



# THE NEED FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION/INNOVATION PROGRAMME

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## Scaling UP Nutrition in Morocco

The field of nutritional research in low to middle income countries such as Morocco may be underfunded, but there is strong interest from researchers in moving forward. In April 2016, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) capacity building initiative that took place in Morocco is a key first step towards mitigating this issue. As part of our Global Initiative, NNEdPro, in partnership with the British Council and representatives from other UK institutions, travelled to Morocco to deliver the SUN workshop, promoting education and capacity building in Africa.

**Background:** Morocco has ambitious plans to improve the nutritional and health status of its citizens. In order to achieve such goals, several education initiatives have been implemented. As an attempt to step it up a notch, the "SUN Surveillance, Research and Education in Morocco" was conducted with NNEdPro at the forefront.

**The SUN initiative:** From April 26th to 28th, researchers from the UK (Cambridge University [CU], Medical Research Council Elsie Widdowson Laboratory [MRC EWL], Ulster University and Newcastle University [NU]) convened in Rabat, Morocco along with Moroccan academics, government officials and its Ministry of Health. The goal was to conduct a one-week exchange in knowledge and experience including dietary assessment methods, nutrition surveillance and nutrient/food database development.

**Day 1** brought current nutrition challenges faced by the Moroccan population to light. The conference started with Prof Hassan Aguenau introducing the importance of nutrition as a determinant of health and disease. He also highlighted the double burden of malnutrition; a growing and serious issue in the country. Prof Sumantra Ray (NNEdPro Chair) then introduced the importance of tackling nutrition issues through a translational approach. The talks that followed highlighted the role of breastfeeding and the relevance of micronutrient deficiency (vitamin A, iron and iodine) and the current efforts to overcome it. The day was concluded with Dr Sonja Nicholson (MRC) who outlined the National Dietetics and Nutrition Survey, as a successful approach to nutritional surveillance. The first day showed a remarkable shift in the participants' attitudes from thinking local to global.

**Day 2** was more didactic in nature where Dr Mei-Yen Chan (NU Singapore Campus) outlined methods to assess portion sizes, and Nida Ziauddeen (MRC) and Dr Sonja Nicholson summarised dietary assessment. To emphasise the need for quality research, Dr Michael Newell (NNEdPro and MRC) presented comprehensive approaches to longitudinal and acute studies in nutrition using projects based at the MRC EWL. In particular, Dr Anand Ahankari

(Nottingham University) presented pioneering work carried out in India in collaboration with the UK as an example of effective partnership. While, Pauline Douglas (NNEdPro Vice Chair) shared case studies from the Northern Ireland Centre for Food and Health demonstrating the impact of nutrition research on global policy. Dr Chan and Gabriele Mocciaro (NNEdPro) conclude with describing the role of the traditional Mediterranean diet in preventing cardiovascular and cognitive decline in European and Asian populations. We truly witnessed enthusiastic conversations and exchange of ideas resulting in various proposals to improve Morocco's research standard.

Ms Amina El Abdellaoui from the British Council highlighted different sources of UK research funding bodies on **Day 3**. To encourage collaboration, NNEdPro organised a speed networking session where participants were split into separate groups with two facilitators per group. Participants had the opportunity to express their views and mock up future proposals to strengthen surveillance, research and education relating to nutrition in the region.

**Overall**, the event was a success! Moroccan researchers were highly enthusiastic about the content of the talks and viable ideas were proposed with the goal to strengthen the current quality of work and enhance collaborations with UK partners. This workshop exemplifies the need for quality training and nutrition education in countries such as Morocco, but also illustrates how promising the future of this field is in this area. NNEdPro along with our UK counterparts will strive to harness the clear potential to establish new collaborative partnerships between Morocco and the UK.

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### Events

- **An Indian Summer' Charity Show:** at Wolfson College – 30th July 2016 – Raising funds for the Slum Dwellers Nutrition Project in India

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