

## 4. DEMONSTRATED POLITICAL COMMITMENT

### *Why is political commitment an indispensable element of successful nutrition programs and community development?*

Political commitment is necessary to enable communities to:

- ◆ explore possibilities for solving their nutritional problems and
- ◆ translate perceived possibilities into action programs.

Political commitment demands a decentralization of power. It also demands that governments, institutions, and communities adopt the approaches and processes that lead to community self-reliance and empowerment.

In most countries, the institutional and political frameworks needed to support sustainable nutritional improvement and community development lack strength. Sectoral and institutional budgets still allocate a disproportionately larger amount to materials resources and infrastructure than to capacity-building in support of community-based development initiatives and activities. Such initiatives, including nutrition-related ones, seldom receive high priority and are usually served by understaffed and under-equipped units.

At the national level, the political environment that will foster social development will also support community nutrition programming. Policies related to poverty alleviation, population and

### INDICATORS OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO A PROGRAM

- ◆ Existence of national policies and action plans approving the use of community-based development programs as a means of addressing national nutritional problems
- ◆ Employment of a consultative process and community participation in policy formulation
- ◆ Enough resources allocated to implement such programs
- ◆ Major interest groups within or outside the public sector that support such programs.

**Source:** Adapted from, Cohen S., *Developing Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Strategies for Population Programs*. Technical paper number 1, UNFPA, 1993.

gender issues, education, food security, health, agriculture, and decentralization, translated into concrete action, are a prerequisite for such an environment.

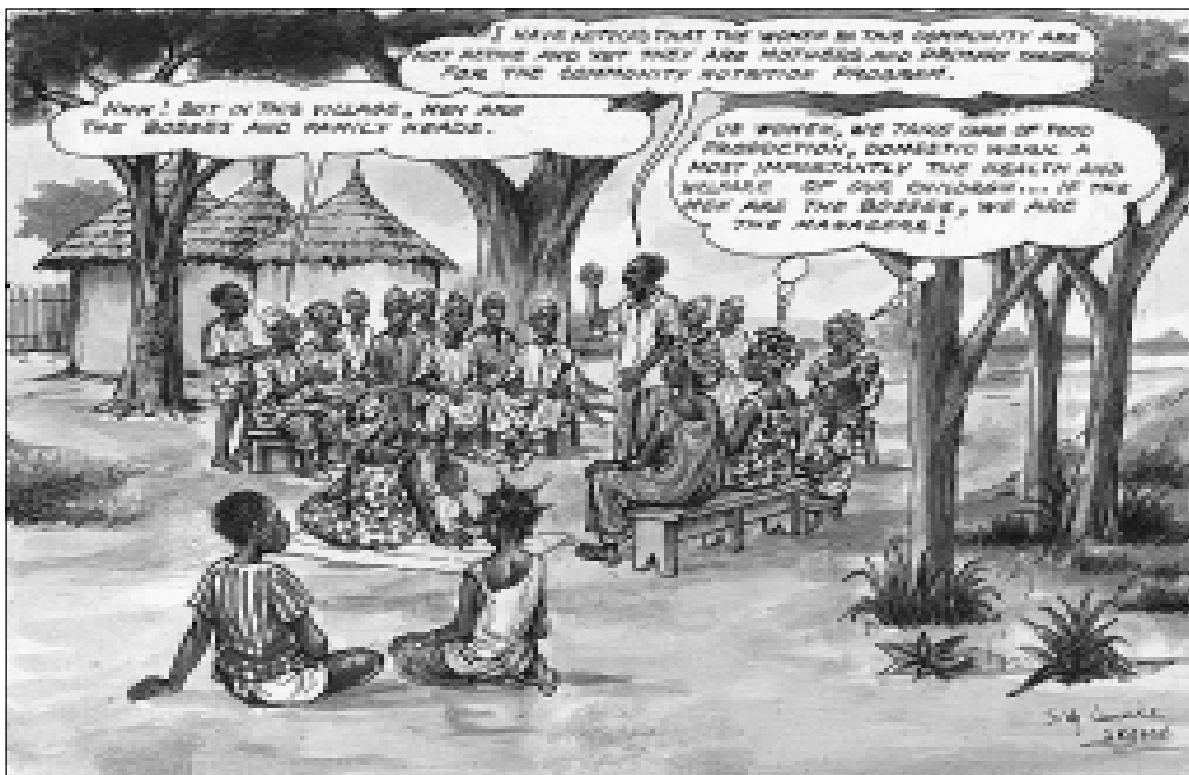
These policies will need to be supported by appropriate institutional frameworks with leadership and outreach to the community level. See Section III, Step 4, page 37.

## 5. THE ROLE OF GENDER IN DEVELOPING OF COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS

***Should community nutrition programs favor the involvement of men in the planning and implementation process, or should only women be considered as primary targets?***

A number of community-based health and nutrition programs are built on the premise that, in aspects of health and nutrition, there exists no better agent within the family and for the child than the mother. Women appear to be at the forefront of community-based programs. While such programs may have a positive impact on nutrition and women's status, they often exclude men. In effect, these programs discourage

broader community participation because they emphasize women's involvement. Approaches based on gender should ensure that the preoccupations of men and women are taken into consideration, and that responsibilities are allocated to men, women, or the community as a whole, depending on their nature. They should respect communities sociocultural values and traditions and promote collective community ownership. Furthermore, women from most African societies do not act alone. Their decisions are influenced by others including their husbands, mothers, and traditional leaders. A well-designed and targeted program should involve those responsible for decision making and those who influence them. Therefore, involving men is critical. See Section IV, Step 3.



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Nutritional problems will not be alleviated if the low social status and education levels of women are allowed to persist, however. In addition, lack of control over income and decision-making within the household deprives women of economic and social power and the ability to take actions that will benefit their own well-being. See Box 19, page 54. To ensure the success of community nutrition actions, the following elements should be present:

- ◆ Women's capacities should be promoted and improved to enable them to take control of their own well-being and development.
- ◆ Women's rights should be respected, and value should be placed on the role of the woman in the household and within her community.
- ◆ Women's decision-making capacities should be enforced by involving women in program activities wherever possible.
- ◆ Men should be more actively involved in community nutrition programs.

## 6. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS: A LEARNING PROCESS

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### *Is there a standard model for improving nutrition at the community level?*

A review of different nutrition programs reveals the broad spectrum of interventions used to improve nutrition. While no unique strategy, approach, or intervention can be applied to all programs, there is a recommended process for working with communities to identify problems, solutions, and resources for action, and recognized critical elements for success of community nutrition programs.

Within Africa, great variations exist among regions and even among areas of the same country. Therefore, there is no best way to improve community nutrition. Each country and community needs to define, implement, and secure financing for the most appropriate strategy and programs.

The ideal approach to planning and implementing community nutrition interventions is the "learning process" approach (Korten, 1989). In this approach, during implementation and evaluation, priority is given to "how" activities are/were carried out, and "how" those activities are perceived by

those who were involved and by those who were intended to benefit. All partners are involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities so that their perspectives are taken into consideration. A critical element in this approach is the formulation of lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation activities that are fed back into the program plan. As a result, modifications in program activities and strategies are made continuously based on the lessons learned during the entire period of program implementation.

The design of a community nutrition program should be viewed as a learning process in which options are proposed for addressing the nutrition situation. The implementation cycle should include repeated monitoring and evaluation exercises to assess program impact, identify obstacles to progress and allow for revision according to the changing needs and lessons learned through operations research, and a flow of information across all levels of the institutional and organizational framework.

Some community nutrition programs have already been evaluated, a summary of lessons learned from past experience will be of great use in briefing the program development personnel.

## FIVE ESSENTIAL STEPS FOR DESIGNING A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM

### INTRODUCTION

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Enormous financial and human resources can be spent on programs that are not appropriate to the country or community situation. Even when the program is relevant it can sometimes lack impact. If a program is to be relevant to the people who make decisions about policies and programs and to communities, it must address the problems they face and help them search for solutions.

Nutrition programs are more likely to be effective when there is an extended, three-way process of communication linking policy-makers, program

managers, and those most affected by the nutrition issues to be addressed.

The foundations of a successful community nutrition program are set at the conceptualization and planning phase. This section reviews in greater detail the steps and types of decisions that need to be made when developing a community nutrition program, according to the sequence proposed below:

#### A STEP WISE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM

##### **Identifying the key partners involved in the planning and implementation of a community nutrition program**

- ◆ Identifying the key partners from the community
- ◆ Identifying the key partners from the public and private sectors
- ◆ Making intersectoral collaboration work

##### **Understanding the priority nutrition problems**

- ◆ Assessing the nutrition situation
- ◆ Analyzing the causes of malnutrition

##### **Selecting the most appropriate program approach**

- ◆ Defining the program goals and objectives
- ◆ Determining the key program targets
- ◆ Choosing the most appropriate intervention strategy

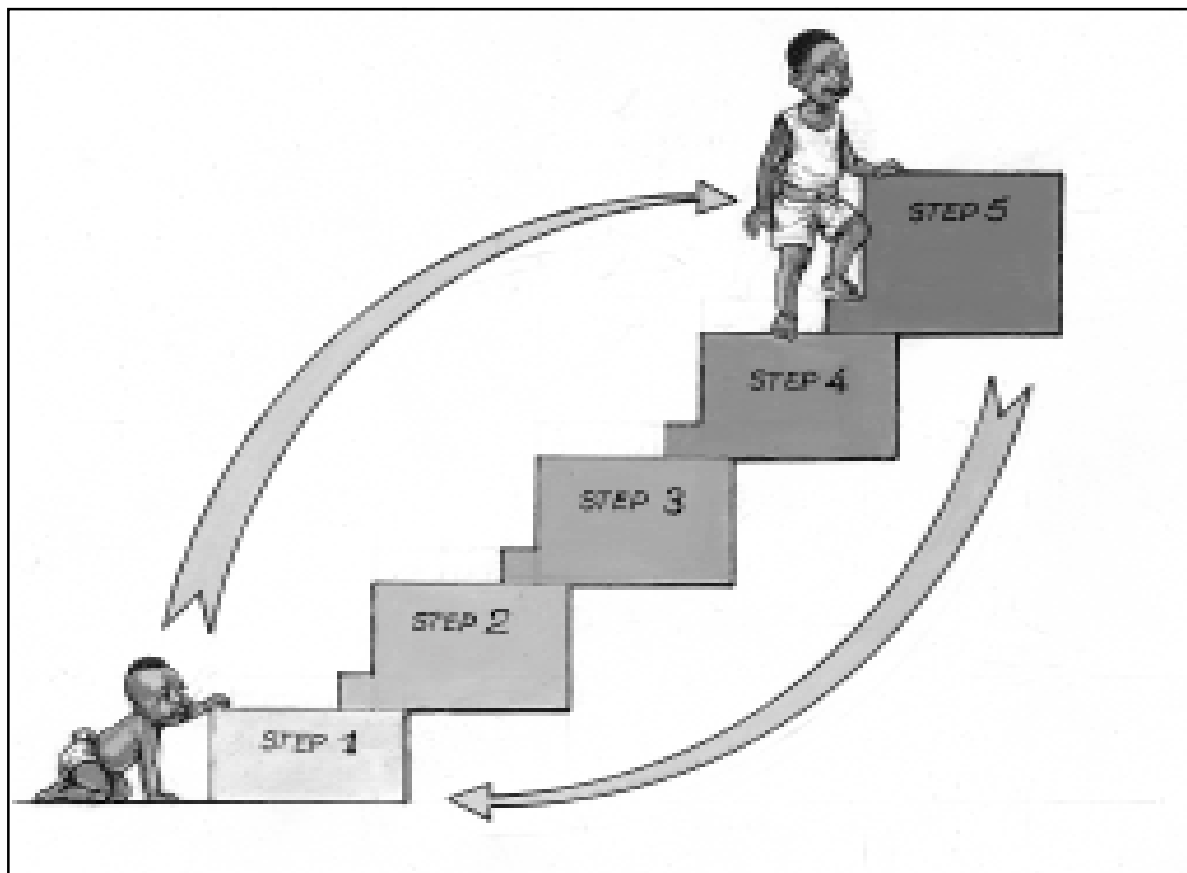
##### **Developing the institutional framework for implementation**

- ◆ Defining the management and programmatic roles of different partners
- ◆ Eliciting commitment of partners to their roles

##### **Designing an appropriate program action plan**

- ◆ Defining program activities and time frame for implementation
- ◆ Determining the amount of resources needed

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## IDENTIFYING THE KEY PARTNERS INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM

Designing a program, no matter how small, will be the work of a team of individuals from a host of sectors with a common goal and a joint interest—that is, the development of the community and the alleviation of malnutrition.

### Identifying the key partners from the community

The initiative for the development of a community nutrition program can emerge from one of a number of sources including the community, a group of concerned individuals within or outside the community, the government, or a non-governmental association (NGO). What is important is that a multifaceted approach be taken to address the perceived nutritional problems, recognizing the fact that there is no single cause of malnutrition.

The key issue is: Who in the community and who else, should be involved in the planning and implementation of a community nutrition program?

A host of individuals and groups within the community can be involved. They include women of childbearing age; older persons; young children and girls; husbands; community leaders; religious leaders; extension workers; community health workers; community development committees; women's groups; youth groups; men's groups; teachers; and traditional birth attendants.

Involving all of these individuals and groups in the planning process might not be feasible or realistic. Therefore it is necessary to identify key individuals, groups, or structures who will be able to provide that relevant information for the planning process. Extension agents, who usually have a good knowledge of the community, can be used to help identify the partners from the community.

### Identifying the key partners from the public and private sectors

Collaboration between governments and members of civil society (non-government organizations and local organizations) on the one hand, and among different sectors within government on the other, is crucial for success. Yet, identifying the key partners from these different sectors and organizations is not an easy task. Addressing the following questions might make the task easier.

Away from the community, it is clear that not only sectors and institutions dealing directly with food- and nutrition-related issues, such as the ministries of health and agriculture, will be involved.

Many nutrition intervention efforts have failed to achieve the desired impact because an inter-sectoral and participatory approach was not applied at the planning stage.

Traditionally, nutrition programs were implemented by ministries of health with little involvement from other institutional members of civil society.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- *Who in the community is affected by the nutrition problems to be addressed by the program?*
- *Which members of the community are responsible for influencing decisions that can affect the nutrition status of individuals and the community as a whole?*
- *Who in the community is involved in activities that contribute to nutrition and community development?*

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### KEY QUESTIONS

- *Which members of the community are well-informed about the communities nutrition problems community and those affected?*
- *Who has influence on accessibility to goods and services that have an impact on community nutrition?*
- *Who provides services from the public and private sector that have a direct influence on nutritional status?*

Lately, a more diverse number of structures and institutions, such as non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and private institutions are taking active part in the implementation of community nutrition

programs in an effort to make maximum use of the expertise and material and financial resources.

A review of the organizational roles of institutions involved in the planning and execution of community nutrition programs suggests at least four organizational roles for institutions:

#### ◆ Providing political leadership

These include those institutions that help coordinate national program interventions across sectors, at the national, regional, and sub-regional. Engaging the provincial or sub-central levels becoming increasingly important, given the trend toward decentralization and community involvement in decision-making, and the key political and managerial roles local government authorities play in integrated development approaches.

### Burkina

#### Box 3

#### PROVIDING THE INITIATIVE FOR A COMMUNITY NUTRITION INTERVENTION

*In Burkina Faso, the Village Women Animators Network evolved from a need observed during a mission to two agricultural youth groups in the provinces of Sourou and Zoundweogo by staff of the Ministry of Agriculture. The mission observed that wives of local farmers had a relatively unaware of maternal health-related issues. Their children suffered frequently from malnutrition and diarrheal disease, the causes of which were often related to superstitious beliefs. Mothers were worried that a many of their children were sick and dying, a trend which was having a profound effect on their agricultural productivity.*

*On returning to the capital, the mission approached UNICEF which assisted the community with food for the rehabilitation of malnourished children and later helped teach mothers how to prepare enriched weaning foods. Basic hygiene to prevent diarrheal disease was also encouraged.*

*The mission staff then initiated a small training project for the women of the two youth groups concerned. An evaluation of the project produced better than expected results in terms of knowledge retention and behavior change, which led to an extension of the project to include more women from the same locality.*

**Source:** Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Social Action and UNICEF. The Village Women Animators Network in Burkina Faso. A presentation made at the UNICEF Technical Workshop on "Promoting Community-based Activities", 1-4 November, 1997, Nouackchott, Mauritania.

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### Box 4

#### AN EVOLUTION: NEW STAKEHOLDERS OF COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS IN SENEGAL

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE OLD NUTRITION PROJECT EXECUTED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH COMPARED WITH THOSE OF THE NEW COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY AGETIP (AN NGO IN SENEGAL)

PAST STAKEHOLDERS	PRESENT STAKEHOLDERS
Ministry of Health	President's office Ministry of Health AGETIP
Medical districts	Medical districts Neighborhoods
Non-governmental organizations	Non-governmental organizations
Women's organizations	Women's organizations

*Source: Tonia Marek. Successful Contracting out of prevention services in Africa: The cases of Senegal and Madagascar in fighting malnutrition. Unpublished, 1998.*

#### ◆ Managing of program activities: “executing” institutions

These are the institutions responsible for overall management and coordination of a program or project. They may be from central or local government, or from the non-governmental or private sector. The selection of lead or executing agencies for community nutrition programs is a key strategic decision to be made.

#### ◆ Providing technical expertise in nutrition

Designing a community nutrition program requires technical expertise in problem analysis, strategy planning, capacity-building, monitoring and evaluation, operations research, and Information, Education and Communication (IEC).

The agency or committee responsible for nutrition should delegate such decisions to technicians, who can prepare proposals for approval by the political decision-makers.

Technical assistance might be provided by a local consulting firm, university, local or international research institution, government agency's technical unit, or an NGO.

#### ◆ Providing services to the community

#### CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF EXECUTING AGENCIES

- ◆ Size and nature of the program itself
- ◆ Mandate, political position, and political commitment to nutrition of the agency
- ◆ Its technical and managerial capacity
- ◆ Its mobilizing or outreach capacity
- ◆ Autonomy
- ◆ Access to funding
- ◆ Track record

*Source: Sylvie I. Cohen, Developing Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Strategies for Population Programs. Technical paper number 1, UNFPA, 1993.*

In most community nutrition programs, the focus has been on using indigenous structures and institutions to provide services such as health promotion, growth monitoring and community mobilization. (see Step 4, Page 37). Institutions and structures operating at a higher level are then responsible for training and supervisory services and the provision of materials and equipment. (Included among these for example, are divisional-level and field personnel of ministries, NGO staff

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and community-based agents, community-based groups etc.)

### **Making intersectoral collaboration work**

Planning and implementation will involve much of consultation among partners at the national, regional, and sub-regional levels. For example, assessing the nutritional status of the community alone will require consultation among partners in the collection, sharing, and review of information. This level of cross-sectoral interaction will require partnership, coordination, and commitment from all sectors.

Integration of various sectors can be difficult, but it has been achieved through the use of existing

political and decentralized organizational structures and staff to plan and manage programs. Coordination will be enhanced by the establishment of intersectoral coordinating teams, with well-defined roles and responsibilities, that meet regularly to share activities and experiences.

At the community level, existing development committee, where operational, can be used as an entry point for coordination and planning activities.

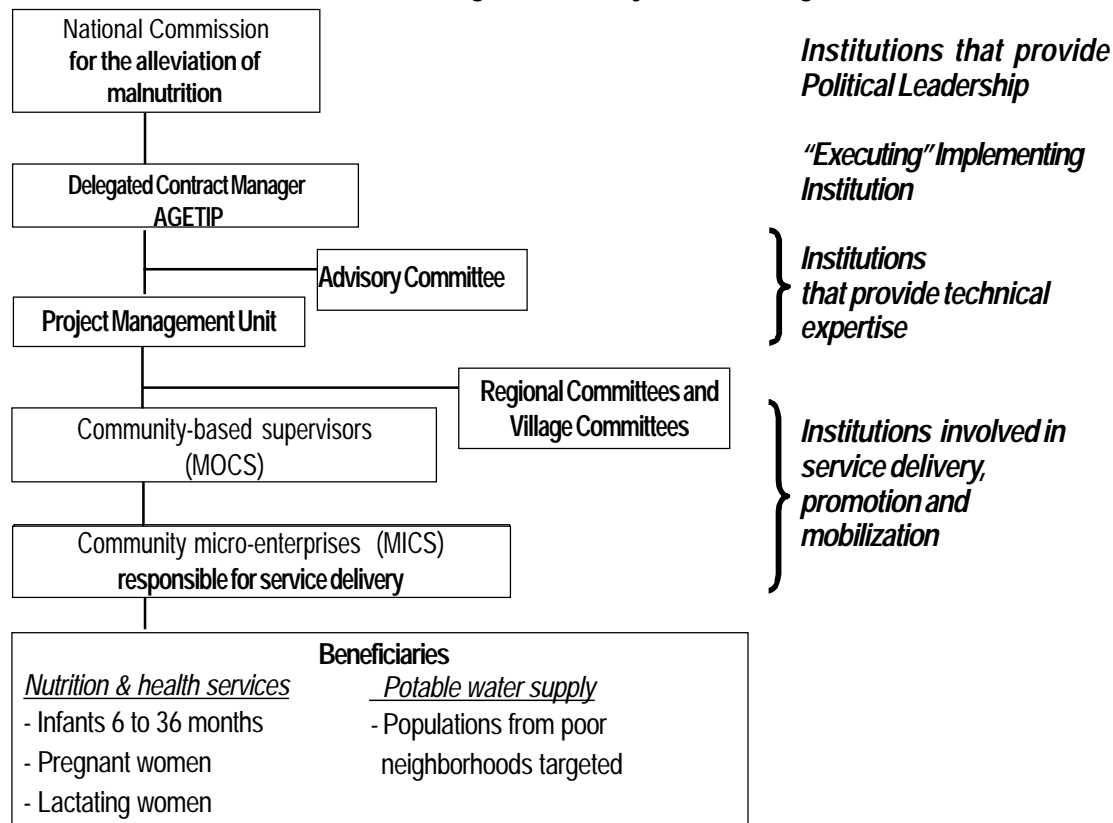
Figure 2, Page 21 shows a flow chart that demonstrates the potential coordination linkages among different sectors across and within different levels.

## **Senegal**

### **Box 5**

#### **INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN PLANNING AND EXECUTING A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM**

#### **Role of institutions involved in the planning and execution of the Senegal Community Nutrition Program**

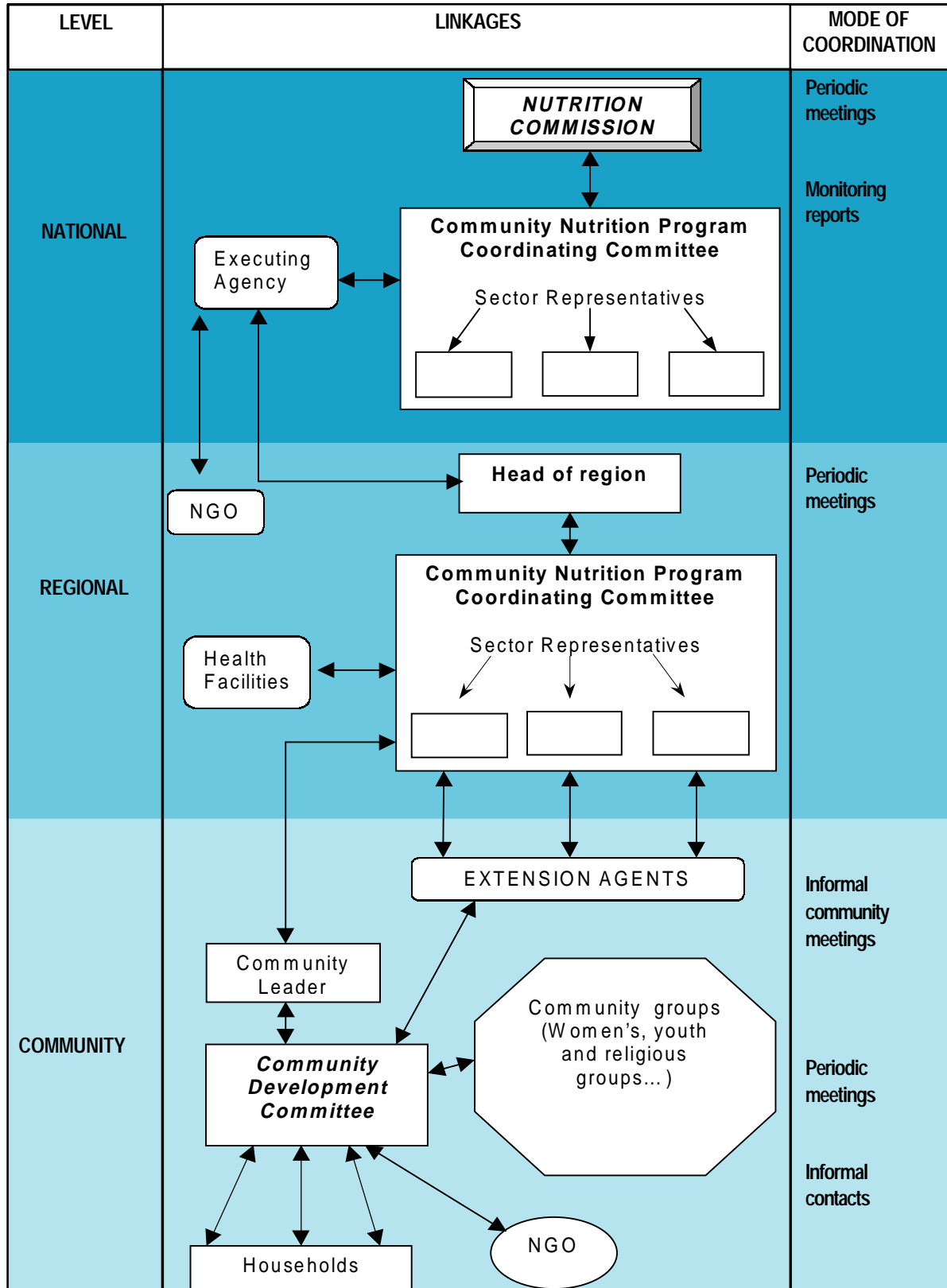


*Source : AGETIP, Presentation on the Community Nutrition Project of Senegal. Presented at a Workshop on «Experiences from Community Nutrition Programs». 23-27 March, 1998, Dakar, Senegal.*



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**FIGURE 2**  
**POSSIBLE COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR THE DIFFERENT IMPLEMENTATION LEVELS**



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## THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND

- √ *The community to be served is the best source of information about itself. Its views on its needs and concerns are best learned through some form of participatory research in which participants serve as respondents and collectors of data, thereby having an important influence on the program design.*

## UNDERSTANDING THE PRIORITY NUTRITION PROBLEMS

A pre-requisite step to the identification of appropriate strategies to combat or prevent malnutrition is precise knowledge of the nutrition situation being considered and its causes.

A weak relationship between the services offered and those demanded by the community is common among many community nutrition programs. This is largely because nutrition is seldom a perceived need of the community (Bailey, 1995). Second, negotiation with community members to decide on priority needs to be addressed is insufficient, and there is often a different perception of the reality program planners and community members. All these factors are exacerbated by an apparent unwillingness and poor capacity to stimulate dialogue and, in the process, “listen” to communities, needs and ideas among some technical personnel, especially when dealing with largely illiterate populations.

☞ (See Section IV, 2, Page 48)

The key to a coherent understanding of the nutrition situation is the ability to listen and ask the questions “who,” “why,” and “how,” to give communities the opportunity to express themselves, communicate their concerns, and experience the planning exercise firsthand. This approach places the community at the center of the planning process.

### Assessing the nutrition situation

Promotion and support of a process that involves individuals and communities in the assessment of their nutritional problems and the mobilization of local resources for action was found to be a success factor in South Asian community-based nutrition programs (Jonsson, 1995). Involving the community from the outset is vital to encourage

### KEY QUESTIONS

- n How do we ensure that the voices of the community are heard, and that community nutrition programs take their needs, concerns, and aspirations into consideration?*
- n What approaches will facilitate maximum community participation in the planning stages?*
- n How do we build capacity at the community level to improve assessment and analysis skills?*

community ownership of the program, break down resistance to program activities, and expand knowledge of the nutrition issues at the community level.

Community members, both men and women, are not confused about what is happening around them. Severe forms of malnutrition affecting young children may well be recognized by members of a community. Some may even be able to identify several of the contributing causes. Few may realize the presence or consequence of mild to moderate forms of malnutrition and “hidden hunger,” however, many may be unaware of the magnitude or significance of these problems and how best to tackle them.

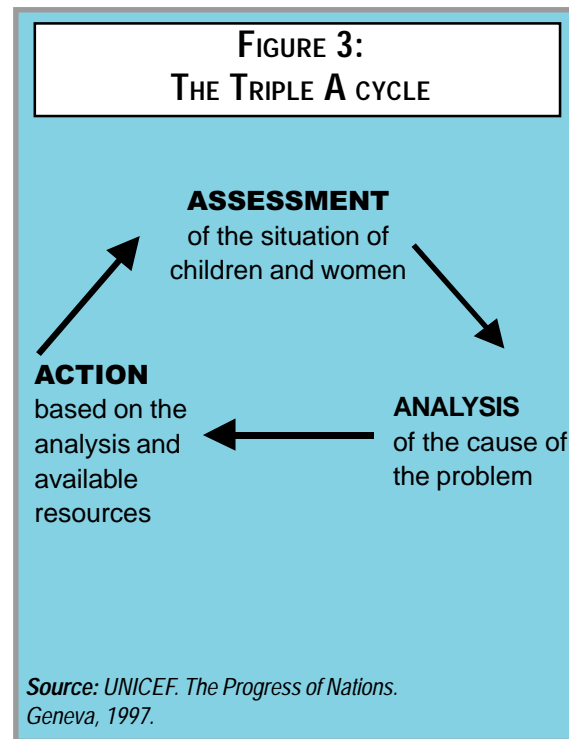
Community members seldom have enough technical knowledge to carry out the assessment process adequately. They need technical assistance from government personnel. Non governmental organizations with the necessary expertise can also be of assistance, if they have

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personnel and logistical resources to reach to the community level. Whether the support is from government or an NGO, the community needs to understand why its involvement at this stage is important.

The emphasis should be on engaging in dialogue and collaboration with the community to collect and analyze basic socioeconomic data to help community members better understand their real situation. Participation will be facilitated by workshops and orientation sessions to train local stakeholders in the use of local resources and in the technical and leadership skills needed for their active involvement in the assessment of the nutritional situation.

The Triple A cycle developed by UNICEF is a useful tool for articulating action in all aspects of life. It is used widely in the identification of community-based solutions to child nutrition and health problems. As the name implies, it is a cyclical process that involves three steps:



**Mali**

**BOX 6: HELPING VILLAGES UNDERSTAND THEIR NUTRITION SITUATION**

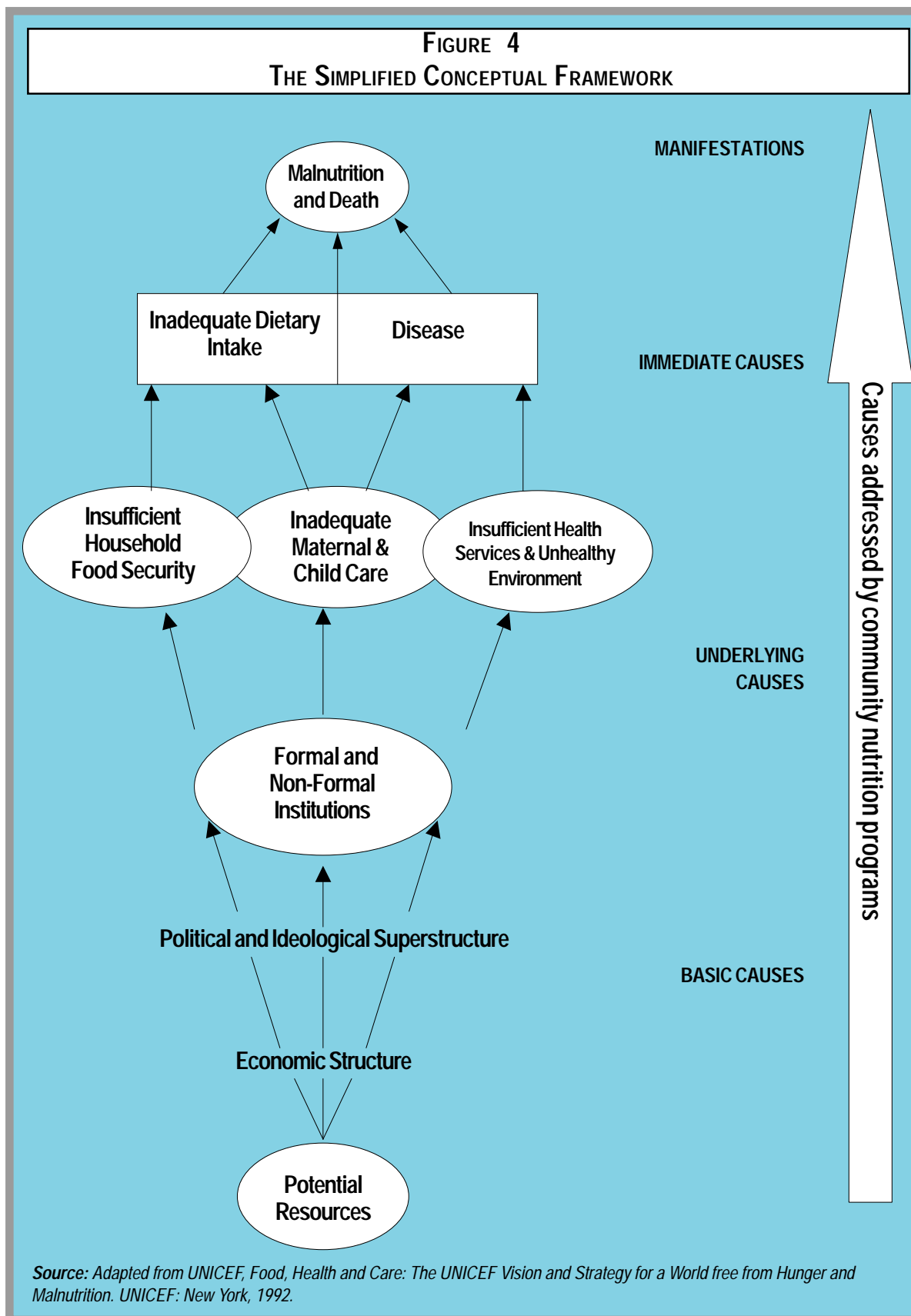
*In Mali, a series of village contacts known as “*approche par village*” help communities identify appropriate practices aimed at improving nutritional status and addressing perceived health and nutrition problems. The system is organized around three phases :*

- ◆ *In the first phase, vital demographic and health information is collected and analyzed from all the villages in a particular health catchment area. From this information, a tentative list of priority health problems is developed.*
- ◆ *In the second phase, focus group discussions are held with village members to attempt to confirm the existence of the problems identified in the first phase and propose solutions to them. The results from the focus groups are compiled and discussed with the local health committee, and recommendations are recorded by the community health agent. The goal is to select and implement those solutions that do not require outside support.*
- ◆ *In the third phase, the training needs of community health agents are determined based on the solutions identified, and a training plan is formulated.*

**Source:** Dr Alfani Shesoko et al., Health areas as an entry point for community development:

The case of the BLA Health District, Segou Region. Presented at a workshop on “Promotion of Community-based activities”, October 1-4, 1997, Nouackchott, Mauritania.

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**Assessing** the problems facing the household or community, in this case;) **analyzing** the causes underlying those problems; and) developing **actions** to resolve the problems.

The different techniques that can be used to assess the nutrition situation are described in Appendix 3. The type of information that can be collected is listed in Appendix 4.

### **Analyzing the causes of malnutrition**

After assessing the nutrition situation, a list of the factors thought to cause malnutrition in the community should be developed. This can be done using a participatory rural appraisal method such as the pocket voting method (described in Appendix 3). The UNICEF conceptual framework

(shown in Figure 4, page 25) can be used in synergy with the Triple A cycle to assist communities to identify the basic, immediate, and underlying causes of malnutrition.

Conducting this exercise with the community is important, as it helps its members to discover the relationships among different factors, observe how some factors influence others, and to begin to see clearly which factors they have control over and are able to do something about.

As can be seen in Figure 4, community nutrition programs address the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition more often than they do the basic causes, which tend to be more complex and expensive to deal with.

## **THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND**

- √ *It is important to limit the amount of data collected while making sure that all important indicators are being followed and used. Maximum use should also be made of available information at national and sub-regional levels.*
- √ *The results obtained from the assessment process should:*
  - *be shared with the community to arrive at a consensus and to facilitate the community's support for future implementation levels;*
  - *lead to a good understanding of the problem and identification of strategies with potential to improve the nutrition situation; and*
  - *provide a concrete basis for prioritizing and targeting of action on those most in need.*
- √ *The cycle of assessment, analysis and action should not be conducted as an on-off exercise. The Triple A cycle should be repeated periodically to ensure that program actions respond to changing needs and situations.*

## SELECTING THE MOST APPROPRIATE PROGRAM APPROACH

After arriving at an understanding of the specific nutrition problems in the community and their corresponding causal factors, the next step is to design an effective solution to the problems. First, the goal and objectives of the program need to be defined. Next, the most appropriate strategies for meeting the program's objectives must be selected. This involves:

- ◆ a definition of “what” you expect the program setting to look like after the program has solved the problem, the **goal**;
- ◆ the series of specific accomplishments designed to address the stated problems that result in your goal of a changed situation, the **objectives**;
- ◆ a determination of “who” the program is going to address, the **target**; and
- ◆ “how” the program is going to address them, the **strategy**.

### Defining the program goal and objectives

Issues to be taken into consideration when setting a program goal:

- ◆ **The goal is a solution to the priority problems identified by the assessment.** An assessment of the nutrition situation should result in an understanding of the specific priority problems that could be addressed by the program. The goal statement presents the solution. For example, if the problems are high rates of malnutrition due to low female literacy, inadequate weaning practices, poor child care, and high maternal workload, the goal may be: “To reduce the rate of malnutrition in Jappineh village by increasing access of women to information, education, and communication services and appropriate post-harvest technology.”

- ◆ **A goal must be visionary but realistic** Do not state that your program will accomplish more than it possibly can. For example, the goal “To reduce malnutrition” implies all forms of malnutrition among all types of people: men, women, and children, rich and poor, educated and poorly educated.

Issues to be taken into consideration when setting program objectives:

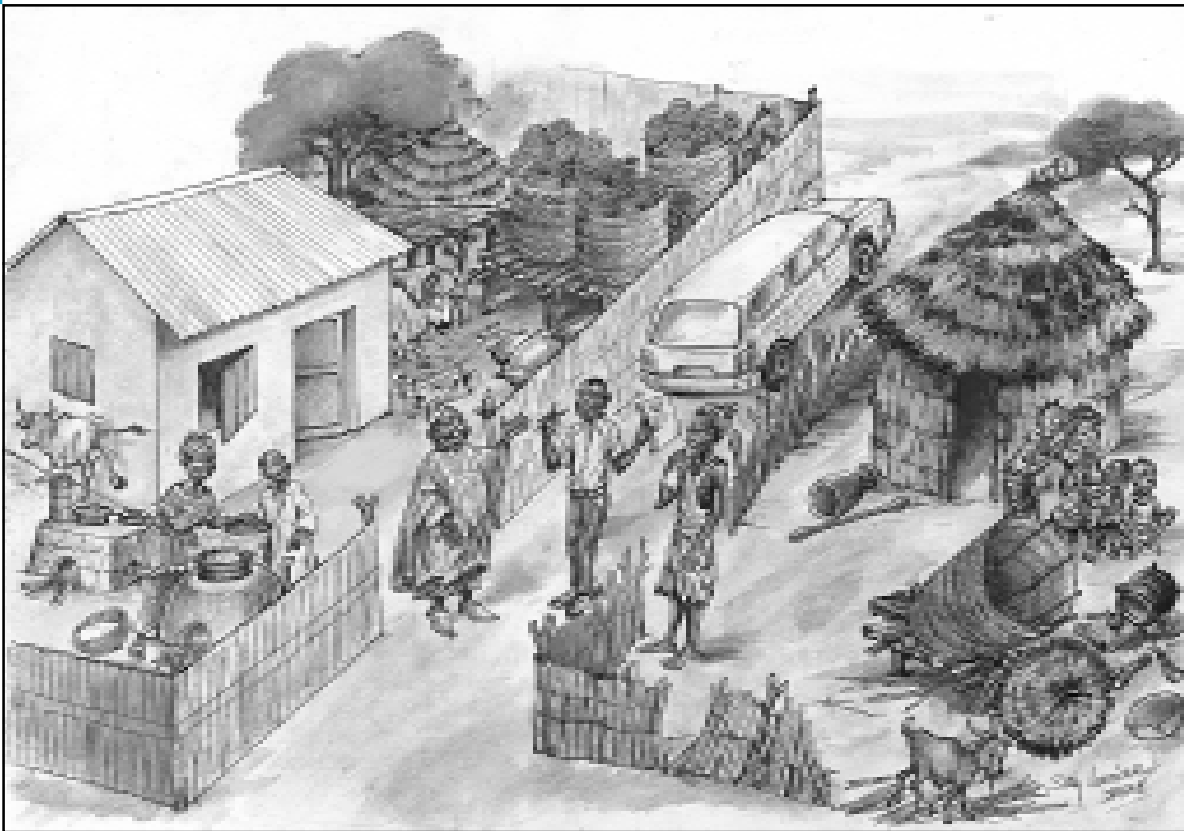
- ◆ **Objectives should be clear to:**
  - √ make it easier to plan and implement activities that will lead to their attainment, and
  - √ make it easier to monitor progress and evaluate the success of the program

### Determining the key program targets

In most cases, not everyone in a community is affected by the nutrition problems identified. Therefore, targeting the whole community will be highly costly and ineffective. Appropriate targeting is critical to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of community nutrition programs.

Targeting permits the better use of limited resources by focusing specific interventions on those groups or individuals at greatest risk and most likely to benefit from intervention. Nutrition interventions have been shown to be most effective when tailored to the specific needs of well-defined target groups. This should not mean that the most vulnerable to nutritional stress should be targeted at the exclusion of everybody else. For example, in an effort to address the needs of the most nutritionally vulnerable groups in developing countries, emphasis has been placed on the mother and young child, an approach that may have led to the misconception

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that nutrition is not a problem of the general population. A mother and child cannot take control of their own development without an enabling environment around them both at the household and community levels.

#### Approaches to facilitate targeting decisions

- **Nutrition approaches**

An analysis of six programs in the sub-region has shown that 75% of the target is children between age 6 and 36 months due to the high rate of malnutrition among this age group. All of the programs also targeted pregnant and lactating women.

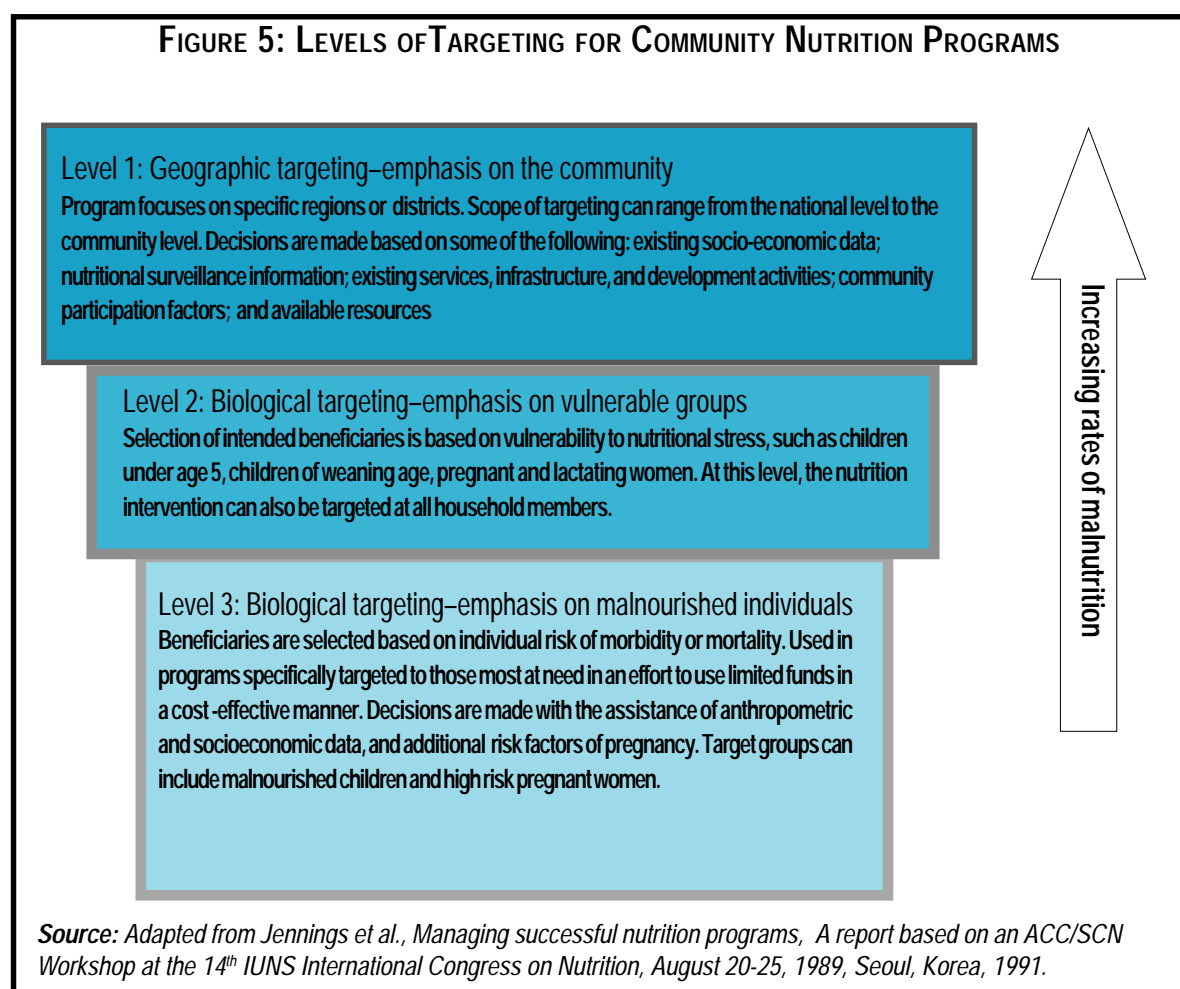
A review of a number of successful nutrition programs identified a three-tiered approach to targeting described in (Figure 5, Page 29). This approach can be viewed as descending from very broad targeting (essentially non-targeting) of communities to highly targeted programs focusing primarily on individuals. In all cases, the focus of targeting is on those deemed at nutrition risk.

Targeting may be based on geographic, socio-economic, demographic, or nutrition criteria, and may take place on a community, household, or individual basis. The statistics collected during the assessment exercise should facilitate this type of targeting.

#### KEY QUESTIONS

- *Which members of the community are most affected by the nutritional problems identified?*
- *Which members of the community can have a major positive influence on the lives of those at nutritional risk?*
- *Who are those with the capacity to motivate and mobilize communities toward increasing self-reliance and nutritional improvement?*

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Some programs take seasonal factors into consideration when targeting, in an effort to provide support to individuals/households at periods of acute food shortage e.g, food supplementation during the rainy season. Other programs consider the motivation and involvement of communities in making targeting decisions.

● **Holistic approaches**

As malnutrition and under-development persist, a more holistic and systematic approach should be considered when targeting community nutrition programs, that recognizes the interdependent relationship between women and the family, social, cultural, and economic environment of which they are a part.

This approach to targeting, referred to as the **ecological approach to health promotion** (Green, 1996), makes it possible to address the community

setting and multiple targets within that setting. It also recognizes the influence of other key household figures on the health practices and outcomes of women and children.

Target groups for community nutrition programs should include:

- ◆ **Those with nutrition problems:** Women of child-bearing age, infants and children of pre school age, and teenage girls.
- ◆ **Those with an influence on the nutritional status of the above:** (a) influential persons in the family - e.g., husbands, mothers, mothers-in-law, peers, other child caregivers (b) influential persons at the community level e.g. community leaders, religious leaders, representatives of community groups extension workers, traditional communicators.

