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## DISCUSSION REPORT

(Discussion of paper presented by Dr. J.M. Gurney)

Discussant: A. Henry

In reviewing Dr. Gurney's interesting paper, I was first struck by the fact that the title of the paper differed somewhat from the title of the Official Programme.

I make reference to this only because, perhaps misguidedly, I had expected to learn in a paper entitled *The State of Food and Nutrition of the Peoples of the Commonwealth Caribbean* a little about the performance of the agricultural sector in the Commonwealth Caribbean in terms of whether it was producing enough food for its own domestic consumption - especially in view of the author's statement that national food energy supplies vary from being about equal to requirements providing an over-supply of about 30 per cent. I was particularly interested in the performance of the agricultural sector because of the stimulating address delivered by the Director General (FAO) to the Netherlands National Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce in March 1974.

There the Director pointed out that one effect of the energy crisis was the shortage and increased price of fertilizer; he urged developing countries to give higher priority to agriculture; he pointed out that in oil rich Venezuela there was the slogan "*We must plant oil*". He also pointed out that the Second Development Decade's annual target of 4 per cent increase in agricultural production of the developing countries had not been attained.

In the Caribbean it is clear that we import a major part of our food supply; when therefore Dr. Gurney states that the national food energy supplies vary from being about equal to requirements to providing an over-supply of about 30 per cent and that protein supplies are well above requirements, it must not be forgotten that the supplies he refers to are total supplies - local production and importation - and one can therefore give unreserved support to his recommendation to construct a regional food balance sheet to obtain definitive data for the Region.

One estimate is that on a total food supply basis, countries of the Region produce in some cases up to 70 per cent of what is consumed and an examination of the composition of most of the extra-regional food imports into the area indicate a heavy weighting towards the importation of the cereals and animal protein - both of which account for 70-80 per cent of total proteins consumed.

In regard to food expenditure, the statistics show that the rich may spend as little as 20 per cent of their income on food, while the poor may spend as much as 87 per cent; this emphasizes the fact that malnutrition in the Caribbean has its roots in the economics of daily life and this is borne out by the results of cost nutrient value tables which have been recently compiled and from which the author, Dr. Gurney concludes: "*Apart from the shortages of supply and from profiteering ... and apart from an often very inadequate management of feeding of her young children, the housewife does the best she can.*" The

sophisticated computer has proved the wisdom of the humble housewife.

With regard to nutrition, it must have been very satisfying indeed for the author to be able to record "*fairly complete information on nutritional status is available for many countries of the Caribbean*". This is because within recent years Caribbean Governments have responded to stimulation by CFNI and have cooperated in establishing, through a variety of surveys, the baseline on which rational food and nutrition policies can be planned. The author could not have recorded this statement a few years ago.

Although this paper might not have been the appropriate place in which to make the observation, nevertheless the observation should be made that one reason for previous unavailability of data is the fact that there are so few nutrition workers in the Caribbean. As a result of regional efforts within the past seven years however, and as a result of international crises within the past two or three years - crises of monetary stability, food stuffs and energy - there is now much more regional interest in food and nutrition and Governments should establish more training facilities for nutrition workers, create more posts for these workers and more important adopt a definite food and nutrition policy.

The author points out that the nutritional data and vital statistics indicate that malnutrition is a major problem and that this is reflected in the high infant mortality rate which in some countries is three to four times that of North America and the high toddler mortality rate, which is one and a half to seven times that of North America.

With regard to the toddler mortality rate, Akroyd points out that due to the breast feeding pattern in the Caribbean, the age specific death rate of six months to two years is probably a better local indicator of malnutrition than the traditional one to four year rate, and Dr. Gurney obviously accepts this when in an earlier section of his paper he refers to "*the older infant mewling and puking in the nurse's arms and the toddler*" as being extremely vulnerable to malnutrition.

Anaemia of infancy is rightly mentioned as one of the major nutritional problems, but in keeping with the title of the paper at least passing reference could have been made to anaemia of pregnancy which is so common. Two publications recently prepared and being widely circulated in the Region: "*The strategy and plan of action to combat Gastro-Enteritis and malnutrition*" and "*The strategy and plan of action to strengthen the Maternal and Child Health Services*" should ensure that within the health sector major emphasis is placed on the nutritional requirements of the vulnerable mother and child.

The newest venture of CFNI, the distribution of a regular food price monitoring service together with cost - nutrient values deserves commendation and should be of use to consumers, nutrition workers and governments alike.

Finally, it is my opinion that the time has come for a more positive expression of national and regional will than is embodied in the statement in the penultimate paragraph "*Malnutrition can be eradicated*". This should be followed by the affirmation "*Malnutrition*

*must be eradicated"* and before it adjourns, the Conference should by an appropriate resolution, go on record that it supports this objective and as a first step toward this objective supports the nutrition goals outlined in the *Ten Year Health Plan of the Americas (1971-1980)*.

Reduce grade III protein-calorie malnutrition in children under five years of age, on a regional average by 85 per cent and grade II by 30 per cent. In countries where it is feasible, these goals will be separated for children under one year and from one to four years.

Reduce by 30 per cent the prevalence of nutritional anaemias in pregnant women, and that of endemic goitre to less than 10 per cent, eliminating cretinism and hypovitaminosis A in vulnerable groups at an average regional rate of 30 per cent.