

Dr Urban Jonsson (1944–2016)

Bjorn Ljungqvist

United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN)

Dr Urban Jonsson passed away on March 8, 2016, just a few days after his 72nd birthday.

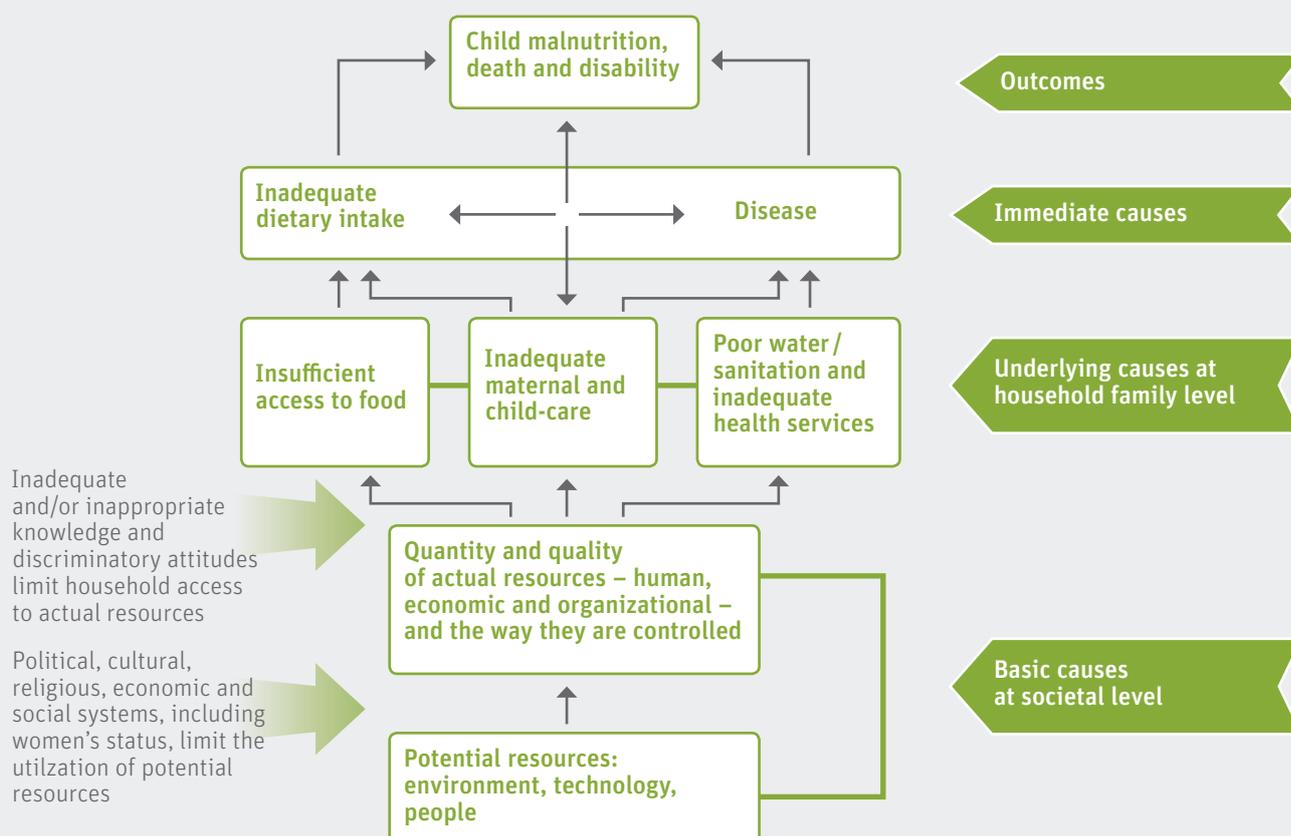
Urban Jonsson, a national of Sweden and resident of Tanzania, held a PhD in Food Science with focus on Nutrition. He pursued advanced training in nutrition at Cornell University and

lifelong studies in philosophy, mathematics and a series of other disciplines in order to build his impressive competence within the broad areas of development and human rights, often with the problems of nutrition and hunger as the point of reference.

A long and successful career in UNICEF

Following academic and research work at Chalmers University in Sweden, the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Center and the United Nations University in Tokyo, he started his long and successful career in UNICEF as the country representative to Tanzania in

FIGURE 1: UNICEF conceptual framework on the causes of child malnutrition (1990) – a key element in Dr Jonsson’s legacy.





Dr Urban Jonsson

1981. He went on to become the chief of nutrition for UNICEF globally, and then regional director, first in South Asia, based in Kathmandu, and then in Eastern and Southern Africa, based in Nairobi. He completed his career in UNICEF as senior advisor on human rights, and then went on to work on a series of significant assignments and publications in this area.

Dr Jonsson will be remembered for leading the groundbreaking work to develop the “UNICEF conceptual framework for nutrition causal analysis,” which has become universally adopted and used as a tool to understand and find solutions to nutrition problems. He will also be remembered for introducing the principles of “duty-bearers and claim-holders” in human-rights-based development programming.

A phenomenal capacity for systematic research

For those who were privileged to know and work with Urban, there is a wide range of issues related to development, nutrition, HIV and AIDS, human rights, and social justice where his phenomenal capacity for systematic research and analytical clarity helped to open new insights and, indeed, amazing opportunities for enhancing human dignity and respect. He was tireless in his commitment to children, and to all of humanity.

Urban leaves behind his wife, Dr Olivia Yambi, his two daughters Asa and Anna, his grand-daughter, and family in Sweden. He will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues, and by countless other persons in all parts of the world – from ordinary mothers and fathers to leaders in the highest positions – whose lives he touched. The world will surely be diminished, and less lively, without him.

Urban Jonsson, with strength and determination, stood up against oppression, indifference, and pure nonsense, and created meaningful ways to realize children’s right to health, nutrition, education, and a life free from all forms of violence.

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This obituary first appeared on the website of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN), the food and nutrition policy harmonization forum of the United Nations (www.unscn.org/). UNSCN thanks Urban Jonsson for his important support to UNSCN, especially his dedicated chairmanship of the UNSCN working group on nutrition, ethics and human rights.
