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CAMH5 MOVES INTO GEAR WITH MEETING ON FOOD AND NUTRITION DEVELOPMENT

14 April 2011, Windhoek Namibia- A task force comprising experts from African Union member states is meeting in Windhoek, Namibia from 14 to 15 April to advocate for food and nutrition in social and economic development. Nutritious food is that which adds value to the body as opposed to simply filling up the stomach. Therefore there is need to raise awareness of the general population, policy makers and development partners of the consequences of under nutrition.

The African Task Force on Food and Nutrition Development (ATFFND), will review progress in the implementation of the African Regional Nutrition Strategy (ARNS), and look at ways to strengthen coordinated implementation of the ARNS among member states of the African Union.

The task force meeting will provide technical input into the “Cost of Hunger: Social and Economic Impact of Child Under Nutrition”, a study which was launched in 2009 and is currently being conducted by the AU Commission’s Department of Social Affairs and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa with support from the World Food Programme. The study is important in that it seeks to quantify the economic and social impact of child under nutrition in Africa, to raise awareness about this impact and generate momentum for increased investment to address under nutrition. It is expected that the study will encourage revision of current allocation practices towards ensuring human and financial resources needed to effectively combat child under nutrition, in particular during the first 1,000 days of life, when most of the damage is done.

The Head of Division of the Health, Nutrition and Population Division at the AU Commission Dr Ademola Olajide says that under nourishment particularly affects children and women and this has a negative impact on Africa’s human resources.

“Under nourished children lose a significant proportion of their IQ, thereby compromising Africa’s human resource base. The more children are under nourished the more the mortality and morbidity in communities. Eradicating child under nutrition is an effective investment in the human capital of a country” he said.

The meeting will also provide an opportunity to share and document good practices in nutrition and food security development and will seek to motivate member states to implement the ARNS, as well as look for ways to further its implementation.

Dr Ademola says AU efforts in securing enough nutritious food are aimed at achieving Millennium Development Goals 1, 4, 5 and 6. It is a multi sectoral task, he said, involving sectors as diverse as agriculture, health, finance, women's development and education among others. Within the task force framework, the AUC is therefore gathering different experts from the World Food Programme, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, Save the Children, and the AU Commission in their advocacy for food security and nutrition.

The ATFFND was endorsed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor to the African Union, in 1993. The first task force meeting was held in 1987. Other follow up meetings were held in 2008 and 2009. One of the major agreements of the task force was that everyone working on food security and nutrition should do so within the framework of the ARNS- hence the importance of the current meeting as a means to check progress and find a way forward.

The meeting of the task force on food and nutrition development is being held as a side event to the 5th conference of African Ministers of Health (CAMH5) to be held from 17 to 21 April in Windhoek. The review of the ARNS and other recommendations from the meeting will be presented to the 5th Conference of Ministers of Health (CAMH5) to take place from the 17th to 21st April, and will form part of the considerations for an African Common position on the continental HIV response to be presented to the United Nations High Level meeting to be held in New York in June this year.

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