

Journal Review

Review of *African Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences*

Gifts always please but a copy of the inaugural issue of the *African Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences (AJFNS)* was a great and pleasant surprise. It helped to make the 17th International Union of Nutritional Sciences Congress in Vienna in August 2001 especially memorable. *African Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences* is the first peer-reviewed journal for Africa. The journal aspires to be the first choice for authors and readers who want a forum for African food and nutrition issues. It has breadth of scope from the social aspects that range from advocacy around policy and programme planning, to serve all stakeholders committed to providing and using an evidence base for food and nutrition in Africa. It will also serve as a forum for African research, undertaken in Africa by Africans and others.

The 17th International Union of Nutritional Sciences Congress had a successful focus on Africa, and so there were many delegates from all parts of Africa. The presence and contribution of so many researchers and scholars signify a critical mass of contributors and readers to sustain a peer-reviewed journal. The 17th International Union of Nutritional Sciences Congress explored the importance of capacity building, one area that is developed in the journal too. For example, within a series of papers on policy, Suresh Babu considers 'Capacity challenges and training options', using a modification of the familiar UNICEF model to underpin the need for nutrition economists analogous to the agricultural economists who dominate policy planning in government ministries. Providing more nutritionists to better advocate for nutrition is a justification for 'public nutrition'. This link to a sector that dominates the resource base of emerging and low-income countries makes it more significant than health economics, which is rooted in an expenditure-driven sector. It would be interesting to know where in Africa education and training in this aspect of public nutrition already occurs or could be started. Mwadime's paper on 'Health sector actions to improve nutrition challenges and opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa' presents a simplified model that summarises the links between enhanced human capital (outcome) from improved nutrition growth and development and investment in social health nutrition and education. But it strips out agriculture and the food system as if the food chain has no role to play in the economic growth and poverty reduction upon which these other desired changes and outcomes will depend. The Editor-in-Chief, Professor Oniang'o, takes up the

cudgel on politicians' inconsistent support for agriculture in Kenya. While quoting the net rate of growth in food production, she does not describe or analyse the trends in growth in individual commodities or sections of the food system. This is an important consideration for the future, as it would meet the challenges implicit in the article by Babu to identify the capacity for economic development of agriculture. Analysis of the price and income elasticities of staples can resolve the dilemma of imported cheap staple foods, priced below a level with which local farmers can compete, depressing the economic contribution that farming can make – fewer jobs and less income. Analyses of this kind are published elsewhere but need an African audience if they are to contribute to the debate and contribute to advocacy for change in Africa. Authors mention the dearth of an evidence base for models of Food and Nutrition Policy Planning. Payne and Joy stimulated a common food systems approach, fostered by the FAO, that includes the creation of Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Councils. It would benefit policy planners and advocates, of the African diaspora especially, to evaluate the benefits of Food and Nutrition Councils – whether located in health, agriculture or planning ministries or as quasi-independent bodies reporting to prime ministries or finance ministries, and determine what budgetary and human resources are needed to make an impact on nutrition status and social justice.

The inaugural issue of *AJFNS* is stronger on scholarship that distils wisdom and employs secondary analysis. There is only one original research paper – on insect and mycoflora interactions in maize flour, important if (post) harvest losses in this key staple are to be reduced to improve efficiency of production, profitability and affordability of this key staple for SADEC countries. Hopefully, the next issue will contain more primary research. Perhaps in future the section for students could include summaries of postgraduate students' research projects. Dissertations should not form an untapped resource that languishes in libraries. Writing for publication in *AJFNS* would be a useful additional skill that academics could instil into their students, to ensure that there is a growing pool of competent published authors who submit their own work to peer review, and contribute to peer review themselves, in order to support the growth of food and nutritional sciences in Africa and world-wide.

The journal uses the Vancouver style of referencing but

inconsistently. There is scope for the technical editors to reduce the number of typographical errors and establish more consistency in style.

This journal will be of interest to all Africans at home and abroad. It will also be of interest to anyone who teaches students who come from or intend to work in Africa. Anyone who wants to know more should go to www.ajfns.net for English and French versions.

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