

Editor's note

The year ends with two landmark events, as summarised in the Society News section of the *SAJCN*: the SASPEN Joint Congress that was held with a number of other interdisciplinary societies, and the ADSA-Nutrition Society Congress in the latter part of 2012, in which a number of current issues on nutrition were addressed. The attention that current nutrition policy is receiving at national government level within the framework of the National Evaluation Policy Framework is also of critical importance.¹ A given policy, by its very nature, can only be as good as its frequent, if not continuous, monitoring and evaluation.

The National Evaluation System for South Africa, established in 2011, aims to improve or increase:

- Policy or programme performance (evaluation for continuous improvement) that provides feedback to managers.
- Accountability for where public spending is being directed and the difference that it is making.
- Decision-making, e.g. on what is or is not working.
- Knowledge about whether or not a public policy, plan, programme or project is effective.

In the current financial year, the two flagship nutrition programmes that are to be evaluated are the impact evaluation of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and the implementation evaluation of the Integrated Nutrition Programme. The key motivation for the evaluation of the former programme is its aim, namely “to enhance the educational experience of neediest primary school learners through promoting punctual school attendance, alleviating short-term hunger, improving concentration and contributing to

their healthy development”. Approximately 8.8 million learners are beneficiaries of the NSNP. The aim of government is that by 2014, 75% of learners in quintiles 1-3 in public primary and secondary schools should receive free school lunches. Outcome 1 includes improving teacher-pupil contact time, which is linked to learner absenteeism.

High levels of absenteeism are often an early signal that a pupil will drop out of school. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the NSNP and to appraise how the impact can be increased. The corresponding motivation for the Integrated Nutrition Programme, which was introduced in 1994, is its aim “to improve the nutritional status of all South Africans, particularly pregnant women and children under the age of five. Nutrition is key in three of the outputs of the health outcome. The economic costs of under-nutrition are substantial: productivity losses to individuals are estimated at more than 10% of lifetime earnings and losses to gross domestic product may be as high as 2-3%. The estimated budget allocation for nutrition-related interventions in provinces under the health budget vote is R320 million”. This most welcome and timely initiative promises to afford the much-needed perspective on the contribution that nutrition often claims is has on education and health in general.

Prof Demetre Labadarios

Editor-in-Chief: *SAJCN*

References

1. The National Evaluation Plan 2012-2013. The Presidency [homepage on the Internet]. 2012. c2012. Available from: <http://www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=137>.