

# GOALS AND TARGETS IN THE REALM OF NUTRITION RIGHTS

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The term goal is here taken to refer to an ideal desired state, e.g., no malnutrition in the world, while target is understood as a quantified achievement to be reached along the path to the goal by a specific time. Goals may be generic (e.g., no malnutrition in the world), or may be divided into their component elements (e.g., no stunting, no vitamin A deficiency disorders).

Often the global community proposes specific targets to be met in the process of achieving goals. For example, the 1990 *World Summit for Children* called for reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition rates to half their 1990 level by the year 2000. Such targets are based on measurable indicators that allow judging whether the path is pointing towards the goal, and whether the progression is rapid enough to achieve the target by the intended time. With clearly formulated targets, when the time comes, it is possible to say whether the target has in fact been successfully reached.

Some goals are set in great detail. Very concrete goals in relation to nutrition were set at the *World Summit for Children*; they were subsequently endorsed by many other international bodies. Nations then may, or may not, have taken binding commitments to the goals. In most cases, these goals and targets are not legally binding for endorsing states. They are understood as strong recommendations for governments to formulate their own commitments.

Few of the targets set by the international community in 1990 with regard to children's nutrition were met by 2000. Nevertheless, they remain useful for guiding the formulation of national commitments.

## RIGHTS IMPLY GOALS, BUT NOT VICE-VERSA

The proclamation of goals does not necessarily mean that any individual has any rights in relation to the government/agency/programme that proclaim them. The goal may say that everyone ought to get a particular outcome or service (e.g., adequate nutrition), but that does not in itself mean that people are entitled to it. The core implication of a right is that if everyone is entitled to something, everyone has a legal claim to it. As a legal claim, there are specific actions that rights holders can take to remedy the situation if they

do not receive what they are entitled to.

Goals do not imply rights, but rights do imply goals. Human rights declarations and covenants express global goals: there should be no slavery, no discrimination, no genocide, no malnutrition, etc. When states ratify international agreements, they make commitments to pursue the respective goals in their own countries. However, nations have in fact exercised considerable latitude in interpreting and applying these goals.

## BUT RIGHTS INVOLVE MORE THAN GOALS

Setting clear goals and targets can be very helpful to governments as they design their social sector programmes. However, people having a right to a particular goal being realised requires more than just having the government set the goal. A substantial planning effort and commitment of resources must be made to achieve specific targets by specific times. These commitments can be made through an appropriate national law or decree.

Often goals are set loosely and governments are unable or unwilling to make the needed commitments, sometimes due to real or apparent resources constraints. Governments may make concrete commitments to more limited targets, e.g. only for children under three years of age, or with longer time horizons, e.g. over fifteen years. The point here is that nutrition rights mean that governments should make firm commitments to specific nutrition targets.

Clearly articulated goals and targets should be used as the basis for designing specific goal-directed strategic plans of action—backed by legally binding documents. The plans should set specific targets, i.e. specific levels of specific indicators to be achieved by specific dates. For example, the government may say that it will reduce the rate of malnourished children under two years of age by five percent in two years, and twelve percent in five years. In this approach, the process of realizing a right is pursued through a realistic step-wise strategy.

At all levels, strategies should be based on explicit intermediate goals and targets. Strategic planning and resource allocation should be guided by these plausible, concrete objectives. There must also be a possibility for



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mid-course corrections and the reallocation of resources. In other words, there must be continuous steering of the effort if the target is to be achieved.

Many social sector programmes define their tasks in terms of the services they provide, e.g. inputs such as nutrient supplements, school meals, etc. They often leave the ultimate goal unspecified, and thus function as if they expect to continue the same activity forever, not aiming at resolving the problems they claim to address. In doing so, these programmes may actually help to perpetuate the problems

The entitlements corresponding to specific human rights can be described either in terms of inputs delivered to clients or in terms of desired outcomes, results, or targets that constitute steps toward the achievement of particular goals. Rights to specific inputs and rights to specific outcomes correspond to what in the human rights discourse are called "obligations of conduct" and "obligations of result".

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#### THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION

Careful attention must be given to the *process* through which rights are realized. The rights holders should not be treated as passive beneficiaries of government-directed programmes, but should be fully engaged, with high levels of participation, community ownership, sustainability, and empowerment.

This means that the beneficiaries should be active participants not only in the implementation of social programmes, but also in the formulation of their goals and targets. Goals and targets should emerge from broadly participatory consensus-building efforts. The goals and targets set out at the major global conferences or at national-level meetings of policy makers should not simply be imposed on local communities.

International human rights instruments articulate widely shared goals that are identified through broad participatory global consensus-building efforts. They acknowledge the reality and value of local differences and encourage localized interpretations and application of the agreed-upon principles. Rights need to be concretized locally as specific entitlements and specific local targets. The most important means of adapting global goals to local realities is to assure that local people participate in shaping the policies for achieving them. Outsiders coming in with their own analyses and their own remedies for local problems violate the right of local people to participate. Local people must be actively engaged not only in the implementation of

the programs, but also in their design and management. They must share in the formulation of the goals, as well as in shaping the means for reaching them.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGY

Goals and targets do not fulfill themselves. They mean little in isolation; they become important when part of a coherent strategy for action. Consider, for example, the goal of ending stunting among children. If we are serious about this, we will need to mobilize the resources that will be needed and put in place the required actions to get there; it will further require that we get prepared to give the right incentives to the right individuals in the right places at the right times.

Human rights are an important instrument contributing to the achievement of social sector goals. We should go beyond saying that children ought to get the food, health, and care they need, to say that they are *entitled* to these things. The specifics of

these entitlements will vary in different places according to local circumstances. However, we begin with the premise that every child is entitled to whatever it takes to assure that she or he is not stunted. That is not negotiable.

The goal of abolishing stunting cannot be achieved in a short term. That is why national governments have to make long-term commitments to reducing it by a certain percentage per year. That commitment should be ideally enshrined in a national law. If results show results are falling below target, the resources allocated to the achievement of that target should be increased accordingly to get back on course.

This sort of commitment establishes a clear incentive for using resources efficiently and effectively, and to assure that the efforts stay on track. Willingness to make this sort of commitment to allocate resources in a national law would be the clearest indication of genuine commitment by national governments for the achievement of the goal.

All people everywhere have the right to adequate food and nutrition. Clearly, many countries do not have the capacity to assure the realisation of this right. Thus, the international community has obligations to act to assure its realisation. There needs to be a commitment of significant international resources to help the poorest countries in their efforts to eliminate malnutrition. This assistance could take the form of food supplies and direct financial assistance, but in the long run the most important assistance might be in forms such as advisory services and capacity building.

Systematic strategies need to be formulated and implemented at every level if the goal of fulfilling every person's right to adequate food and nutrition is to be achieved. In these strategies, there must be clear incentives for the actors to do what needs to be done, and there must be institutional mechanisms in place to assure that all actors are held accountable for doing their jobs. Just as the construction of a building or a bridge is only possible with detailed

planning and periodic course corrections during the process of working toward the goal, the human right to adequate food and nutrition can only be fully realized through carefully designed and implemented programs of action. The formulation of strategies only begins with the formulation of clear goals and targets.

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## AIMING AT THE TARGET: WHAT'S LEFT FOR THE DEVIL TO ADVOCATE?

*Claudio Schuftan*

Guest editing this issue has really been a learning experience. Not that I did not already have some personal convictions on the topic. Rather, I was exposed to new angles to the question: over the long term, have nutrition goals helped progress or not?

Here I blend my own ideas with what I feel are loose ends in the collection of papers by my distinguished colleagues. I do this with the benefit of hindsight, having read their work. This then is additional, hopefully complementary, food for thought.



munity representation. But it is the process that carries in it the seed of sustainability. Unfortunately, as nutrition professionals, we fear prescribing processes; we also fear discrediting processes that we know do not work. We have not spent the time to arrive at universally acceptable indicators that can measure sustainable progress in processes such as participation, social mobilisation and empowerment. Instead, we have spent time and money choosing and monitoring outcome goals and targets that have unduly over-medicalised the nutrition problem. Think about it.

### THE BIG HYPE

Clearly, large international conferences convened to set and monitor global goals and targets raise huge expectations and excitement. Whether these events are useful in moving programmes forward is a different matter. Keep in mind that setting goals is the result of a process in which public admission of dissent is difficult. Therefore, countries pledge, but do not really embark or comply.

The real challenge comes after the (usually expensive) international gathering. It comes during the process of preparing down-to-earth action plans, raising funds and implementing them. Unfortunately, this process is rarely participatory. And for this process, the international conference, more often than not is unhelpful, because the strategies to achieve the targets are left a bit in the air (or in the paper).

### THE OUTCOME-PROCESS RIDDLE

Getting to where we want to go requires knowing and quantifying where we want to be. But the processes involved are even more important. Goals and targets address where we want to go. Processes are left to the planners and managers to implement—often excluding com-

### BEING REALISTIC

With a pinch of self-criticism, some goals and targets set in the 90s called for a number of pretty unrealistic measures, unaffordable to most developing countries' state coffers. With insufficient resources, one cannot but get low coverage rates. This is, by definition, not only ineffective, it is also wasteful. The danger I see is that we may be doing this again for goals being set for 2015. At the moment, we have no assurances that the new set of goals will mobilise leaders, the media and members of civil society any more than before. Business as usual will simply not get us there for anaemia, stunting and underweight. At present rates of progress, it will take us decades to halve the prevalence of child malnutrition.

Moreover, three serious concerns arise here. The first is who should be the judge as to what is *realistic*. Certainly not the technicians alone. Global, across-the-board (i.e. one fits all) targets actually need to be adjusted to local circumstances and this process takes much more than the technicians can offer.

Another related concern is the quality of data used to monitor progress. If data are of poor quality the intrinsic