

Nutrition

The situation analyses identified malnutrition as a serious threat to the health of the population, especially children. This has been aggravated by the drought. The commission recognised undernutrition as being caused by the economic inequalities reinforced by the apartheid system. This has resulted in a major part of the population being trapped in landlessness, poverty and unemployment. Inadequate sanitation, water supplies, housing and health services, as well as unfair labour practices have all contributed to the present nutritional crisis.

We call on the government to address these fundamental underlying causes of malnutrition.

We further call on government to:

- establish a nutrition monitoring system within the public health sector;
- identify representative sites for collecting information within an area which would reflect the nutrition status of that area;
- initiate the use of master growth cards (scattergrammes for weight for age) as an easy rapid surveillance technique to be implemented as soon as possible;
- make nutrition rehabilitation part of a comprehensive health care system;
- promote and support breastfeeding as an urgent national priority, this would include the monitoring of milk formula promotion;
- ensure that every child, under six years of age has access to nutrition support through the public health sector, and initiate school feeding programmes. Pregnant and breastfeeding women would also qualify for support;
- reinstate food subsidies and remove VAT on specified basic foods;
- protect consumers by legislating for detailed content information to be provided on all processed food;
- make food relief and food stamps available for those who qualify (aged, destitute, disabled) with a built in developmental component; and
- establish a nutrition department within National Health which should function intersectorally and be linked to district nutrition development committees (community structures and health workers).

We recommend our organisations:

- take immediate action to advocate and mobilise for the abovementioned nutrition policies.
- make nutrition a priority issue within our organisations and advocate for resources.
- embark on a programme of breastfeeding promotion and support, including training of health personnel.
- work for the introduction of the mastercard for nutrition surveillance with immediate effect.
- investigate milk prices - why milk is unaffordable to most of the population.

- start an independent review and local monitoring of how food aid is being managed and utilised.
- ensure that nutritional status is included in any national survey into poverty.

