

# QUADRENNIUM REPORT OF THE TASK-FORCE ON DIET, NUTRITION AND LONG-TERM HEALTH OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES FOR THE PERIOD: 2005 – 2009



Prepared by Noel W. Solomons, MD  
Marieke Vossenaar, PhD

Submitted September 21, 2009

## **Task-Force Constitution and Membership:**

The tradition of IUNS internal bodies dating from the Committee period was to seek variation in ethnicity, geography, gender and age in the membership. At the beginning of the period, a major turnover membership was effected and a volunteer Secretariat of three young professionals who were all post-doctoral fellows in 2005 was constituted.

The invited members for the 2005-2009 quadrennium were:

Noel W. Solomons,<sup>‡</sup> MD, Chair (Guatemala/USA)  
Jane Badham, MSc, RD (South Africa)\*  
Rekia Belahsen, PhD (Morocco)  
Karen Charlton,<sup>‡</sup> PhD, RD (Australia)\*\*  
Colleen Doak, PhD (the Netherlands)  
Susan Higginbotham, PhD (USA)  
Martha Kaufer-Horwitz, PhD (Mexico)  
Anura Kurpad,<sup>‡</sup> MD (India)  
Manuel Ruz,<sup>‡</sup> PhD (Chile)  
AnaLydia Sawaya,<sup>‡</sup> PhD (Brazil)  
Klaus Schümann,<sup>‡</sup> MD, (Germany)  
Youfa Wang, PhD (USA/China)  
Julia Wärnberg, PhD (Spain/Sweden)

<sup>‡</sup> = member of Task-Force, 2001-2005

\* = appointed in mid-period

\*\* = moved from South Africa to Australia during the period

The Secretariat was constituted by:

Dena Herman, PhD, RD  
Shibani Ghosh, PhD  
Marieke Vossenaar, PhD

### **Task-Force Background and Mandate:**

The Task-Force on Diet, Nutrition and Long-term Health emerged from the reform of the IUNS at the beginning of 2001, which replaced the Committee system of permanent internal standing bodies with 8 Task Forces with a task-related and time-limited mandate. Its mission is predicated on a fundamental respect for the useful contributions of nutritional epidemiology and the evidence for variable and uneven processes of nutrition transition occurring through middle- and low-income societies across the world. Its mandate was to determine how applicable were the relationships of dietary pattern and nutritional status to the resistance to or susceptibility to disability, dysfunction and diseases in later life. During the first quadrennium (2001-2005), the Task-Force interpreted its mandate to provide and outline and critique the relevance of guidance and guidelines for healthful eating (and life-style practices) such as the WCRF/AICR 1997 Report and the emerging WHO/FAO Technical Report 916. The interpretation of the mandate for the present period ending in 2009 was an evolving and iterative process, influenced by recent global crises and concerns.

### **Process, Meetings and Encounters of the Membership:**

The I World Congress on Public Health Nutrition in Barcelona in September 2006, convened one year to the day following the 18<sup>th</sup> IUNS I.C.N. in Durban. It followed a period of renewal of membership of the Task-Force. The members gathered for a breakfast meeting on the opening day of the Congress. Present were: Noel Solomons, Reikia Belahsen, Colleen Doak, Susan Higginbotham, Martha Kaufer-Horwitz, Manuel Ruz, Klaus Schümann, Julia Wärnberg. Member of the Secretariat included: Dena Herman, Shibani Ghosh, and Marieke Vossenaar. In addition, for minutes during the breakfast gathering both IUNS President, Ricardo Uauy, and IUNS Secretary-General Osman Galal, were able to sit in on the all-too-brief deliberation around the table. It served as a summary of the earlier quadrennium, and a brainstorming around a course of action for this present period. Youfa Wang was in attendance at the Congress – but not at the breakfast – and was briefed on site in Barcelona.

That in Barcelona in 2006 was the only formally anticipated and scheduled meeting of the Task-Force over the period. The remainder of the time over the past three years was spent in working opportunistic working conversations at meals or coffee-breaks at a series of gatherings in which more than one member was present along with the Chair. The first of these opportunities came in Ouarzazate, Morocco at the Federation of African Nutrition Societies (FANUS) meeting in May, 2007. Rekia Belahsen and Julia Wärnberg were available for discussion and directives. Interactions among Klaus Schümann and Karen Charlton and the Chair were possible in San Diego in April 2008 at the Experimental Biology meetings (EB2008). Rekia Belahsen, Julia Wärnberg, Anura Kurpad and newly incorporated Jane Badham, as well as Shibani Ghosh, were all gathered with me at the III African Nutritional Epidemiology Conference (ANEC) in Cairo, Egypt in October, 2008. We had a coffee-break meeting and individual discussions. Manuel Ruz, Klaus Schümann with the Chair in Pucón, Chile in November 2008 at the Trace Elements in Man and Animals (TEMA) meeting. Most recently, in April, 2009, in New Orleans at EB2009, we had several opportunities to forge get-togethers across geography (USA, Latin America, Europe) with the attendance and interaction of Colleen Doak, Susan Higginbotham, Martha Kaufer-Horwitz and Klaus Schümann, facilitated by Shibani Ghosh of the Secretariat. Shibani pledged to move the deliveries of these members forward toward Bangkok. In addition, one of the IUNS Council Members at large, Hee-Young Paik of Korea, was able to sit with several of us to be informed for the Council of the Task-Force goals and process.

Notably, on the part of the Chair, I had the privilege to attend the first staging meeting of the supra-Task Force on Diet Quality, also convened in Barcelona at the I WCPHN. I was also invited to a 2-hour presentation and meeting within this process, led by Drs. Lindsay Allen and Suzanne Murphy, respectively, Vice President and Treasurer of the IUNS on the occasion of the Asian Congress of Nutrition in 2007 in Taipei, Taiwan. This provided a linkage and liaises, although sporadic and limited, to the central thinking, to be reflected in the conversations with the members in the opportunistic encounters' chronology (above).

## **Inspiration and Early-Course Correction:**

The inspiration that refined the specific mandate for the last three years was to come later in the week of the I WCPHN. There was a roundtable panel on the theme of REDEFINING HUNGER: NEED FOR BETTER INDICATORS. The participation by the IUNS President Ricardo Uauy was entitled “*Hunger and Underdevelopment should not be defined only by Access to Energy.*” In the course of his analysis, he pointed out what was a severe defect in the way that the Food and Agriculture Organization had been defining adequate food. It was based, he decried, exclusively on the calorie. Adequacy was when the food balance sheet data of import and production of food was adequate to supply the presumed energy requirements across the resident population. He pointed out in physiological and policy terms who energy sufficiency was far from a safe or reasonable criterion, and proposed that the human right to adequate food was fulfilled by the consumption of all humanity of a “Quality Diet.” The unknowns raised by the call to substitute the calorie-criterion with something more nuanced and relevant were intriguing – and urgent. Indeed, the IUNS placed its Vice President, Prof. Lindsay Allen at the head of a supra-Task Force (on Diet Quality) for the Quadrennium. However, within the framework of “long term health” (disability, dysfunction and disease), the embrace of the “Quality Diet” would come the rallying centerpiece of our Task-Force.

An initial working framework of what represents a “*Quality Diet*” with criteria was developed (variously) within the Task-Force. It comes to comprise today:

1. adequate in recommended nutrient intakes
2. nutrient content below upper tolerable limits for nutrients
3. rich in protective factors (recommendable foods)
4. low in noxious factors (non-recommendable foods)
5. affordable and accessible to all citizens
6. appealing, appetizing and culturally/religiously acceptable

A central axis of interest revolved around two questions: 1. What combination of foods available in a Task-Force member’s region constitutes a “Quality Diet”, simultaneously fulfilling the criteria?; and 2. Who (what segments

of the population) currently consume and do not consume a dietary fare approximating a “Quality Diet”?

### **The Operative Context arising in 2008:**

The final specific mandate took on an operative context in later 2007 and early 2008 when global circumstances, variously termed a ‘threat’ or a ‘crisis’ to food security began to be recognized in agricultural economics, food trade and food policy circles. As documented by a policy white paper from IFPRI (von Braun et al, 2008), the prices of the staple cereal commodities (rice, wheat, maize) began to skyrocket. In retrospect, the increases were dated to 2006. There was a certain upheaval in terms of trade policy and food exportation from net producer countries, and a leaning toward protectionism. The role of price speculation was debated, as was the importance competition of people with bio-fuels (derived from sugar and maize) and bio-diesel (derived from edible oils) for the supplies of these commodities. A synthesis of the initial concern was food inflation and food insecurity.

The second week in September of 2008 led to the “discovery” by politicians, the press and the people of the underbelly of previously masked chaos in the financial institutions, banking and investment policy and leverage and speculation on Wall Street, New York – and shortly thereafter in all corners of the financial world. The demise of a major investment bank placed the world on the brink of an all-out financial Panic. In the same months, retrospective analysis showed that GDP growth had been negative, constituting a depression in the USA. Similar statistics were found later in Europe. Credit dried out and consumer confidence plummeted and their spending dried up. Demand for exports put a crimp in economies around the world and international trade dipped. Job insecurity and unemployment soared to record levels. Rather than inflation, the dearth of available cash and credit threatened deflation in prices, including food commodities. Household budgets for basic necessities like food and health care shrank around the globe.

We of the Task-Force reasoned that, within both of these scenarios – one termed food commodity inflation and the other financial chaos and economic recession – there would be pressures and stimuli for individuals to change their eating patterns by cutting back on some customary items and

selecting others that might be more available (in the commodity inflation) or more affordable (in the economic slump). According to the monograph collection edited by Popkin and Caballero (2002), “Nutritional Transition” defines a progressive and predictable change in diet. The agricultural-economic and financial-economic circumstances beginning in 2006 and evolving to the present are uncharted food-choice territory, moving faster than conventional research “scholarship” can describe and analyze them. Government agencies and the news media are the sources providing the concrete “snap shots” of attitudes and practices of people facing the two-scenario turmoil. We posit, however, that the *intuitions* of trained scholars (our Task-Force adherents) could be the tool or probe to gather lessons (and project hypotheses for testing when the dust settles) across the interface of turmoil and its implications for more or less healthful eating patterns.

From this dynamic and ever changing set of scenarios and the consequences – different, presumably, for different social strata within countries, and different from society to society and nation to nation, we had the opportunity to look at and judge – if not “research” in a stable and scholarly sense – the logic and media observations of reactions. Again with the notion of the criteria of Quality Diet, one could speculate (frame a series of theories, links and hypotheses) of how altered consumption would play ***positively*** or ***negatively*** (or neutrally) promoting the one or another of the six tenets of the Quality Diet through adaptive food choice and selection in crisis(es).

### **Delivery of Membership Participation:**

The new “deliverable” requested from the membership was to place the quest for definitions and local context around “Quality Diet” into the flow of passing economic and social events. Questions posed in this, the home-stretch of the quadrennium to each of the Task-Force members was to present from **each one’s own** geographic perspective:

1. The description question: In your zone of interest, what has been your impression of the food inflation crisis and of the financial/economic crisis on food accessibility, selection and consumption?
2. The effect/impact question: How has it affected different sectors in terms of their approaching or moving away from the practice of consuming a *Quality Diet*? [Yes, this second question invites you to draft out your own concept of what would constitute a *QD*.]

**Current Status and Conclusion:**

As we stand, none of these essays can be incorporated in edited and polished form to the Annex of the report. A contribution from Germany has been received, but not edited for inclusion in the Appendix. We expect to receive more from the members in the week leading up to Bangkok and on-site itself. Others cannot deliver. The Quadrennium of this IUNS period will end without a final Report.

**Publications cited:**

Diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases. Report of the joint WHO/FAO expert consultation. WHO Technical Report Series, No. 916, 2006.

Popkin BM, Caballero B (editors) The nutrition transition: Diet and disease in the developing world. London: Academic Press, 2002 261 pp.

World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Food, nutrition and the prevention of cancer: A global perspective. Washington DC: AICR.

Von Braun J and collaborators. High Food Prices: The What, Who, and How of Proposed Policy Actions. Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, May 2008.