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Workshop on Household Survey Data:
their Use in Nutrition Policy Planning

Athens, 30 September - 2 October 1987

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SUMMARY REPORT

A Workshop was convened in Athens from 30 September to 2 October 1987 to discuss the opportunities for and problems in using dietary data from household budget surveys in nutrition policy planning and implementation.

The Workshop had 30 participants from 17 Member States, only three of which at present have official nutrition policies. About half the participants were statisticians, representing institutions that conduct household budget surveys or use their results. The other half of the participants were nutritionists, in one way or another interested in nutrition policy planning and the collection of dietary data.

The participants had brought to the Workshop the latest information from their own countries detailing how this type of data is currently collected. This information constituted the background documentation to the meeting.

Expenditure on household budget surveys is usually justified by the need to analyse the economic implications of trends in food consumption, as well as by the need for information on which to base weights for price indices. At the same time, these data are one of the most important sources of information about dietary patterns.

The participants considered how nutrition policy planners could make better use of this type of dietary data, which is regularly collected in most European Member States. They recommended that nutritionists be much more specific than they have been to date about what kind of information is needed to formulate alternative models for making nutrition policy. This would serve as the starting point in discussions with producers, manufacturers and educators.

The participants discussed differences and similarities between these data sets and other population-level dietary data such as food balance sheets, individual-based dietary surveys and small special surveys.

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Recommendations

Specific recommendations were made as to how household budget survey data on food acquisition could be improved at the stages of data collection, analysis and presentation.

Since planning is the most important phase, nutritionists should be invited to be part of the planning team, and should be ready to formulate explicitly what data they need and what they will use them for. Countries that have had this kind of collaboration have found that surveys can to a large extent accommodate well considered wishes for special information.

It was further strongly recommended that future surveys ought to ask surveyed households to include the amounts of food acquired, in addition to the expenses incurred.