



Chennai Declaration

From the National Nutrition Conclave August 14, 2007

We, a group of people who are passionate about achieving a nutrition-secure India, representing Central and State Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, corporate leaders, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, nutrition experts, activists and academia, met for the National Nutrition Conclave from August 12 – 14, 2007 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, sponsored by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Indian Council of Medical Research and USAID/India.

We met on the eve of the 60th anniversary of India's Independence to continue the work to achieve Mahatma Gandhi's vision:

*The first task of an independent
India must be to eliminate hunger*

Sixty years after independence, national survey data (such as NFHS III) show that the nutrition situation has not improved as desired in some areas in India, with almost 50% of our children underweight and more than 70% of our women and children with serious nutritional deficiencies such as anemia. Although there are success stories and parts of India which show what we can achieve, the level of malnutrition in India today is morally unacceptable and has enormous costs in terms of social and economic development.

We have deliberated and come to the following recommendations. In addition, we commit ourselves to work for the realization of these recommendations to achieve Gandhiji's vision and to make our nation nutrition-secure.

- We call for **nutrition to be a priority on the national agenda**. This includes creating a "home" for nutrition such as a National Nutrition Authority. This group could lead and coordinate nutrition programming. Create a Parliamentary committee including a group of concerned Ministries working in the area of nutrition, as the coalition for sustainable Nutrition Security in India.

- Further, we call for a **Citizen’s Charter on Nutrition** endorsed by policy makers and leaders to ensure that nutrition is a national priority.
- We call for **preparation of a white paper** by a multi-sectoral expert group to present the compelling case for nutrition as a national priority, including the costs of the problem, and to propose a coherent framework and sustainable action plan.
- We call for a **national strategy for nutrition of children under two** that would focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups. This strategy should foster policy convergence and program integration as well as focus on infant and young child feeding.
- We call for a **nutrition security focus on the urban poor**. This must increase the identification and mapping of unlisted slum clusters, promote a network of agencies working in urban health and nutrition, which should identify lead programs that can serve as prototypes and learning sites and work to activate the media as advocates for improving urban health and nutrition.
- We call for **improved monitoring and evaluation of nutrition programming, including ICDS increasing its focus on measuring nutrition outcomes**. States should set up specific systems for monitoring nutrition outcomes.
- We call for **more focus on nutrition education, communication and awareness**. An appropriate core committee led by Government, to arrive at nationally accepted key nutrition messages, establish a public–private partnership for a national nutrition education campaign, and establish a set of monitoring indicators to monitor the campaign.

We have all pledged our personal commitment toward these objectives and ourselves to work together in this effort.

“If people have to starve I shall blame none but ourselves... we now have our own government.... Can’t we do something?”

It is not just big conferences that we want. What is required is understanding, hard work and purity. In the absence of these qualities, the poor must die.”

- Letter of Mahatma Gandhi, dated 15th August 1946