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FAO / WHO
Technical Consultation on National Food-based Dietary Guidelines

Cairo, Egypt
6–9 December 2004
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The conclusions given in this report are considered appropriate at the time of its preparation.
The FAO/WHO Technical Consultation on National Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG) invited 18 experts from selected Member States of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and FAO Near East Regions, acknowledged experts from other countries and senior technical staff from FAO and WHO Headquarters and regional offices, to review the status of food-based dietary guidelines in participating countries of the Region; identify gaps and resources involved in setting up national food-based dietary guidelines; and formulate a framework to assist Member States in developing and implementing food-based dietary guidelines.

The technical consultation was divided into plenary sessions and group work. A number of important presentations were given on the food and nutrition situation in participating countries, including their experiences in the development and use of FBDG, and steps taken in their preparation; various aspects of diet, malnutrition and chronic diseases; recent international commitments by WHO Member States (Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health); and the potential of FBDG in guiding policy formulation, nutrition education and communication strategies.

The topics for the working group sessions consisted of identifying constraints and gaps, including the availability of appropriate data and information, in the countries to complete the process of developing FBDG; identifying the role of different sectors and partners in the development and implementation of FBDG; developing national plans of action and follow up. Participants were divided into two groups based on the priority nutrition problems identified, the level of development of FBDG, regional proximity, possibility of collaboration, and similarities in food habits.

Conclusions

- The countries in the Region are at different stages of nutrition transition, facing the entire spectrum of nutritional conditions.

- FBDG remains an important education and communication tool in addressing the burden of nutritional conditions. They have great potential for placing nutritional concerns on the national agenda, providing guidance for food, nutrition, food hygiene, education and agricultural policy formulation, and nutrition education activities. They can also identify policy options of food supply and demand that promote lifelong healthy eating patterns, influencing the nutrition transition towards healthier outcomes and a decrease in the economic burden of diseases.

- Physical activity should be closely integrated with food-related messages in the dietary guidelines in this Region.

- FBDG could contribute substantially to the implementation of the
Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health in the Region, and other initiatives to promote healthy diets.

- A considerable amount of basic and supportive data to enable the development of national FBDG already exists in all countries participating in the consultation. External technical assistance may be required for undertaking further analyses to generate appropriate information in some countries.

- In order to develop and implement effective FBDG, key stakeholders need to be involved in the process, such as ministries of health, agriculture, education, commerce, finance and planning, research institutions and universities, consumer groups, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private sector and other relevant bodies.

- In order to utilize the available resources within the Region for the development of FBDG, several countries with similar social, health and economic characteristics could consider the possibility of pooling their available resources and developing a common FBDG, where appropriate.

**Recommendations**

1. In view of the dual burden of nutritional conditions affecting countries in the Region, immediate action should be taken at the country level to follow up on the development and implementation of FBDG.

2. FBDG development and implementation is an ongoing process. Countries that have already initiated work on their national FBDG should expedite the process. Countries that have not initiated development of FBDG should organize follow-up meetings and set up a steering committee.

3. Regular regional and subregional follow-up meetings should be organized to report progress, share experiences and lessons learned in the development and implementation of FBDG. FAO and WHO should facilitate this process.

4. An email listserv should be established among countries to facilitate the dissemination of information and sharing of experiences on the development and implementation of FBDG in the Region.

5. Resources for the development and implementation of FBDG should be identified by countries. In addition, assistance from international organizations may be solicited, as required.

6. Intersectoral cooperation is essential for the development of successful FBDG. Based on available information, intersectoral cooperation should be strengthened in most countries.

7. Physical activity recommendations should be integrated in FBDG in the Region.