

PROMOTING THE EXPRESSION “FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY (FNS)”

A strategy note from the Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division - AGN

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FAO's mandate is to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy. AGN plays a critical and direct role in implementing this mandate.

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's efforts. According to FAO “food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active, healthy life.”¹ Household food security is the application of this concept at the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern. Intrinsic to this definition are the four pillars of food security, that is, availability, stability of supply, access and utilization by the body. While not always explicit, each pillar contains nutrition considerations and components crucial to the links in the chain between national food economies, households and individual well-being.

Thus, AGN proposes using the term “food and nutrition security” to better articulate these links as opposed to “food security and nutrition” where the importance of nutrition's role in sustainable food security may be lost. Use of this terminology makes the distinction between quantity (energy) and quality (dietary diversity) unequivocal. Furthermore, from an agency perspective, promotion of the expression “food and nutrition security” could increase the visibility of AGN's nutrition work inside and outside of the Organization, and its use could further encourage other Divisions and Departments within FAO to involve AGN on a regular basis when dealing with food security issues.

FAO's role in nutrition is unique in that it is the UN agency with the most expertise in improving nutrition outcomes via food and agriculture-based approaches. Other UN agencies working in nutrition (WHO, UNICEF and WFP) have different mandates and operational set-ups. Their strategies are typically curative, emergency-response based or limited (e.g. distribution of vitamin and mineral supplements, staple food fortification and food aid). These approaches can be crucially important in the short-term, but may not always represent sustainable long-term solutions. In contrast, FAO looks at the food and agriculture linkages to nutrition and tries to address the longer term, root causes of hunger and malnutrition. FAO recognizes that agricultural production, the relative stability of supplies, livelihoods, incomes and access to food, health and care *all* need to be addressed simultaneously if food and nutrition security is to be achieved and sustained. Achieving this goal requires policies, institutions and infrastructure that reinforce agricultural-based livelihoods and protect and promote food and nutrition security. No other agency is capable or willing to undertake this work.

mission. This does not mean that AGN can ignore the health and care components essential to reducing malnutrition. Rather the Division includes these variables as much as possible within the parameters of FAO's mandate and operations. For instance, nutrition education, communication and behaviour change provided by agricultural extension, as well as activities to improve hygiene and safety are examples of health and care initiatives that may fall under FAO's purview.

Box 1 – Reconciling different views: A strategic approach when dealing with FNS matters

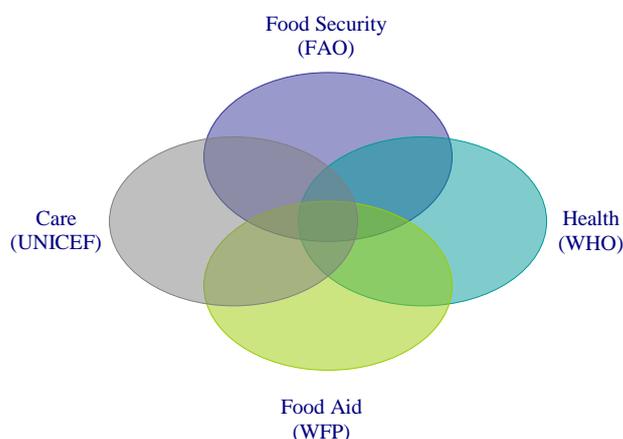
FAO, and its Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, needs to maintain its strong and active role in the field of nutrition by providing an agricultural and food friendly perspective to nutritional problems and therefore a food and agriculture approach to their solution. This underlies the importance of FAO for nutrition and the importance of nutrition for FAO. FAO cannot leave it to other agencies to look after nutrition. We need to do it as part of a “One UN” with FAO providing our own complementary and essential contribution to the elimination of hunger and malnutrition from a food and agriculture perspective.

Considering this agriculture and food-based orientation, we propose using the FIVIMS² conceptual framework (see Figure) to guide AGN's nutrition activities. Like the UNICEF conceptual framework for malnutrition, FIVIMS includes health and care components but moves beyond a maternal and child health focus to include all population groups, with special emphasis on the food economy. Furthermore, FIVIMS includes an explicit focus on consumption at the individual level. This is a crucial aspect of food and nutrition security and one which AGN is uniquely positioned to promote. One of AGN's most important roles as “nutrition advocate” within FAO is to ensure that improved availability, stability and access to food at aggregate levels leads to improved energy and nutrient intake at individual levels. That is, while recognising nutrition as inter-disciplinary in nature and inclusive of critical health and care components, AGN's comparative advantage lies in promoting food and agriculture based strategies to increase access to and consumption of adequately diversified diets. Individual intake patterns are the final link in the chain that begins with improved national food security and ends in improved nutrition outcomes. AGN plays an important role in making these connections, without which sustainable food and nutrition security cannot be achieved.

Box 2 – FNS and the double burden of malnutrition

Incidence of over consumption and overweight (i.e. “over nutrition”) is increasing in rapidly developing countries, especially in conjunction to urbanization. This trend has added a new dimension to the concept of food and nutrition security. Many countries (e.g. South Africa, India, and Mexico) are now facing a “double burden of malnutrition” where increased intake of fat, sugar and sodium, increased prevalence of overweight, and increased associated ill health effects are occurring in conjunction to continued undernutrition. The concept of food and nutrition security addresses this double burden by emphasizing the importance of dietary quality in addition to total energy intake, thus addressing both positive (over) and negative (under) deviations from the nutritional optimum. Food and nutrition security thus remains relevant in contexts of over, as well as under, nutrition, and is fundamental to reducing the burden of nutritional disorders that accompany economic development and urbanisation of societies worldwide.

Fig. 1 - The Intersectoral Nature of Nutrition and UN Agencies' Roles



Improving food and nutrition security via agriculture-based strategies is thus integral to FAO's Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division's

¹ FAO, Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action, 1996.

² FIVIMS (Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System) is an inter-agency initiative with FAO acting as a Secretariat set up to monitor progress in achieving the World Food Summit goal for eradicating hunger and achieving food security.

FAO/FIVIMS Framework: linkages between the overall development context, the food economy, households, and individual measures of well-being

