MAINTREAMING 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:
   - 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.