

MAINSTREAMING NUTRITION IN AGRICULTURE: WHAT CAN WE DO CONCRETELY?

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR GROUP WORK 1 & 2

KEY CONCEPTS

The nutritional impact of agricultural programmes is not automatic! Agriculture needs to be made nutrition-sensitive. This means:

1. **First, doing no harm!**

Agricultural interventions can have a *negative impact* on nutrition:

- Promotion of limited number of crops and varieties can reduce diet diversity
- Increased workload (in particular of women) can reduce time available for child feeding and care
- Focus on large-scale agriculture can marginalize small-holders and vulnerable groups dependent on small-scale farming...

2. **Maximizing the nutritional benefits of agricultural interventions:** ensuring that improved food production leads to improved food consumption & nutritional status.

➔ It is important to assess balance of potential positive and negative impacts *before* implementation.

Applying the “nutrition lens” to agriculture at different levels:

- **“Nutrition-sensitive value chains”:** agricultural value-chains whose nutritional impact is maximized (e.g. production and marketing of nutritious varieties). Value chains need to be addressed in the context of...
- **“Nutrition-sensitive food systems”:** a food system includes all means, processes and actors whereby food is produced, processed, distributed, and consumed. A nutrition-sensitive food system is one whereby nutritional impact is maximised. It is important to address food systems as a whole to ensure dietary diversity, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience (reduced dependency on single products).
- Concept of **“Sustainable Diets”:** sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.

WHAT CAN I DO PRACTICALLY TO MAKE AGRICULTURE “NUTRITION-SENSITIVE”?

There is no “blue-print” of what to do, but key principles to follow:

1) **Put nutrition as an outcome *and* measure it.**

- Improved nutritional status is a *goal*; improved diets as a measured *outcome*
- It is difficult to measure the impact of food security interventions on individual nutritional status (anthropometry) because many factors come into play (esp. health)
- But it is essential to measure the impact of programs on household and individual diets (ex: Diet Diversity Score:
http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/wa_workshop/docs/FAO-guidelines-dietary-diversity2011.pdf)
- When designing your M&E system, choose a set of indicators that allow you to understand and monitor key causal pathways.

2) Understand who is malnourished and why *at the local level*

Agricultural programs should be designed to address causes of malnutrition. You can:

- Gather and review reports of nutritional surveys and food security assessments so as to identify population groups who are most vulnerable to malnutrition (geographical areas + socio-economic/livelihoods groups), and key determining factors of malnutrition.
- Improve surveillance / assessment systems to coordinate the collection and analysis of nutrition, food security and agricultural production data (ex. Comparable sampling frame)
- Conduct participatory, multi-sectoral workshops with professionals working in program design and implementation at decentralized level, to achieve consensus on who is malnourished, why and how existing programs can be improved (see: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/wa_workshop/docs/Joint_Planning_for_Nutrition_FAO_May2011.pdf)
- In doing so, work with governmental authorities at central and decentralized levels, NGOs, civil society (community health centers, women's groups, farmer organizations, religious groups...), UN agencies, donors

3) Identify and target the most vulnerable

- Use the results of nutritional, food security and poverty surveys to identify groups at risk of malnutrition and design programs adapted to their needs and livelihoods.
Caution: in doing so, do not refer only to acute malnutrition rates, which are a late indicator of vulnerability – food consumption and poverty indicators are also important!
- Don't forget the urban poor who can benefit from agriculture as small-scale producers (urban/peri-urban agriculture), processors, retailers and consumers
- Target families whose children are registered in *nutrition rehabilitation programs* (implement by the health sector) with food and nutrition security programs adapted to their needs.

4) Improve access to diverse foods *year-round*

- Diversify local food production :
 - Promote local biodiversity as a foundation for diet diversity
 - Develop inter-cropping and crop rotation
 - Promote micronutrient rich varieties of foods (fruits and vegetables, but also legumes, roots/tubers, animal-source foods, whole grains, nuts...)
 - select crops based on nutritional content in addition to yields & market value
 - Maintain / improve soil quality and nutrient content
 - R&D to breed plants & livestock that enhance the nutritional quality of products
- Promote homestead food production: micro-gardens, small livestock rearing...
- Facilitate access to diverse products on the markets (from local production and/or imports): develop market infrastructure; improve transport and road networks; marketing of nutritious products...
- Develop and improve food storage and conservation methods that preserve or enhance the nutritional quality of foods
- Generate income through agricultural value chains that can be used to purchase foods and meet other basic needs (soap, health care...)
- Invest in sustainable natural resource management (forests, pasture, soil, water...) to ensure activities can be continued in the long-term (c.f. conservation agriculture)

5) Provide nutrition education

Working on the supply side won't work unless there is an increase in the *demand* for nutritious foods and households know how to obtain a healthy diet!

- Provide practical skills to households to optimize the use of their resources for improving nutrition, esp. that of infants and young children, school-age children, women, and the chronically-ill individuals! Ex: development of improved local recipes, in particular for complementary feeding, and participatory cooking sessions.
- Channels for nutrition education: Agricultural extension (Farmer-field schools); women's and youth groups; schools (school gardens and nutrition education in school curricula); Health centers; media (radio; soap operas...); religious networks

6) Link agriculture to social protection programmes

- Social protection = "all initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risk, and enhance the social status and the rights of the marginalized; with the overall objective of extending the benefits of economic growth and reducing the economic and social vulnerability of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups" (examples: Cash transfers; Vouchers; School feeding)
- What role can agriculture play for social protection:
 - Direct agriculture assistance (ex: input distributions, vouchers for inputs) are a form of resource transfer
 - Associating agricultural support (extension, access to inputs) to cash transfers and voucher programs to assist households in protecting/developing their productive asset base, thus reducing their dependency on social protection
 - Linking local small-scale producers to food aid programs: e.g. Home-Grown School Feeding and Purchase for Progress initiatives.

7) Support and work with women

- Women play a central role in food production, income generation, food preparation, child and family care
- Importance of understanding women's workload and constraints they face
- Women invest in family needs
- Women's participation is a factor of social cohesion and improvements in nutrition practices
- Gender approach entails working with men and women together!

8) Work together across sectors and institutions

- Parallel implementation of sector-specific programs is not enough to help a family affected by malnutrition
- Developing synergies to optimize impact and resource utilization : harmonize targeting; ensure interventions are complementary and meet households' needs
- Platforms for joint action: community-based programs; school-based programs
- Nutrition education as a means of 'cementing' partnerships (e.g. use of same nutrition education materials by different sectors)
- Good opportunities for multi-sectoral planning with SUN, REACH, Joint Programs

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAINSTREAM NUTRITION?

- Political commitment / Understanding by decision-makers of cost and consequences of malnutrition
- Understanding what agriculture can do *practically* in a *locally appropriate way*
- Good integration with other sectors and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships
- Effective M&E including nutrition indicators
- Capacity-development
- Funds – but a nutrition-sensitive design can maximize the nutritional impact of existing agricultural investments at limited or no extra costs.