FOREWORD

For more than two decades, advances in information and communications technologies, the Internet, and the World Wide Web have been instrumental in initiating fundamental changes in the practice of post-secondary education. Since 2002, when UNESCO first coined the term “Open Educational Resources” (OERs), there has been an exponential increase in access to free online learning content and applications. According to UNESCO, OERs can be defined as digital materials that can be re-used for teaching, learning, research and more, made available for free through open licenses.

The work you have in front of you has been authored by nutrition practitioners and experts based primarily in Africa. These authors present their views and expertise on nutritional issues relevant in different developing world contexts. This etext does not seek to be either a complete guide to nutrition in developing countries, or an all-inclusive account of how developing world nutritionists practise their craft. Rather, each chapter attempts to highlight a specific issue of importance for nutritionists, especially community nutritionists, as well as other health professionals in the developing world.

In the developing world context, the Internet and digital access using mobile devices present new means by which learners can access, produce, and share information and knowledge. In Africa, people face challenges in accessing textbooks and learning materials in general. This etext has been edited by Norman Temple, a nutrition professor and researcher at Athabasca University (AU), together with Dr Nelia Steyn of the Human Sciences Research Council in Cape Town, South Africa.

Africa has been a leader in the OER movement beginning with the Cape Town Open Education Declaration in 2007 to “accelerate efforts to promote open resources, technology and teaching practices in education.” Of particular relevance to this etext on nutrition is the complementary 2010 Cape Town Declaration of the XVth World Congress of Food Science and Technology supporting the Budapest Declaration on Open Access, recognizing the need for open education in nutrition, food science, and technology. More recently, the UNESCO Guidelines for OER in Higher Education were drafted in South Africa, while the African Virtual University has become recognized as a world leader in the development of OERs in three languages (English, French, and Portuguese).

AU, as Canada’s online distance university, is an appropriate partner for this initiative. It established one of the first open access journals, the International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning (IRRODL). And it was the first Canadian university to sign both the Cape Town Open Education and Budapest Declarations and implement an open access policy. This was followed up with the establishment of the world’s first open access university press: AU Press, which is co-publishing this etext.

A principal advantage of using OERs is the ease with which the content can be localized or otherwise customized or adapted without the problems associated with copyright protected content. Nowhere is this clearer than in its application to online education in general, especially in developing countries where local contexts differ sharply. Student learning can vary from individual to individual, from country to country, and from program to program; OERs provide the needed flexibility to allow for reuse, modification, and openness.

In keeping with its mission as an open university, AU is delighted to provide this book under a creative commons license, thereby removing financial barriers to its accessibility. As the former president of AU, I take pride in what our staff has accomplished and recognize the particular contribution that this book’s authors are making to the global extension of our mission.

The topics in this etext have been chosen specifically to highlight issues of concern in developing countries with especial regard to community nutrition. The text begins with a look at the food and nutrition environments that prevail on the African continent at all age levels; the management of the most common diseases and other ailments; the needs of nutritional education; community-based nutrition programmes; and the role of governments in food policy.

Since these international declarations, an even wider range of institutions have developed OERs, creating a rapidly growing and accessible ecosystem for quality educational content and applications. Moreover, with
the growing enactment of use-limiting copyright legislation in many jurisdictions, the pressures on institutions to prefer OERs over proprietary content, with its restrictive licensing and technological protection measures, are intensifying. OERs and etexts are increasingly being seen as necessary for those institutions that provide learning in digital environments. Digital Restrictions Management used by the publishing industry, coupled with the exorbitant pricing of proprietary textbooks, are bringing us closer to a tipping point, after which etexts and other forms of OERs will become the dominant media for delivering learning content and applications.

OERs will form part of any solution that supports the realization of the UNESCO Millennium Development Goals through this global partnership for gender neutral universal education. In particular, this will help to address the goals of food security, poverty eradication, child and maternal health, and a healthier population.

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