

Memorial for John Mason

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John Mason established and developed the concept of “Public Nutrition” (Mason et al 1986) which extends beyond public health to include other sectors of public action, including socio-economic development, and dealing with crises (e.g. refugees) which also involve nutrition. Public Nutrition is also concerned with environmental changes, the emergence of new diseases, and demographic and socio-economic changes that effect nutrition and its provision.

I began working with John in 1975 in connection with the *WHO Nutrition Surveillance* report (WHO 1977), which owes its lucidity to his writing. As is usual for United Nations documents, staff members are not recognized as authors. It is typical of John that lack of recognition was of no importance to him as long as the work was accomplished and well done. He was a power house in getting meaningful things accomplished.

After the WHO report, we worked together in the Cornell Nutritional Surveillance Program (1980-1986) which he established and developed. His book on *Nutritional Surveillance* (Mason et al 1984) and his work on the *Evaluation of Ongoing Programmes* (Mason et al 1984) laid out the principles for moving efficiently from data collection to informed decisions for action that are the basis of modern policy making and implementation. He was also involved in developing the Indonesian nutritional surveillance program to prevent famines, which was then effectively implemented.

From 1986 to 1996 he directed the Secretariat of the *United Nations, Administrative Committee on Coordination, Sub-Committee on Nutrition*, an inter-agency group (17 UN member agencies) whose responsibilities included liaison with bilateral donor agencies and associated NGO's and collaboration with the Advisory Group on Nutrition (AGN). The secretariat was responsible for coordination and communication in policies for nutrition within UN system, and among bilateral agencies and NGOs. From the point of view of being a member of the SCN advisory committee I observed the mire of bureaucratic obstructionism and jealousies that would have paralyzed anyone without John's vision, drive, bureaucratic energy and ability to amass resources to deal with issues, and get the job done in a timely fashion. The publications issuing from the ACC/SCN during his tenure were remarkable in their focus and organization, features that were due to his vision and intellectual organization. In particular the many “*Reports on the World Nutrition Situation*” initiated in 1987, were tours-de-force, not just in the intellectual content but also in the ways the data were amassed across factious organizations. These qualities reflect his clear vision and his imaginative use of available information to address important issues.

One could always count on John to do more than his share. He was demanding and sometimes impatient with colleagues, but he was always helpful and loyal. He worked well cross culturally, including with people whose lack of technical preparation required patience and understanding. In fact, in addition to his other contributions John was always concerned about training program leaders and policy deciders. His training courses in Africa were particularly important.

Looking back on his important and productive career, and how much he will be missed, it is comforting to know that John's sweeping contributions have been widely recognized, including,

for example his invitation to give the Lord Boyd Orr Memorial Lecture of the United Kingdom's Nutrition Society. This lectureship is reserved for very senior scientists and prime ministers.

John was a great nutrition leader.

References

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