concepts can be operationalized in a development programming cycle.

II. The Role of Good Governance in Reducing Child Mortality, Malnutrition and Poverty

Sen (1999) points out that good governance in the form of democracy can make three positive contributions to development: 1) the basic political and civil rights that are preconditions for freedom of choice and action; 2) the incentives for political leaders to respond positively to the demands of the people; and 3) the formulation of values and priorities by allowing open and transparent discussions and debate. The evidence for good governance on the nutritional status of the poor is illustrated by the following research.

Evidence for the importance of good governance in reducing malnutrition and poverty can be drawn from Guatemala and South Africa (Heggonboughen 1995). Poor populations denied their basic civil liberties suffered disproportionately from social injustices, hunger-related diseases, mortality, and food insecurity. Research carried out in 23 countries for the 2000/1 World Development Report confirmed the importance of good governance by demonstrating the importance of political voice by the poor as a major contribution to their well-being (Dethier 1999).

The link between good governance and the reduction of child malnutrition has been established by a cross-country study carried out by Smith and Haddad (2000). They suggest that improvements in democracy (as proxied by the political rights and civil liberties data from Freedom House Index 19981) can lead to a reduction in malnutrition if they are directed toward improving food security, caring practices and health. Good governance, in this study defined as the strength of democratic political institutions, contributes to the reduction of malnutrition by improving access to services and increased availability of food. Smith and Haddad find this relationship to be particularly strong in

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1 The Freedom House Index methodology “rates countries and territories based on real world situations caused by state and nongovernmental factors, rather than on governmental intentions or legislation alone.” Freedom House does not maintain a culture-bound view of democracy and its results demonstrate that, in addition to countries in Europe and the Americas, there are free states with varying forms of democracy (http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/methodology.htm).
South Asia, East Asia, and North Africa and the Near East Regions. Their study supports the argument that governance has a valid place in an approach to reducing malnutrition.

Gerring and Thacker (2001) found that reductions in child mortality are associated with good governance. Their cross-country research shows that political and civil rights significantly and positively correlate with declines in infant mortality. Thus, good governance appears to exert a long-term cumulative effect on infant mortality. Given their research and that of others, it is surprising that good governance is a neglected component of many nutritional development programs.

Despite the fact that globalization is a force that diminishes the capacity of nations to govern their own affairs, it is also true that the greatest deficits to deal with malnutrition are at the level of national governments. The persistence of malnutrition is largely attributable to the failures of national governance to provide essential public services and resource. Attempts by global institutions to improve national governance have been frustrating (Paarlberg 2002). Rather, efforts to improve governance should be multi-leveled with an emphasis on working from the bottom-up beginning with local governments.
III. Given the Importance of Political Dimensions to Reductions in Malnutrition and Child Mortality, Why Has Such a Focus Not Been Integrated into Programming Approaches?

Despite the insights provided by the above studies, the development of an analytical framework that identifies the channels through which democracy and governance condition poverty and nutrition outcomes has not been forthcoming. This is primarily because there is a general reluctance on the part of researchers and implementers to address political issues. The political economy of policymaking tends to be dominated by
an economic analysis. There tends to be a strong desire on all parties to remain technical when approaching malnutrition and poverty reduction (Dethier 1999). Nutrition programs are similar in their avoidance of direct contact with governance and empowerment issues. Traditional nutrition interventions are usually limited to growth monitoring and promotion, promotion of breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, nutrition IEC or nutrition education, supplementary feeding, health-related services or micronutrient supplementation (Allen and Gillespie 2001).

Nutritional programs need to be viewed as ethical processes of governance where basic rights form the framework for food and nutrition security goals and program implementation (e.g. respecting food preferences, protecting means for local procurement, facilitating new means for achieving nutritional security) (Marchione 1999). Nutrition programmers should see their role as helping to: 1) build local capacity to enhance the sustainable impact of their work; 2) facilitate coalition building to mobilize grassroots civic participation for the protection of the rights of their communities; and 3) become advocates of pro-poor policy reform (McCarthy 2000).

Some nutritionists and development practitioners might argue that tackling the political dimensions of malnutrition are beyond the scope of most nutrition programs. It is unrealistic to assume that a small nutrition program with its meager resources could change the way countries govern. What is essential is to recognize is that participation is a key ingredient to good governance and can be fostered at multiple levels of society and government. Participatory processes that operate at local and regional levels are within the realm of most nutrition and poverty alleviation programs.

There are many examples of successful participatory community programming where technical content constitute core interventions. Tanzania and Tamil Nadu are classic examples. More recent experiences from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Philippines demonstrate successful participatory nutrition programs. Participatory Triple-A process, as emphasized in UNICEF’s Nutrition Strategy, is a common strategic element in many of these programs. The success of these programs suggests that a well-implemented Triple-A process is democratic, empowering and in line with good governance.

Although technically focused externally derived programs have had positive impacts on child survival, sustainable outcomes will be likely achieved when the community exerts more control over the process. Greater participation by the various stakeholders impacted by the program is needed to provide nutrition programs with a community focus. Improvements in nutrition and child survival are not amenable to technical fixes, but require the facilitation of input from the poor to better address local nutrition and poverty issues.

The technical fix approach of traditional nutrition programs is being brought into question by recent lessons learned from programs being implemented in Asia where sustainable improvements in child health and nutrition depend on community participation, capacity building and ownership. Community mobilization and
participation (i.e. the process orientation) is as important as the technical content of the program. However, for maximum sustainable impact, both the process and outcome orientations need to be integrated into a framework that views community ownership as fundamental to success (ibid.).

For example, selective child survival approaches that focus on a specific disease or a specific intervention tend to be vertically directed approaches (Pellitier et.al. 1999a). Problems are usually defined by external institutions or a narrow portion of the community. Community ownership is usually not of concern to the implementing agency. These programs tend to use time-limited resources to focus on problems, and may not be sustainable beyond the timeframe of the external grant. In fact, such technically focused interventions can act as a deterrent to community participation, because program staff may attempt to align the activities of the community with the goals and interests of one particular program or agency at the exclusion of other activities that could have a positive impact on health and nutrition.

In such circumstances, the actions of line agencies could lead to staff forming “coalitions of indifference” to the needs of the poor, because community needs may not coincide with the objectives of the agency (Pellitier et. al. 1999b). The incentives of the line agency staff have to be taken into account in order to understand why the marginalization and indifference to expressed community needs exists. First, line agencies may view an community empowerment as a threat to limited resources as they are required to negotiate with communities where resources should be committed. Second, due to limited discretionary funding, agency staff are oriented towards special purpose grants and contracts that do not give them flexibility to focus on alternative needs expressed by the community. Third, central control of objectives has narrowed the range of program options that can be implemented in the field (Pellitier et. al. 1999a). Thus, the ability to focus on empowerment and governance can be constrained by fragmented agency agendas, regulations and fiscal pressures.

IV. Governance and Empowerment: Building Blocks of a Rights-Based Approach to Overcoming Malnutrition

Shifting from a basic needs approach to a human rights development paradigm brings in concepts such as governance and empowerment. This perspective allows us to see that access to assets and entitlements are largely governed by power relationships that have political and economic dimensions. The model proposed here suggests that empowering the poor within the context good governance can bring about positive nutritional outcomes. This analysis highlights the importance of education and free access to knowledge, the building political capital among the poor to strengthen their ability to make their voices heard, the role of NGOs as facilitators in the dialogue between the poor and government service agencies, and incorporating a gender perspective in empowerment to more effectively address child malnutrition.

A. Governance
Definitions of governance vary substantially. In the context of this paper, governance is a political and institutional process that contributes to nutritional improvements and poverty reduction through enhancing the development choices available at the local level and better inclusion of all social groups in those choices (Rahman 2001). Most popular writers tend to use the term synonymously with ‘government’ (Weiss 2000). It is important not to confuse local government with local governance. Governments have a central role to play to ensure that the processes of governance can occur (e.g. protection and safety of the citizenry so that individuals have the freedom to develop their own capabilities). However, to be effective for poverty reduction, governance processes have to include actors beyond government (civil society and the private sector). Good governance is accountable, transparent and participative (Akinyele 1998). Governance embodies the elements of the rule of law in the context of basic freedoms and the sharing of power (Schneider 1999). However, good government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reducing malnutrition and poverty. Good governance is more likely to occur when there are strong partnerships between local government, the private sector, and civil society.

Parajuli and Kothari (1998) discuss how emerging perspectives on good governance are moving away from a centralized national model to a decentralized, or local level approach. They point out that strengthening local governance is important for the establishment of a strong foundation upon which the state rests. Contemporary grassroots political movements, for example, The National Front for Tribal Self-Rule in India, and the Zapatistas movement in Mexico, are powerful forces that advocate for increased local autonomy as a way to better adapt to the inevitable forces of globalization. Their discussion highlights the many perspectives on what constitutes good governance and how this concept should be instituted.

Modes of governance can be characterized by the degree of: 1) centralization / decentralization; 2) participation of stakeholders; 3) transparency of the procedures adopted; and 4) the accountability of the agents involved (Dethier 1999). Certain systems of governance provide better opportunities for participatory development than others. Good governance usually includes, but is not limited to, democratic institutions and political processes.

The presence of good governance is influenced by a number of factors such as the degree to which political systems are fragmented; the degree to which government incentive structures are influenced by being accountable to the poor; the competition between development actors over resources; and the prevailing power struggles between central and local government.

Leaders must be accountable to their constituency for good governance to take place. Effective commitment to reductions in malnutrition and poverty are derived from accountability. Two types of accountability are essential. Government employees must be accountable to elected representatives and elected representatives must be accountable to the voting public (Blair 1998). Accountability is not possible without transparency and the threat of sanctions in case of non-compliance (ibid.). The lack of accountability and
transparency in prevailing incentive structures frequently stands in the way of effective program implementation. Civil society institutions must generate enough pressure from below to keep government open, responsive and accountable.

In addition to accountability, good governance requires free access to knowledge. Access to information tends to be asymmetrically shared among stakeholders and unevenly distributed at different levels of government (Schneider 1999). Free access to information can transform individuals into community participants equipped with the knowledge about their rights and duties to serve as active members of society (Akinyele 1998). A free press who has access to information about the conditions of food insecurity is able to present the situation to the public so that agencies can coordinate their activities more effectively. Such information can also be shared with the international community from which assistance could help ameliorate a crisis (Haddad and Oshuag 1999). As Sen (1995) rightly states, “no substantial famine has ever occurred in any country with democracy and independence and a relatively free press.”

To effectively mobilize the poor to improve the quality of governance, there is a need to focus on the enabling environment provided by government. This will include the tolerance of local government for poor peoples’ voice, the credibility of public officials, the predictability of government programs, and respect for poor peoples’ rights (Moore and Putzel 1999).

One of the problems obstructing the establishment of good governance is the fact that most local participatory arrangements do not always include the poorest people (Shepherd 2000). Aside from the fact that the poor often do not have time to participate, the poor may be excluded deliberately by the local elites. Thus, in order for true participation of the poor to occur, institutional mechanisms must be in place to make sure these groups are included. In many places, NGOs have a comparative advantage in developing participatory and targeting approaches that effectively involve the poor (ibid.). NGOs often work to enhance social capital by mobilizing the poor into networks of organization and contributing to the economic and political resources possessed by these groups.

An example of the role of NGOs in the promotion of good governance can be drawn from Cebu City, Philippines. Governance in the city was enhanced by the 1992 Philippine Local Government code that granted fiscal, administrative and planning autonomy to local government units with the purpose of increasing local autonomy and political leadership. This reform provided organizations like the Urban Poor People’s Council with the opportunity to mobilize the community for participation in decision-making regarding social development projects, employment initiatives, police control and representation in the city council (Etemadi 2000). NGOs serve as partners in service delivery programs. The city council contracts out service delivery programs to NGOs and to assist communities in articulating their needs to the city council for agenda setting purposes (ibid.). NGOs engage in community leadership training and social mobilization. They work with trained leaders to identify problems, outline objectives and define a strategy. This process facilitates the understanding of local problems by the
community and empowers them to identify changes that need to be made and the resources required to do so. Sessions held by NGOs focus on the community strengths and weaknesses, opportunities for change and potential threats that could result from their efforts to bring about change (ibid.).

The example of Bangalore, India illustrates a case in which good governance practices are not found and the interests of the poor are marginalized from policy discussions and service delivery programs. Governmental linkages available to the poor are limited to local civil servants, while corporate entities, which dominate the urban development policy scene, have the advantage of linkages with state and national agencies. This disadvantages the urban poor as they compete with corporate entities for land, infrastructure and services. The rights of the poor are replaced by corporate needs and the urban poor are often subject to the demolition of their property, resettlement, increasing land prices and a government in which their interests receive little attention (Benjamin 2000). A good governance perspective on urban poverty views the poor as a proactive group whose participation in setting the development agenda is required. The needs of the urban poor often include land reform, service delivery and marginalization as areas of key importance for intervention (ibid.).

B. Empowerment

Improving nutritional outcomes through participatory governance requires empowering the poor to advocate for their own agendas. Empowerment is one of the key building blocks of good governance. Empowerment is achieved through social mobilization, “the process of bringing together all feasible intersectoral social partners to determine felt needs, and raise demand for and sustain progress toward a particular development objective” (Tontisirin and Gillespie 1999:54). The goal of empowerment is “the gaining of strength in the various ways necessary to be able to move out of poverty, rather than literally ‘taking over power from somebody else’ at the purely political level” (Schneider 1999:13). Empowerment requires the poor to have access to knowledge, the ability to organize, an awareness of civil rights, a forum to make their voices heard, and the financial and material resources to advocate for their agendas. In the context of this paper, empowerment can be viewed as increasing the political capabilities of the poor to make changes in nutrition programming decisions by building a capacity for action based on collective organization (Moore and Putzel 1999). In many situations, the poor must become involved in networks and coalitions with sympathizers to press for their claims (Schneider 1999). Viewed in this way, empowerment is a critical dimension of a good governance approach to sustaining reductions in malnutrition. However, the opposite can be argued for the cases of Bolivia and Argentina where popular empowerment has had negative effects. The important point here is to consider that in any empowerment process local, national and global contexts are critical in determining the appropriate approach to implement.

Two essential elements facilitate the process of empowerment. First, change agents from the community make social mobilization possible because they promote organization in an environment where economic insecurity, illiteracy and a history of political exclusion
have reduced popular enthusiasm for participation (Osmani 2000). Second, the ability of mobilized groups to advocate for policy change needs to be accompanied by measures that remove some of the conditions of economic and political insecurity. Unless the poor can be guaranteed the security of their livelihood and safety, it is unfair to assume they expect them to accept the risks that come with social mobilization (ibid.).

Second, empowering the poor does not necessarily mean that they will be always be successful in lobbying for their agendas. Because the poor are not homogeneous and live in different contexts, they may face different types of deprivation. Local deliberative processes may produce an outcome that does not reflect the values and interests of all stakeholders equally. Deliberation by members of the community may actually cause some participants to alter their viewpoints in a manner that leads them to support decisions that are contrary to their values and interests (Pelletier et al. 1999a). It may not be feasible for marginal groups to pressure local government institutions to deliver services directly to them without having the benefits made available to the whole community (Blair 1998). The community deliberation process can also lead to unfair and inefficient outcomes. In such situations it may be important to integrate expert-generated considerations into the deliberation process during the problem definition, agenda-setting and implementation processes. This approach implies a high degree of articulation between the community sphere and the administrative state (Pelletier et al. 1999b).

Johnson and Wilson (2000) provide an example of the community deliberation process and discuss how the institutional sustainability of an urban waste recycling program in Zimbabwe depends on how well the fragmentation of civil society is recognized and accounted for in the development process. In this project, as with most, there was a diverse range of participants who negotiated their interests and goals in the context of relative social inequality among participants. They found that changing local governance required a unified community interest in seeing the project become successful.

Creating an enabling environment for empowerment requires implementing efforts to promote empowerment opportunities grounded in removing the obstacles of bad government. These include the regulations and various bureaucratic roadblocks that prevent the poor from obtaining services (Shepherd 2000).

Women and empowerment is an important element for nutrition programming, because personal empowerment for women has a direct positive impact on improving the nutritional status of infants and children (Haddad 1999). The nutritional status of children and infants of women who occupy low status positions is compromised by their mother’s inability to influence decisions about family size, health-care seeking behavior for their children, the amounts and types of food fed to children, and the amount of time spent on child-rearing. If we want to know more about nutrition and what to do about it, we must learn more about women and their deprivation (Osmani 1997:21).

Women’s education as a form of empowerment is especially effective in promoting positive nutritional outcomes for children. At the global level, the greatest reductions in
rates of underweight children can be attributed to an improvement in women’s enrollment in secondary education (43 percent) (Smith and Haddad 2000).

Exceptionally high rates of malnutrition in South Asia are rooted deep in the inequality between men and women (Ramalingaswami, Jonsson and Rohde 1996). To bring about change, a sustained, long-term effort must be made to promote equal freedoms, opportunities, and rights to participate in decision-making both inside and outside the home. The issue of gender equality is not amenable to any kind of technical fix.

Resistance to the empowerment of women may come from cultural gender values that disproportionately position women in lower status positions relative to men. An example of this includes preferences for male children in South Asia, the Near East and North Africa that have an observable effect on disproportionate rates of mortality as a result of unequal nonfood and food resource allocation (Haddad 1999).

Building political capital is a critical element in empowerment, but has received little attention during the past two decades (Shepard 2000). Given that power relations influence access to assets and entitlements, it is important for any program focused on reducing malnutrition to determine how political capital is distributed. Political capital is defined broadly as the ability to use power in support of political or economic positions in support of livelihood options (Baumann and Sinha 2001). Important to nutritional programming is to determine how unequal political power can translate into persistent poverty and malnutrition.

The ability of the poor to press their claims depends on how they can build up this power in relation to that of others and deploy it in the face of countervailing forces (Baumann and Sinha 2001). Several ways the poor can create political capital are to pressure for the rights to information, exposing discriminatory actions, and protesting against corrupt officials and favored contractors. Political capital is increased through inclusive democratic and participatory arrangements (Shepard 2000). By increasing participation in campaigning and voting, women, ethnic minorities and the poor will achieve better representation enabling them to influence public decisions and actions that may produce more benefits for them in terms of service delivery, which ultimately has the effect of reducing malnutrition and alleviating poverty. However, the process of transforming representation into empowerment, benefits, and poverty reduction is difficult for those groups with little political capital (Blair 1998). A key objective of nutrition programs should be to consider how political capital could enhance the capacity of the poor to use democratic processes to their advantage. Understanding how political capital operates helps to understand why nutrition and poverty-focused programs often fail to deliver benefits to the poor.

V. Structural Constraints to Good Governance and Empowerment

There are several reasons why the benefits of growth do not trickle down to the poor in countries that have high persistent inequality. These are corruption, the capture of benefits by local elites and the problems associated with decentralization (Dethier 1999).
In all three, there is a reluctance to transfer power from the top and a lack of genuine and representative involvement from the bottom (Osmani 2000). Good governance is closely linked to the rule of law and non-discrimination. When the rule of law is transparent, predictable and uniformly applied, the opportunities for rent seeking behavior and corruption will be reduced (Dethier 1999).

It is important to understand the processes by which institutions make decisions and the system of incentives, values and capacities of institutions (Haddad and Oshaug 1999). Centrally-based agencies may be reluctant to give up power if the costs are perceived to be too high. Thus, centrally controlled sectors may resist devolving power and resources to local government. Illicit operations of power can frustrate efforts of the poor to access and defend entitlements by diverting significant resources away from the poor and into the hands of civil servants and local elite.

A. Corruption

Corruption, simply defined, is the abuse of public power for private benefit (Tanzi 1998). Corruption can be understood as one of the consequences of excessive state intervention and the bureaucratic rents, or bribes, created thereby, and/or as a consequence of the unaccountability of governance (Harriss-White and White 1996). Corruption by governments reduces their capacity to help the poor and contributes to a perception of institutions by the poor as ineffective and to be a problem, rather than a solution (Dethier 1999).

Increases in administrative bureaucratization and a tightening of control over resources to a limited number of officials through the creation of specialized public offices and the issuing permits have provided bureaucrats with the opportunity to request bribes or to accept offered bribes (Tanzi 1998). Many governments provision goods, services and resources at below-market prices so that they can make a profit through the later sale of such goods. This, combined with the fact that governments often pursue salary cuts as a way to keep spending down, leads to a tendency where public officials become inclined to request and accept bribes in order to keep the transfer of goods moving and to maintain a certain standard of living. Governments may not respond to bribery with punishment, rather, they may base their decision to reduce salaries, for example, on the assumption that officials are receiving extra compensation (ibid.).

Corruption is also affecting the quality of the staff that are hired by line ministries. For example, data from 35 countries on the recruitment and promotion of civil servants indicate that as these decisions are decreasingly based on merit, there is less incentive from above to refuse or request bribes. Therefore the extent of corruption increases (ibid.). Similarly, there is a statistical relationship between corruption and the wage index such that lower wages are related to higher corruption. However, significant reductions in corruption require costly increases in wages that make this an inefficient way to deal with internal corruption (ibid.).
A fertile environment for the spread of corruption among civil servants is one in which the lack of transparency in rules, laws and processes make it relatively easy for officials to manipulate the system unobserved (ibid.). In corrupt societies, the most able individuals will be diverted, by existing incentives, from pursuing socially productive activities and toward rent-seeking activities. This diversion will impose a high cost for the growth of these countries (ibid.).

Corruption has been demonstrated to have several observed effects on the health of an economy that directly influence levels of poverty. First, it reduces public revenue and increases public spending, thus contributing to large fiscal deficits. Second, it increases income inequality because it favors well-positioned individuals who can extract higher rents for public goods. Third, it is likely to increase poverty, because it reduces the income earning potential of the poor. Fourth, it reduces investment and therefore slows the rate of growth. Fifth, it indirectly contributes to a reduction in health and education expenditure because of decreased government revenue (Tanzi 1998).

Rent seeking behavior by public officials by extracting bribes from individuals in order to access government services can lead to an internal fracturing of government sectors whose employees are motivated by the profits of controlling public resources. Also, competition between sectors over access to public resources can create serious gaps in the ability of governments to coordinate activities that require the participation of multiple sectors (Tanzi 1998).

Democratization often has the effect of decentralizing corruption from the central elite to local bosses able to manipulate government officials because they have considerable sway in their election. Additionally, democracies provide incentives and opportunities for corrupt behavior through the acquisition and management of large amounts of funds used in election campaigns (Harriss-White and White 1996).

B. Capture of Benefits by Local Elites and Problems Associated with Decentralization

A particular type of corruption that plagues decentralized systems is capture. Capture means that the interests of the rich are given more weight in the welfare function than the interests of the poor (Dethier 1999). This usually occurs when local elites or interest groups control local government. Capture leads to several problems in the delivery of public goods such as the distortion of cost effectiveness. If capture leads to significant diversion, those who take the bribes are not likely to take into consideration the negative externalities of their own actions.

Decentralization of government is a popular approach being taken to improve governance by ensuring a more equitable control over resources within government and in partnerships with civil society. Resistance to decentralization is a reaction to the implicit shift in political capital in any substantial democratization initiative, which inevitably creates apprehension, jealousy and opposition between national political leaders and local civil servants (Blair 1998).
There is no guarantee that decentralization of government will lead to greater participation of the poor. For example, rural decentralization can empower local elites at the expense of the poor in order for the central government to create a power base in the countryside. Thus, central government can have a critical role in making decentralization more or less favorable to the poor. However, participatory governance can be thwarted if it meets hostile reactions from higher levels. For this reason, there is a need to build coalitions of committed people at various levels that support local governance efforts. Efforts should be made to create institutionalized partnerships that champion good governance causes.

The negative side of decentralization is that central governments may not really decentralize power, rather, they may try to deconcentrate power instead of devolving authority (Blair 1998). A significant reason for the failure of decentralization schemes is the takeover of power by local elite. In some cases, indifference at the national level exposes governance structures for take-over by an elite that put them to work for their own use. In other cases, elites takeover through collusion with former political leaders who allocate development funds to local leaders as a means to secure the allegiance of the local power structure. Local elites will siphon off the funds for themselves, and in return, will keep affairs under control in their districts and maintain popular support for their patron national leaders (Blair 1998). Local governments seem to improve in their delivery of services as democratic structures are brought to bear more significantly on local officials (ibid.).

Thus, decentralization does not always lead to better governance. Decentralization will not work to the advantage of the poor if the local power structure is biased against the poor (Schneider 1999). In addition, if local capacities are so weak that the quality of service provision is extremely poor, it may be better in the short run to continue to have the central level manage services.

VI. Incorporating Empowerment and Governance in the Programming Cycle

As the preceding sections argue, governance and empowerment constitute important elements in reducing malnutrition. Governance is part of the sphere of political and ideological superstructure depicted in hierarchical views of cause-effect relationships leading to malnutrition (UNICEF 1992, Gillespie and Haddad 2001). While empowerment is also embedded in this superstructure, it is also the latent capacities that individuals possess and can use to improve their lives. As broad-based contributors to basic causes of malnutrition, governance and empowerment represent important leverage points for addressing higher-level underlying and immediate causes. Long ignored as too far out of reach for projects to influence, the importance of addressing these basic causes is now clear, as they are key determinants of sustainability.

In operationalizing governance and empowerment into nutrition programs, we are faced with a dilemma. Because governance and empowerment are further removed from direct linkages to nutritional outcomes, they do not receive adequate attention or programmatic
scrutiny. They are sometimes viewed only as the latest development trend unworthy of serious consideration. Additionally, governance and empowerment processes have an impact across the livelihood spectrum, not only in nutritional outcomes. Thus, it is difficult to directly measure their contribution to changes in nutritional status. However, as previously noted, there is convincing evidence that governance and empowerment are important components to good nutrition programs. The key is to embed empowerment and governance processes into nutrition interventions, so that they become part of the programming process and serve as catalysts for improving the nutritional status of communities and households.

A. Holistic Analysis

During the previous decade there have been many advancements in integrating key sectors in an attempt to improve the impact of development programs. Broadened perspectives have resulted from advances made in conceptual and field experiences with food and livelihood security, to name just two. New conceptual models generally call for a more holistic understanding of systems within which people conduct their lives. No longer are, for example, KAP surveys sufficient for understanding the complexities of nutrition problems.

There is no substitute for making a holistic analysis a participatory process, whereby empowered individuals and communities drive the process of identifying needs, explore cause-effect relationships, debate possible solutions, and help mobilize resources.

Holistic analysis promotes a multi-dimensional view of actors, both internal and external, which influence nutritional outcomes. Holistic analysis, when done properly, leads to the identification of the most nutritionally vulnerable households and places peoples' priorities and aspirations for improving their health and nutrition at the center of the analytical and planning process.

In conducting a holistic analysis that considers both governance and empowerment, it is important to focus on the technical factors that influence nutrition as well as the contextual factors and processes that influence nutritional outcomes. The key components to consider include: understanding priority nutrition problems; discovering power relationships among institutions, households and individuals; identifying synergistic relationships among sectors that influence nutrition; conducting more in-depth analysis of underlying and basic causes of undernutrition; understanding what linkages exist or are feasible; and determining the existing capacities of institutions.

To determine what the opportunities for a holistic analysis are, it is important to understand the livelihood context to develop an appropriate strategic focus. A sustainable livelihoods approach provides the analytical framework to examine these various contextual factors to understand poor peoples’ options (Figure 2). The advantage of the sustainable livelihood approach is that it: puts the poor at the center of analysis; helps us understand differentiation according to local relevant criteria; links local perspectives with higher level processes of policy design; emphasizes the capability of people as
participants in their own development; recognizes that the poor do have assets, options and strategies and that they are decision takers; and stresses the importance of informal and formal institutions and processes (Farrington 2001).

Kofi Anani (1999) stresses how sustainable governance in rural Africa depends on a concerted effort to utilize the community resources base. He argues that a local, or place-based, approach to promoting sustainable governance provides greater benefits to local populations than a global approach, which disrupts the participation processes of the community resource bases. For rural Africa, Anani feels that a livelihoods approach can provide an effective way to promote sustainable governance and a powerful tool in local empowerment.

One of the most important strengths of the livelihood approach is that it encourages disaggregated analysis to allow for more fine-tuned policy and program interventions. By combining a livelihood analysis with a governance and empowerment perspective, nutrition programmers will be able to illuminate the power dimensions of the development process. Such a holistic analysis will help target support to civil society institutions pressing for poor people’s rights (Conway 2001). It gives rise to a broader range of potential partners than is the case under more technocratic nutrition approaches. Context specific coalitions can be built around specific goals to improve nutritional outcomes.

Understanding priority nutrition problems is rooted in the promotion of participation and inclusion in the analysis of cause-effect linkages. Often, however, such analyses are long on breadth and short on depth, meaning that the immediate causes of nutrition problems are discovered and well documented, but underlying and basic causes are not as well understood. One consequence of this “shallow” analysis is that interventions are not as likely to fit with the context. Appropriate behavioral change and systems improvements needed to promote positive nutritional outcomes are best developed when the cause-effect analysis is rich in both breadth and depth (Caldwell 2002). In order to understand what shapes behavior or system dynamics, one needs to understand the underlying cause-effect structure. These lower levels of cause-effect are also where the issues of governance and empowerment will be discovered.

How power is structured and distributed within a community or across institutions is of paramount importance in understanding the role that governance and empowerment can play in nutrition (and other) programs. Power relationships affect how local governments are able to respond to decentralization, promote equity, and participate in local initiatives (Blair 1998). In order to understand who holds power and how it influences nutrition, it is important to first disaggregate household and community information to arrive at differences in material conditions and social positions among social groups (as well as along other social strata such as gender). Relational analyses will promote an understanding of differentiation and power dynamics.

Participation and empowerment are the basic tenets of a holistic approach, but a holistic analysis should also cover the following components in depth (See Figure 2):
Context - What are the social, economic, political, historical, demographic trends that influence the nutritional outcomes of a given population and what are the risks to which they are exposed?

Resources - What are the various forms of capital (financial, physical, social, human, natural, and political) that households and communities have access to and how are they differentiated and disaggregated? Vulnerability is determined by the risks that households and communities are exposed to and their ability to use capital other means to cope with these risks. Resource availability influences individual and household ability to access goods and services and influence their nutrition.

Institutions and Organizations - The institutions that operate within a given context will be critical to sustainable nutritional outcomes. It is important to identify which government, civic, and private sector institutions operate in a given setting to determine their relative strengths and weaknesses in delivering goods and services. The private sector should not be left out of such analyses since it can play a critical role in providing goods and services.

Nutrition Outcomes - Outcomes are measured to determine how successful households are in their food security strategies. These outcomes can be based on normative standards (e.g. nutritional status) or on criteria identified by the communities. Such outcome measures often need to be differentiated and disaggregated across groups (e.g., livelihood category, age cohorts), households (by, e.g., wealth status, head of household gender) and individuals (including, e.g., gender and age).

Information should be gathered on the areas of governance that impact nutrition as part of the holistic analysis. These include:

- **Public Sector Management**: current status of planning and accounting, civil service reform, process of decentralization, financial management, and audit capacity.

- **Legal Reform**: emphasizing the importance of the rule of law, and civil law framework, and current status of legal systems.

- **Public Participation**: participatory approaches governments at all levels use to involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of projects.

- **Gender Issues**: government’s efforts to promote reforms that remove the legal impediments that women may encounter in seeking education or access to work.
- **Human Rights**: government’s stance on human rights. Human rights are an indivisible and a central objective of development. Civil, political, economic, and social rights are mutually reinforcing.

- **Social Allocation of Public Funds**: how the government allocates public funds among competing social and political interests has a profound impact on the alleviation of poverty, malnutrition and other social ills. For example, excessive military spending crowds out social programs governments could support.

- **Crime and Violence**: a major constraint on development, especially in major cities. Crime and violence diminish personal empowerment, especially for women, and create an atmosphere of distrust among people and institutions.

- **Media**: an important part of good governance and democratization is the establishment of a free and independent media—essential as it ensures a greater degree of government accountability.
Figure 2: LIVELIHOOD FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

- **CONTEXTS, CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**
  - Policy
  - Social
  - Economic
  - Political
  - Environmental
  - Infrastructure
  - Demography
  - Historical
- **LIVELIHOOD RESOURCES**
  - Natural Capital
  - Economic/Financial Capital
  - Human Capital
  - Social Capital
  - Political Capital
- **INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES**
  - State
    - Formal Civil Society
  - Informal Civil Society
  - Private Sector
- **LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES**
  - Production and Income Activities
  - Processing, Exchange and Marketing Activities
- **SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES**
  - Nutritional Security
  - Food Security
  - Income Security
  - Education Security
  - Health Security
  - Habitat Security
  - Social Network Security
  - Safety
  - Environmental Security
  - Life Skills Capacity

**Analysis**
- Contextual analysis of conditions and trends and assessment of policy setting
- Analysis of livelihood resources; trade-offs, combinations, sequences, trends
- Analysis of institutional/organizational influences on access to livelihood resources and composition of livelihood strategy portfolio
- Analysis of livelihood strategy portfolios and pathways
- Analysis of outcomes and trade-offs

Modified from Scoones, 1998
B. Strategy and Design

Project design is the systematic identification and prioritization of problems and opportunities and the planning of solutions that will lead to favorable outcomes when adequately implemented (Caldwell 2002). Problem and opportunity analysis is another important component of holistic analysis. Normally this analysis is performed to identify immediate, underlying and basic causes of nutrition-based problems in communities. To promote more governance and empowerment, however, requires that the same analysis examine the explicit links between the causes/consequences of discrimination and marginalization as well as the material and social outcomes that are observed.

Nutrition projects seek impact in terms of equitable and durable improvements in nutritional status (e.g. – increases in average birth weight, decreases in stunting prevalence). Such changes come about by influencing human behaviors and practices (e.g., - parental care-giving, diet change) or by establishing or strengthening systems (e.g., health service delivery). These two fundamental types of change, behavioral and systemic, define how impact is achieved in any development intervention.

Systemic changes are also common in nutrition interventions but have been largely restricted to improving institutional competency (e.g., improving existing health delivery systems), policy change (e.g., promoting new or revised nutrition-friendly health and agriculture policies, or strengthening the enforcement of existing policies) or service changes (e.g., introduction of IMCI into public-sector health agencies).

In designing nutrition projects and programs that incorporate essential elements of governance and empowerment, the behaviors of individuals and systems must be considered. To facilitate this it is helpful to consider the following categories when designing possible interventions: Capacity enhancement; Linkages; Empowerment; Advocacy; and Nutrition outcomes (Table 1).

1. Capacity enhancement

Often, the limited achievements, or even failure, of many nutrition programs is a function of insufficient sustainable capacities within communities and organizations whose responsibility is to implement such programs (Gillespie 2001). Despite the paucity of good evaluations that look at capacity enhancement within a nutrition program, where programs have combined direct nutrition interventions with capacity enhancement there has been positive gain. Capacity and its enhancement is a broad topic, but Gillespie (ibid.) defines capacity for nutrition as the ability to assess and analyze the problem of malnutrition, and design, implement, manage and monitor appropriate actions.

Capacity exists at all different levels, from individuals to organizations to networks to governments and societies. There is an advantage in recognizing capacity enhancement as a process, inextricably linked to change and the management of change at different levels (ibid.).
Where are capacity enhancements focused in terms of promoting governance and empowerment in nutrition? For example, in democratic societies, they lie within governing institutions - legislatures, judiciaries and electoral bodies. Legislatures mediate differing interests and establish policies, laws and resource priorities that directly affect people-centered development. Electoral bodies ensure independent and transparent elections. Judiciaries uphold the rule of law, bringing security and predictability to social, political and economic relations.

They also lie in public and private sector management - including leadership and management of changes, civil service reform, economic and financial management and urban management. Support for leadership development and management of change cuts across governance efforts. Reform of state institutions to make them more efficient, accountable and transparent is a cornerstone of good governance.

In enhancing capacity of institutions around a nutrition-based theme, a project can initially focus on two areas – problem analysis and information systems. The ability to collect and analyze cause-effect relationships is a powerful tool for any organization, and the ability to then manage the information for decision-making is another important capacity.

Nutrition programming should support decentralization when possible, because decentralized government enables people to participate more directly in governance processes and can help empower people previously excluded from decision-making processes. One opportunity is to include local government as a partner in nutrition interventions, and at the same time plan to mentor local government institutions in the transition from state-controlled service providers to local facilitators of community-based initiatives.

Projects need to be designed to improve the capabilities of communities and individuals to assess, analyze and plan for actions that will result in positive nutritional outcomes. This requires a fundamental shift from designing projects that are community-based to designing projects that are community-driven. The former can imply direct service delivery whereby the community is a passive recipient of services, joined only by common geographic boundaries. Projects that are community-driven, on the other hand, enjoy the active participation of a broad constituency.

McClusky (2001), in examining ways and means of governance, discusses methods to build capacity in order to improve decision-making. These include developing non-conflictual approaches to decision-making (such as committee-based decision-making with equal representation); collectively defining an overarching value framework that guides decision-making within any given area; enhancing the role of the individual, in particular by reintegrating community-based decision making into everyday life (whereby people incorporate decision-making processes into their personal decision-making); organizing participation in decision making in terms of circles of interest within an overarching value framework; and integrating the notion of learning into decision-making.
2. Linkages

Accelerated progress toward malnutrition reduction through community-based nutrition programming depends on the strength of linkages between community and government structures facilitated by an enabling and supportive policy environment (Tontisirin and Gillespie 1999). The relevant actors to consider here include central government (e.g., Ministry of Health), regional and local government line agencies, municipal government, private and public service providers, community-based organizations, and funding agencies.

The operational nexus of many community-based projects is a two-way link between service delivery outlets (government health services, private clinics, marketing channels, etc.) and communities themselves, represented by various forms of local government and civic groups (Gillespie and Haddad 2001). Dialogue and action is often between frontline service personnel and community mobilizers, although different scenarios should be considered that bring more diverse representatives into the link. For example, in urban areas the city government can provide valuable linkages among neighborhood leaders or the private sector. This can facilitate social mobilization campaigns that promote healthy nutrition behaviors.

To achieve reductions in child morbidity and mortality, the BASICS Project in Nigeria developed a model, called Community Partners for Health, that brought together community-based organizations and private health facilities to identify issues affecting child health in the community, set priorities, and develop and implement action plans to address identified problems. Project staff held community fora to forge partnerships between the private and public groups. To facilitate action, the project proposed partnership prototypes, but each partnership was allowed to evolve its own structure and working dynamics. By the end of the second round of the fora, partnerships were established in each of the six communities. (See BASICS II. Community-based Approaches to Child Health: BASICS Experience to Date).

3. Empowerment

Sustainable approaches to malnutrition reduction need to emphasize an empowerment approach that builds community capacity as a means to promote nutrition development even after projects cease to exist. “Service delivery programs, which tend to focus on the immediate causes of malnutrition, should be designed and implemented in such a way that they create opportunities for capacity-building and empowerment “(Tontisirin and Gillespie 1999:35).

Projects first need to create an environment that can empower people – especially the most vulnerable groups – so that they in turn can exercise their voice in civil society (Osmani 2000). For example, empowerment opportunities for youth can begin with things as simple as participation in sports or youth clubs that involve travel.
Empowerment of community mobilizers is important. These mobilizers need to feel important and have peers in the system. Often because of their pay status (they are normally volunteers) and lack of formal training they are not treated as equals with other health professionals and, hence, are not highly empowered.

The Mahavita Program, an urban development project in Antananarivo, Madagascar implemented by CARE International using USAID Title II resources, has as one of its core themes the empowerment of community-based organizations and individuals (Dunston 2000). The initial challenge for promoting empowerment was to stop defining the project as a set of interventions and to fully embrace the participation of individuals and organizations. This did not mean embracing all problems and needs, but considering all aspects of people’s lives, and developing a mutual understanding with them of the linkages in their own lives. Understanding the linkages was an essential pre-condition for empowerment.

Where the Mahavita Program has departed from most other programs with empowerment elements is in the efforts to empower its own staff. Considerable time and effort was invested in empowering its own staff so that they could be genuine facilitators of empowerment processes in the urban communities where they worked. This meant creating a participatory culture in the workplace before ever attempting to facilitate similar processes in communities.

Once staff empowerment had been achieved attention was turned to social and personal empowerment in poor urban neighborhoods in Antananarivo. Social empowerment in some cases involved establishing or strengthening representative community-based organizations and other formal and informal networks. In other cases it required more basic community mobilization, particularly in areas with weak or emerging civil society. The aim was to build capacity for community members to plan and implement priority development activities that emerged from participatory needs assessments, and in so doing, provide communities with the means to develop their own principles and structures of democratic representation and governance. In this way, arenas were developed for those social categories often disempowered in traditional forms of local governance – women, youth, the poor – to voice their needs and concerns and demonstrate how their increased voice may bring more widespread social and economic benefits.

It was found that for the poorest members of the communities, improving their democratic voice addressed the issue of their exclusion from decision making fora, but in and of itself was insufficient to impact nutritional outcomes and other livelihood concerns. Before gains in nutritional status could be achieved, the project had to build human capital of the poorest groups. Personal empowerment training and support activities were developed to encourage the formation of mutual support and interest groups, and to assist these groups in identifying the key constraints of an economic and social nature (including gender issues) inhibiting productive activities. The program then worked with the groups to elicit ideas and strategies for improvement. Personal empowerment followed, focusing on enhancing people’s confidence and improving their
interpersonal, business and decision-making skills to initiate activities. This included working with groups to commence savings activities, to improve existing income generating activities, or to identify and start-up more profitable new activities (Dunston 2000).

4. Advocacy

Political commitment is necessary if communities are going to be able to explore their possibilities for solving nutritional problems and translating perceived possibilities into action programs. Political commitment requires a decentralization of power to include local level government officials in the planning and implementation process. Political linkages of communities are most likely going to influence local government more than they would make a difference at state or national levels. Priorities within government need to become more equitable with the allocation of budgets. Generally, material resource improvements and infrastructure obtain disproportionately larger amounts of budgets than capacity-building in support of community-based initiatives (Ndure et al. 1999).

Community-based approaches must start with advocacy to convince decision makers of the importance, feasibility, and cost-effectiveness of investing in nutrition at the community level. Strategies must also be supported by clearly articulated national policy guidelines accompanied by a clearly defined institutional framework. In addition, community leadership and education must create an awareness of the prevalence and consequences of malnutrition and the availability of low-cost solutions (Ndure et al. 1999).

5. Nutritional Outcomes

Much has been written about programming for nutritional outcomes, and best practices exist for a number of key nutrition interventions. Gillespie and Haddad (2001), among others, provide an excellent review of direct and indirect interventions for improving nutrition. They note that solving nutrition problems requires improved management of resources at all levels, and hence good information systems. In programs that incorporate governance and empowerment, a focus on nutrition information can be the primary catalyst for facilitating change and strengthening the interaction of individuals and institutions.

When embarking on nutrition programs that incorporate elements of governance and empowerment it is wise to begin with nutritional outcomes that are realized in a short time frame, so that people can observe success and be appropriately acknowledged for their efforts. This may mean that the highest priority nutrition problems are not tackled first. However, it is the introduction and successful demonstration of the participatory process that is important, for communities will usually build on their successes by demanding better services in the future.
There has been little clarification on how to make the concept of empowerment more evident in the more conventional health programs. The program design and management should allow for a greater time frame when working with the community. Program design, regardless of its content, can be made more empowering in its strategic planning by right away including representatives from the community. Rather than begin a time-limited or one-off nutrition activity, the program becomes a vehicle through which longer-term relationships between government, NGOs and community members are built through health promotion. Through this relationship, various financial, human, material, and knowledge resources become available to community members. These resources help them to enhance their capacity to act on the specific issues of short-term nutrition needs or to change the public policies that determine access to water and sanitation. The capacity of community to act in coordination with NGOs and government can be in turn generalized to other issues of local interest (Laverack and Labont 2000).

An example of such a project is the PUSH II project in Zambia implemented by CARE. PUSH II was designed as a process project, wherein specific outputs and activities were defined in consultation with residents (Hedley and Sanderson 2000). To facilitate the empowerment process, Zambia’s governmental reforms have provided opportunities for BASICS II to have a significant influence on national policies, nationally distributed technical and planning guidelines, and the development of national training materials. These reforms have encouraged a shift from an outreach model of prevention to one that works to empower the community. Health centers are working to identify NGOs and private sector partnerships for prevention programming and in the delivery of health care as defined by the new health reforms. BASICS II encouraged the formation of community health committees who share decision making power with district level government and community health centers to design research questions, collect information, and develop health programs. By helping the community to gain awareness, experience, and a sense of ownership, and demonstrating visible positive outcomes, this type of programming has a better chance of being sustained after outside support is terminated and perhaps more impervious to political upheavals than programs that are planned and implemented from the top. The implementation of the PUSH II approach of a district health center community partnership has been field-tested and the processes of community education and collaboration have been duplicated in other districts. Their accomplishments have been to identify areas most vulnerable to disease, strengthening collaboration between NGOs and the community in the areas of project design and evaluation, and opening communication between community leaders and district government officials regarding health management (Rasmuson, Bashir and Keith 1998). Community participation has not been a simplistic process of requesting the community to identify projects they would want or assuming the opinions of small, but active, groups to be representative of the whole. Participation requires honest relationships that are built on trust, transparency and equitable collaboration (Hedley and Sanderson 2000).
Table 1: Traditional versus CLEAN design approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>CLEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holistic Analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of immediate and underlying causes leading to priority nutrition problems.</td>
<td>Assessment of immediate and underlying causes, and in-depth probing of basic causes and their cause-effect linkage to nutrition problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of immediate and underlying causes leading to poor nutritional status.</td>
<td>Analysis of underlying causes, production processes and processes of production (social).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of implementation, planning systems and capacities, and resource allocations.</td>
<td>Linkage of local perspectives with higher-level processes of policy design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment of power relationships among government structures, local authorities, private entrepreneurs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Strategy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community nutrition programs that provide a range of interventions.</td>
<td>Programs that combine process with service delivery, and give both proper status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation may reduce non-compliance.</td>
<td>Even strategy selection should be participatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency and impact assessed with respect to production of outcomes.</td>
<td>Effectiveness assessed with respect to production of outputs and production of good quality processes – especially with respect to governance and empowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Formulation and Implementation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals are SMART (simple, measurable, achievable, replicable and time-bound).</td>
<td>Goals may not be achievable and need not be measurable. Objectives are SMART, but more difficult to identify objectively verifiable indicators for process components.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding often the primary constraint to implementation.</td>
<td>Lack of community empowerment may prove as serious a constraint as funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor governments or weak institutions bypassed or ignored in favor of direct delivery (or control) of services.</td>
<td>Good governance (and agency interaction with government and civil society) essential. Capacity developing programmatic support may be required by gap analysis above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectoral programs implemented in partnership with sectoral counterparts.</td>
<td>Analysis of political capital, community power relationships and governance may yield additional partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members viewed as target beneficiaries of nutrition interventions.</td>
<td>Community members viewed as active partners and key players in the decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Patel 2001; Ndure et al. 1999
C. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation represent two key opportunities for putting into practice elements of governance and empowerment. The measurement of a community’s progress in nutritional outcomes can be turned into a practice of expanding democratic governance and individual or group empowerment. Information is power, and can be used to reinforce linkages among individuals and institutions involved in nutrition programs, promote transparency through the open exchange of information, advocate for political change or resource acquisition, and demonstrate the efficacy and efficiency of nutrition programs. Most effort has been put into measuring efficacy and efficiency of direct nutritional interventions aimed at addressing immediate and underlying causes of undernutrition, for example, breastfeeding practices, growth monitoring and promotion, supplemental feeding, and micronutrient intake (Gillespie and Haddad 2001).

Most experience in measuring governance comes from the macro level. Community-based programs have generally relied on anecdotal evidence to assess the quality and effectiveness of governance, but this information is often misleading or incomplete. For some aspects of governance—for example, corruption—only qualitative data are generally available, although new types of surveys are beginning to provide improved quantitative governance indicators (Kaufmann et al. 2000). Moreover, stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of governance—as reflected in qualitative ratings using, for example, Likert scaling—matter at least as much as objective data (from official statistics) and often more accurately reflect actual outcomes. These participant-based surveys can reflect the views of citizens, entrepreneurs, foreign investors, public officials and others about the quality of governance in their own or other communities.

The two most important elements of a strong M&E system that involves governance and empowerment are: 1) involvement of key stakeholders in the design of the system (data collection, analysis, interpretation); and 2) use of data by stakeholders for program readjustment and redesign.

Collaborative design of monitoring and evaluation processes is important because participatory involvement of local partners and communities (developing results with objectives and indicators, collecting and analyzing baseline data, and developing a joint monitoring and evaluation plan) fosters local program ownership by stakeholders, increases interest in sustaining high quality service delivery, and is an empowerment process in and of itself. Collaboration also fosters a wider girth of experience for defining objectives, and identifying, and devising schemes for measuring change.

The participatory nature of the evaluation process encourages problem analysis and development of solutions by project staff and partners – and is therefore more likely to lead to effective and sustainable programs, and good monitoring and evaluation systems allow the identification and support of promising practices or new approaches generated from local staff.

It is essential that the M&E systems developed for nutrition programs incorporate governance and empowerment components and disaggregate data by gender and social
group to track nutritional trends. The trends that to be monitored include both the intended and unintended consequences of nutrition programming. It is often only through the implementation of M&E that the deeper issues of discrimination are discovered.

In situations where the status quo of the existing local elite is being challenged, this may result in contentious and conflict-ridden responses by the elite. For example, challenging cultural norms that induce marginality can create conflict within communities and households. It is important to monitor these responses to insure that participants involved in the program do not become worse off due to the implementation of the program.

VII. Summary

Transformative advances in public health and nutrition will most likely not come about by only addressing the immediate and underlying causes that affect nutritional outcomes. Major changes are more likely to come about if we take bold and different approaches to tackling the problems at the basic causal level. Single sector, externally derived, technically focused, projectized approaches will not have the sustainable impact that we are seeking. Reducing malnutrition and poverty effectively and with sustainable results will require addressing issues of governance and empowerment at multiple levels of social and governmental organization.

Existing governance systems often reflect the interests of the most powerful. Unequal political power can translate into persistent poverty and malnutrition. Corruption and the capture of the benefits of public goods by the rich can go a long way to explain the lack of voice and participation of the poor, and why the benefits of economic growth do not trickle down to the poor.

Establishing effective institutions for good governance and local empowerment will not be simple. Institutional reforms are required that empower the poor to participate in local and national decisions, that make government officials accountable, and ensure that the poor receive legal protection. To be effective in reducing malnutrition and poverty in a sustainable way, the tools of democracy, participation and freedom of choice and the capacities to use these tools must be made available to the poor.
References


