

## **Recommendations on the Role of Nutrition, Food Supplements and Traditional Herbal Therapies in Promoting Good Health and Combating Diseases including HIV/AIDS.**

**Statement following the SADC Health Ministerial Consultative Meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-21 January 2003.**

### Preamble

In view of the prevailing HIV/AIDS situation in the SADC region and the current food crisis, the SADC Health Ministers have deliberated on strategies to urgently and effectively address these. A SADC Regional Technical meeting in November 2002 preceded these deliberations. It has emerged from this consultative meeting that addressing the nutrition situation in the region is a key intervention that will impact positively on the health and well-being of the general population including, children, people living with HIV and other vulnerable populations. It is with this view in mind that the following recommendations are being put forward. These recommendations also recognize the need for a concerted regional nutrition and food security strategy incorporating inputs from other sectors such as Agriculture. Furthermore, due recognition is given to the important role played by NEPAD and other bodies in taking these forward.

### **Recommendations on the Role of Nutrition in Promoting Health of PLWHA**

- 1.1 SADC Member States are at different stages with regards to development of policies and guidelines for nutrition for the general population including PLWHA. In recognition of the need for comprehensive policies, guidelines and protocols to guide nutrition programs in all Member States, it is recommended that all Member States should finalize the development of policy guidelines and protocols to inform the implementation of nutrition for PLWHA programs.
- 1.2 In view of the fact that there is agreement that nutritional supplements are important in the fight against HIV/AIDS, it is recommended that all Member States should invest in nutrition programs and ensure that the three basic approaches to micronutrients (fortification, vitamin supplementation and production and consumption of micronutrients) complement each other, meanwhile it is recommended multivitamins containing vitamin A, C, E, selenium and zinc can be taken in recommended doses by PLWHA.
- 1.3 More research is needed to address knowledge gaps and conflicting issues like the Vitamin A supplementation. In addition, mechanisms for coordinating research and sharing information in the region should be established.
- 1.4 SADC should support research endeavors and programs that seek to enhance the status of indigenous foods, like germinated sorghum and fermented maize.

## **Recommendations on the role of Traditional Therapies in improving health of the population including PLWHA**

- 2.1 SADC Member States should make a firm commitment to the implementation of the WHO resolution for the collaboration of Traditional Health Practitioners with the National Health Systems. Member States are encouraged to establish the Department of Traditional Medicine in their respective Ministries.
- 2.2 SADC should strengthen innovative programs aimed at the identification, research, and promotion of traditional herbal therapies.
- 2.3 SADC Member States should put in place mechanisms and systems to protect indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights of Traditional Health Practitioners.
- 2.4 SADC Members States should conserve and propagate flora and fauna in cooperation with appropriate authorities.
- 2.5 SADC should conduct an audit to take stock of traditional foods and therapies with nutritional value and promote their use.

## **Recommendations on the Regulation of Nutritional Supplements and Traditional Herbal Therapies**

- 3.1 There is need to expedite the harmonization of regulations in the SADC region to ensure quality products within the region that can compete globally.
- 3.2 SADC should establish Centers of Research Excellence in the region that would be employed to determine safety, efficacy and quality of traditional herbs and foods and nutritional supplements.
- 3.3 SADC Member States need to strengthen the regulation of herbal produces to ensure their safety and efficacy.
- 3.4 SADC should strengthen the capacity of the region to regulate and market herbal therapies internationally.
- 3.5 SADC Member States should establish National and Regional laboratories that could serve as testing and quality assurance sites for products.
- 3.6 SADC should facilitate the establishment of a regional network and database to ensure that information on registered products and clinical studies are shared.
- 3.7 SADC should develop guidelines and protocols on the adverse interactions between conventional and traditional therapies and foods and bring awareness to the public at large.

## **Recommendations on integrating nutrition/food supplements into the National Health systems and collaboration with traditional health system**

- 4.1 SADC Member States should ensure that nutrition programs are fully integrated into the national health systems.
- 4.2 In view of the intersectoral nature of nutrition, and with regards to effective coordination of programs, it is recommended that National Coordination Units for Nutrition, representing all key stakeholders especially the Agricultural Sector, be established to ensure that implementation targets are met.
- 4.3 SADC should strengthen the advocacy for nutrition programs and provide the necessary resources in order to promote good health and prevent diseases. The programs should go beyond people living with HIV/AIDS.
- 4.4 SADC should establish a position of a coordinator in Nutrition at the Regional level.
- 4.5 SADC should support the monitoring system for nutrition to ensure that the region's capacity for an effective emergency preparedness is strengthened among other things and ensure food security is always assured in Member States.
- 4.6 In view of a number of operational issues that need refinement within Member States and region wide, it is recommended that research in nutrition be given priority, especially during the lean period when food is scarce, and mechanisms for facilitating sharing of research findings in the region be established.
- 4.7 SADC needs to strengthen National and develop Regional nutrition communication strategies.
- 4.8 Collaboration between modern and traditional health systems needs to be strengthened.
- 4.9 SADC should establish a Regional Forum on Nutrition and ensure that nutrition issues are put out as standing agenda on all SADC Health Minister's Meeting.
- 4.10 Strengthen growth monitoring mechanisms at community level in all SADC Member States.
- 4.11 SADC Member States are urged to promote consumption of traditional foods and to set up campaigns to discourage risk lifestyles like smoking and alcohol abuse.
- 4.12 Member States are encouraged to include nutrition in their PRSP program.
- 4.13 SADC to advocate for the prioritization and advocacy of nutrition in the NEPAD program.