

Enhancing the role of smallholder farmers in achieving sustainable food and nutrition security

Bader Mahaman Dioula, H  l  ne Deret, Julien Morel, Etienne du Vachat, and Victor Kiaya

Action Contre la Faim
4 rue Niepce - 75662 paris cedex 14
Phone: +33 (0)1 43 35 88 26
www.actioncontrelafaim.org

SUMMARY

As food consumers, all people in developing countries count heavily on the efficiency of their local smallholder farmers to satisfy their food and nutrient needs. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role and contribution of smallholder farmers to sustainable food security and nutrition. It identifies and brings together key literature discussing the effectiveness of small-scale agricultural interventions in food security and nutrition at household and community levels. A particular attention will be paid to the role of women farmers. The paper will also highlight some policy recommendations aiming at improving the productivity of smallholder farmers and to enhance their contribution to the global efforts to food and nutrition security. The overall objective of the paper is to contribute to the 'nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems' organized by FAO's Food Security and Nutrition team in the framework of the ICN2 process.

CONCLUSIONS

Smallholder farmers play the most fundamental role in securing global access to food

At global level, smallholder agriculture contributes in a massive and indispensable way to sustainable food and nutrition security. Indeed, as the main domestic food and nutrient providers in developing countries, smallholder farmers are both direct and indirect contributors to food and nutrition security. This contribution is done in three key ways: lower food prices for consumers (improving food access, both for staples and more diverse nutrient rich foods); higher incomes for farmers (and mostly women farmers); and growth multiplier effects through the rest of the economy (UNSCN, 2010; Dorward, 2013). Continued focus on improving smallholder productivity is an important prerequisite to realizing food security goals, including nutrition security (Farmer .First, 2013).

Strategies enhancing the contribution of smallholder farmers to food security and nutrition

Actions-oriented strategies to enhance the potential role of smallholder farmers in food and nutrition security include: capacity building for smallholder farmers organizations, diversification of agricultural production, biofortification, post-harvest handling, nutrition education, women empowerment. All these actions can be implemented through the development of multidisciplinary nutrition-sensitive agricultural projects targeting nutritionally most vulnerable groups.

Smallholder farmers are just one part of the solutions

Even though smallholder farmers play the most crucial role in food and nutrition security, they just represent one piece of the overall puzzle. Solutions to food and nutrition challenges cannot be the responsibility of smallholder farmers alone. Farmers need to be involved as key partners in improving household nutrition and delivering nutritional interventions (FSN, 2012). As the UNICEF framework indicated, smallholder agricultural development needs to be accompanied by other actions in the fields of care, health, water and sanitation in the global efforts of reducing hunger and under nutrition.

Women farmers are the backbone of the household food and nutrition security

As smallholder farmers and caretakers of children play an important role in household nutrition. Considering their crucial role in food production and consumption, the empowerment of **women farmers** may be the outstanding complement to both agriculture and actions on health, water, and sanitation (Wiggins and Keats, 2013).

Sustainability is the foundation of approaches to food and nutrition security

Sustainable agriculture is important not only for ensuring the economic welfare of smallholder and other vulnerable groups; it is also linked to improving dietary diversity and nutrition outcomes. Moreover, sustainable agricultural practices have great potential to reduce some of the most harmful effects of the nutrition transition, for example by reducing resource-intense mono-cropping in favour of more ecologically and environmentally sustainable practices focused on maintaining biodiversity and intercropping (UNSCN, 2010).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the structural causes of food insecurity and malnutrition is the lack of coherence in policymaking at international and national level, resulting from inadequate governance of food security and nutrition (CFS, 2011). For smallholder farmers to play their actual role in food and nutrition security there is a need for the design of strategies and programmes backed by a firm national, regional and international commitment and conducive policy environment in which smallholder farmers, as key players, need to play a central role. Consequently, public policy makers need to re-engage with smallholder farmers and other stakeholders to build an integrated food security and nutrition policy. The paper identified the following key policy recommendations (Traoré et al., 2012; Farmer First, 2012, CFS, 2012; UNSCN, 2012; Wiggins and Keats, 2013):

- Develop national agricultural policy with explicit nutritional objectives and give priority to smallholder farmers' organizations in its implementation
- Strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers' organizations through investment in nutrition-sensitive agricultural policy that includes incentives on the diversification of agricultural production, promotion of home gardens, biofortification, post-harvest handling, women empowerment and nutrition education.
- Target beneficiaries of the investments based on their role in nutrition outcomes and integrate gender dimensions in policies and research by uncovering the social, economic and political barriers to women's participation in agricultural production and nutrition outcomes
- Create enabling policy environments at national and international levels, recognizing the central role of smallholder farmers as food and nutrient providers and establish an informed coordination of stakeholders at global level and support to country programmes in agriculture and nutrition, including those of FAO, SUN, REACH and NGOs.
- Increased support for the establishment and expansion of smallholder farmers' collectives, to improve market opportunities and the collective capacities of smallholder farmers and their communities.
- Maximizing training and awareness-raising for cross-sectorial dialogue, especially link nutrition to agriculture, health, water, sanitation, and social protection as well as other related sectors.