

## FUTURE PLANS FOR FAMINE STUDIES

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Quotation from Alan Berg = THE NUTRITION FACTS  
1973, "Nutrition is a relatively new profession--most of the vitamins, for example, were discovered after 1930--and there are many unknowns. Some of these unknowns require biochemical and other forms of basic research. More urgent are the unknowns that call for mission-oriented research.

"In the past, research interest centered on clinical and laboratory work, with little attention to testing for practical appliance and for linking findings to policy and program needs. Applied work has been regarded as low in sophistication and prestige value, especially among scientists trained in Western Countries who sometimes conceive of research in terms of esoteric problems and shiny equipment. International funding agencies have often exacerbated this problem; a leading Nigerian scientist, for example, had no trouble obtaining funds for an amino acid analyser but failed to procure help for a badly needed field survey . . . .

"The need for a mission-oriented approach to nutrition research in developing countries is clear. An appropriate strategy would aim at identifying and providing the information necessary to develop policies and programs."

The UNICEF programme in Bangladesh is fortunately mission oriented. They have already approved funding for a 10 thana nutrition survey in 10 thanas bordering the northern Brahmaputra riverine area 'inundated' by higher than seasonal flood waters during the last monsoon. This survey carried out under the guidance of the Institute of Nutrition has three objectives:

1. To develop a rapid nutrition survey methodology for assessing potential famine areas.
2. To assess the present famine status of the 10 thanas, as a basis for UNICEF's future policy in the area, and the basis for nutritional surveillance in the area.

3. To gather standardised anthropometric data on children aged 1 to 10 in one area to mesh with the intended 16 site National Nutrition Survey being carried out by the Institute of Nutrition.
4. To assess the efficacy of the Vitamin A tablet programme in a sample area, prior to a Vitamin A policy reassessment by UNICEF.

### Longer Term Plans

There are records of recurrent famines and scarcity in Bengal since 350 B.C. In these famines of the past in Bengal as in present-day famines elsewhere - e.g., the Sahel zone, similar problems occur in the areas of famine prediction, famine surveillance, famine relief administration, and gauging the effect of famine and its sequelae in retarding the development process.

In a localised area in Bangladesh prone to recurrent famine, there is the opportunity for a Famine Research and Training Field Centre, similar to the Matlab Cholera Field Trial Centre. Such a field centre would model itself around the Bengal Famine code with three principal objectives.

1. To provide a para-medical or para-famine training to local government officers such as Circle Officers (Development) Sub-Divisional Officers and District Officers. Such a training would represent a re-tooling of the Bengal Famine Code, stressing Famine Prediction, Famine Surveillance and Famine Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.
2. To provide a field research station in a recurring famine area, for international and national research on Famine Prediction, Famine Surveillance, and Famine Sequelae.
3. To provide a field training centre for International Famine Relief Personnel presently sent overseas on an ad-hoc basis for short 6-month periods. This would allow the build up of a corpus of knowledge and experience on famine relief activities by the international community.

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