

International Symposium  
*Research in Applied Nutrition in Developing Countries:  
Challenges and Expectations*  
Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences  
Nutrition Third World  
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## Opening Speech

by

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Madam Chairman,  
Mesdames et Messieurs,  
Dames en Heren,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you here on the occasion of this international symposium.

The symposium deals with nutrition in developing countries. Having a nutritionally adequate diet is vital for a healthy and active life. In this respect, research focused on nutrition has a key role to play.

Malnutrition is responsible for more than half of all children's deaths in the world. Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is a central objective of the international community, as confirmed among others in the Millennium Development Goals.

The objective of halving hunger and malnutrition by 2015, will most probably be reached in eastern and south-eastern Asia and in Latin America. In south-central Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa however, we are clearly not on track. In both these regions malnutrition, as measured for example by the prevalence of underweight children, remains very high, and is declining at a very slow pace only.

The Belgian Development Cooperation shares the objective of halving hunger and malnutrition by 2015, and we are committed to contributing to it. Indeed, improving nutrition and fighting hunger are key areas in our development cooperation policy. We are contributing to it by rural development projects, by policy dialogue and institutional reforms, and through funding for research.

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Already in the 1980s, the Belgian Parliament itself took the initiative of creating the Belgian Survival Fund, a strong signal to policy-makers to make more means available to combat poverty, eradicate hunger and tackle malnutrition, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As part of the Belgian Development Cooperation, the Fund has so far supported one hundred and twenty-five long-term integrated field projects for food security, including their nutritional aspects. It has, in the meantime, developed partnerships with twenty multilateral and non-governmental organizations, as well as governmental institutions. However, much more effort is needed both from national governments and from the international community to bring down malnutrition.

There cannot be proper development without research. Countries in the South need to build their own research capacity. This is a long-term challenge. Exchange of knowledge and experiences through networking is one of the very basic mechanisms to build such a capacity. I thus express my support to the Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences and to Nutrition Third World, and I thank them for calling this scientific meeting on the most relevant and important topic of nutrition.

The most welcome, innovative and “unusual” feature of this Symposium is that all guest speakers come from the South. I said “unusual” because we, in the North, have the tendency to believe too easily that we have most of the answers for sustainable development. Yet, in the present case, the organizers have decided to invite only scientists from developing countries, and give us a chance to listen to their own perceptions of their difficulties and expectations. There is little doubt that at the end of the day we will come out richer, with a better understanding of the issues at stake, and better prepared to face them.

The examples of research in *applied nutrition* that will be reported today do correspond to a real and insufficiently attended need. I understand this area of scientific research to be located between, on the one hand, fundamental or basic research — that is the kind of research that generates new knowledge —, and on the other hand development action itself. In other words *applied nutrition research* helps us identify *how* to prevent or cure malnutrition in a practical manner, in the field, under real conditions. I am sure that the NGOs attending this meeting, as well as the Government services, will benefit from the lessons brought to us by scientists from the South. Well-targeted, duly tested, cost-effective interventions can significantly reduce the various forms of malnutrition and their consequences. We should indeed be grateful to these scientists who dedicate their work and talent to show us the way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Academy is once again displaying its imagination and its capacity to innovate, while at the same time guaranteeing the scientific quality of this Symposium.

Nutrition Third World is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. A good illustration of their work is the fact that all the guest speakers today are, or were at some time grantees from this organization. The fact that Nutrition Third World is fully funded by the private sector should be commended: private companies, foundations and associations need to be involved in a concerted, well-coordinated set of actions, with the development cooperation policy.

I wish Nutrition Third World a long life, and I assure the Academy that we will continue in the future to look eagerly at its initiatives, suggestions and recommendations.

I wish this meeting the greatest success.