

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON THE FSN FORUM

DRAWING LESSONS FROM FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND INFORMATION FOR IMPROVED DECISION MAKING AND RESPONSE

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I. PURPOSES OF FSN RESEARCH/ANALYSIS/ACTIONS

- Design policies, programs and response local packages (C. Teller, M. Veiga)
- Improve the formulation and implementation of the FS strategy (A. Acosta)
- Assess the causes of vulnerability and local resilience (C. Teller)
- Measurement of impact/effect on FS and/or on beneficiaries (M. Veiga & J. Ortega)
- Obtain accurate reliable baselines of chronic vulnerability to strengthen the early warning systems (C.Teller)
- Improve local analytical capacity (on the analysis of FS issues) (C.Teller & A. Acosta)
- Management of operations (M.Veiga)

II. APPROACHES AND INDICATORS USED

Approches:

- The SERA methods add the community, household and individual approach to include the health and nutritional factors within the FAO/UNICEF conceptual framework of food and nutrition insecurity. The household and individual survey approach adds the depth and flexibility of triangulated data source analysis of the vulnerable target groups (C. Teller)
- Causal chain of the project: availability and stability access → consumption and use → nutritional status improvements and poverty alleviation. (J. Ortega)

Key indicators used:

- The household head's "perception" of their capacity to "make ends meet" and "satisfy their basic food and health needs" during the hunger/epidemic seasons (C. Teller)
- Global Hunger Index (Ihpri) (M. Veiga)
- Average per person dietary energy/food supply (Food balance sheets) (M. Veiga)
- Proportion of population below 1\$ (PPP) per day (World Bank) (M. Veiga)
- Prevalence of population below the national poverty line (Household surveys) (M. Veiga)
- Gini coefficient (WB and FAO) (M. Veiga)
- Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (FANTA) (M. Veiga, A. S Celigny & J. Ortega)
- Dietary diversity (FANTA) (M. Veiga, A. S Celigny, J. Ortega)
- Price of the staple food. (M. Veiga)
- Prevalence of households that are food energy deficient (Household expenditure surveys) (M. Veiga)
- Prevalence of under-nourishment in total population (Individual Food Intake Survey) (M. Veiga)
- Anthropometry indicators: underweight, stunting, wasting and body mass index (Anthropometric surveys) (M. Veiga)
- Coping Strategies Index (Maxwell et al. 1999) (M. Veiga)
- Food share (Household Expenditure Survey) (M. Veiga)
- Total household expenditure (in nominal local currency) (J. Ortega)
- Total food consumption (expenditure and in kind) (J. Ortega)
- Consumption of vegetables (in kilograms) (J. Ortega)
- MUAC and women's BMI in early warning systems (A. Solal-Celigny)

III. KNOWLEDGE TO CONCRETE ACTION/IMPACT

According to C.Teller:

- 1) A National Guidelines on Vulnerability Profiles developed, published and accepted by the government and supported by donors, and widely used for vulnerability assessments and annual reports.
- 2) New indicators of chronic vulnerability utilized for bi-annual field assessment, monitoring, Annual Appeals for Food/health aid, and by Early Warning Systems, FEWS, EWS, FIVINS, MDGs, etc.
- 3) Coordination of rapid collection of mortality and nutrition data by government and NGOs for famine of 2002-03 and subsequent food shortages in specific regions.
- 4) Capacity-building at regional, zonal and district levels of government, public and private research centers and NGO personal
- 5) Results and action packages developed at decentralized levels and carried out when funded (too many to enumerate)
- 6) New follow-up studies and assessments carried out by universities, banks, donors and NGOs to fill research and knowledge gaps and update information
- 7) Ethiopian human capacity for vulnerability assessments and analysis increased, including GIS, epidemiological and demographic statistical packages and qualitative agro-ecological methods.
- 8) National and sub-national policies and strategies use these data, especially in the health, food security, poverty reduction, economic and social planning, environmental, water and disaster prevention sectors.
- 9) National (AAU/Addis) University capacity to provide short-term, mid and high level training in monitoring and evaluation of Health/population/nutrition programs yearly from Anglo-phone Africa.
- 10) National graduate theses and national and international research papers presented and published for the wider FSN and development audience.

According to F. Mirzaei, effectiveness of research findings by ASRI on policy making in animal husbandry sub-sector in Iran includes:

- 1- Usage of tomato by-products on livestock and poultry nutrition preventing of environmental contamination
- 2- Rule of Sanan goat on milk and meat production.
- 3- Survey on first mating age of Sistani calves increasing of farmers' income
- 4- Usage of Zeololite on laying hens nutrition increasing of qualitative and quantitative production
- 5- Decreasing of weaning time in native Golpaygani calves enhancing of farmers' income and milk production
- 6- Usage of rice straw on animal nutrition decreasing of feeding cost and preventing of environmental contamination
- 7- Usage of fruits waste on animal nutrition decreasing of farmer' income and preventing of environmental contamination
- 8- Usage of Whey in livestock nutrition to reduction of fed cost and prevention of environmental pollution
- 9- Nutrition of honey bee by protein supplements deduction colonies' mortality during of winter.

IV. COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS IN THE GENERATION AND USE OF FSN INFORMATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Findings and recommendations stemming from research studies, assessments and analyses in food security and nutrition (FSN) is usually communicated through materials such as publications, reports, briefs, bulletins, newsletters, websites, press releases etc. Collectively these may be called “**FSN information products**”. Their objective is to support of decision making, including the design, planning, implementation and targeting of FSN policies and interventions.

Main problems affecting the impact of FSN information on decision-making:

1. The **poor RELEVANCE** to decision- making processes
2. **Low CREDIBILITY** commonly due to insufficient communication and coordination between decision-makers and FSN analysts
3. **Inadequate ACCESS** to target groups

The first two categories can be directly attributed to weaknesses or constraints in communication and the “process of production” (including: dialogue between FSN analysts and decision-makers, coordination and dissemination activities).

1. POOR RELEVANCE

Information provided (a) not matching actual needs for decision-making, (b) insufficiently action-oriented, merely descriptive, (c) too little updated; (d) covering only one sector despite the multi-facet nature of FSN (e.g. only agriculture or health) (C. Lopriore)

Many researchers in developing counties are unsatisfied with the farmers' approach and poor acceptance of their research findings, and don't feel its effects even on poverty alleviation (F. Mirzaei)

Some causes:

- Gaps in understanding FSN concepts (K.C. Luswata & E.F.A Ismail)
- Research and assistance don't aim sufficiently at empowerment for self-reliance for FS (K.C. Luswata)
- Donors sometimes impose their own purposes/interests/recommendations, in this case few resources go directly to tackle the problems (E.F.A Ismail)
- Weaknesses in policy analyses and the evaluation phase of the cycle to make future plans. Even when data is adequate, it remained unanalyzed and unused or under-used (E.F.A Ismail)

2. LOW CREDIBILITY

- **Gaps in information generation:**
 - Inconsistent information inputs (including delays and inadequacy) received from the main partners are reflected negatively in the reliability and credibility of information outputs (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)

- Methods used are not transparent, not understood, not validated with users; information provided inconsistent with other information sources or previous recommendations; data/information not (considered) reliable (C. Lopriore, EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)
- **Gaps in communication:**
 - Lack of organizational clarity in line of communication (E.F.A Ismail)
 - Poor communication (vertically and horizontally) between the centre and state levels (E.F.A Ismail)
 - Insufficient coordination and dialogue between users and producers of information resulting among others in lack of common understanding of FSN problems and decision-making agenda not aligned with country priorities (C. Lopriore)

3. INADEQUATE ACCESS

- Lack of communication infrastructure and low performance of existing information systems. Even when data is adequate, it remained unanalyzed and unused or under-used (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)
- Most key answers remain undocumented with technicians, experts and practitioners in the field, and are not reaching the target audiences (A. Acosta, Mozambique)
- Target audience preferences/needs not taken into account in terms of timeliness, format, dissemination channel etc. (C. Lopriore, EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing FSN Information Products that Result in Action)

V. LESSONS AND BEST PRACTICES

1. POOR RELEVANCE

- Multi-stakeholders workshop with the aim to create a common understanding on strengthening FSN and nutrition and livelihood analysis to reflect the need for multi-sector approaches in addressing FSN (S. Boetekees, A. Celal-Soligny, C. Teller) → valid also for CREDIBILITY issue

1.1. Capacity building activities

- **Training of FSN analysts** in improving reporting and communication skills with active participation of decision-makers (C. Lopriore, EC/FAO Programme. Countries: Mozambique, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Burkina Faso)
- **Build local capacity** to generate more information and data on these lower [sub-national] levels for the decentralized decision-making and local ownership of response packages that vulnerable communities and households are demanding (C. Teller)
- Develop **local area Vulnerability Profiles and Vulnerability Working Groups**, in a capacity-building mode, as useful assessment strategies and tools to stimulate local action and prompt more responsive and effective early warning systems (C. Teller)
- Train scientists and service providers to repackage information from fact sheets (F. Imakorit-Oumo)
- Intensive 'on-the-job' training components. Facing a high turnover, the best strategy is to train as many people as possible for the same kind of activity envisaged to implement so as to make some kind of redundancy and replaceable of qualified experts in doing the same job (A. Asfaw)

1.2 Effectively link research and programme/project activities to policy making (also valid for LOW CREDIBILITY and INADEQUATE ACCESS)

- Following every stages of the **policy making processes** (problem identification, agenda setting, agenda debate, policy decisions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and involving wide range of stakeholders. Better design policy assistance project: better state how the intervention was expected to fit into the policy process continuum and what was expected in terms of policy results or development of strategies (C. Lagu, H. Tran)
- Ensuring **FSN are among policy priorities** of decision-makers e.g. by support streamlining of FSN into the country reference policy frameworks, support advocacy activities, making explicit the relationships between FSN and country priority objectives, demonstrate the importance of hunger reduction for poverty alleviation and economic growth (S. Boetekees, C. Lopriore)

- Undertake **Users (or decision-making) Needs Assessments** to identify requirements in FSN information e.g. by carrying out a stakeholder analyses to analyze the different decision-making levels: who they are (power/influence), where (or at which level) they operate (central vs decentralized), what type of decisions they face, how they take them – including: extent of participation, (incl. what, why and how they use information (if at all) in these decisions (i.e. Who needs what information and why?) (C. Lopriore)
- The EXPRESSED NEED for information is to fill in information gaps at higher echelon level at the end of donors rather than a direct need requested by local government in terms of priority settings (E.F.A Ismail). Necessity of a policy dialogue to settle down the question of priorities and goal trade-offs among "donors".
- Research actually suggests a particular course of action, recommendations on the implementation processes; and challenges existing assumptions or institutional arrangements (D. Melvin, H. Tran, J.L. Vivero Pol)
- Politicians and decision makers get influenced by different channels, which implies that similar messages should be conveyed to different stakeholders (NGOS, Ministries, Universities, public media, internet, scientific papers), so as the ideas to reach the politicians by several means. E.g within the Latin America Hunger Free Initiative three components are supported: A.- Awareness-raising to position hunger in national and regional agendas B.- Strengthening national capacities, through technical training, policy backstopping, and promotion of right to food and legal frameworks. C.- Applied research, systematization and Food Security Observatory (J.L. Vivero Pol)
- Find, nurture and promote national leaders, champions who are really committed with hunger eradication, political or civil society leaders who are capable of speaking to large audiences, write to the public, mobilize masses, influence politicians. Without a champion (s), project approach will be limited to bureaucratic and technical recipes, with not that much receptive audience in national governments (J.L. Vivero Pol)
- Importance of funds availability to maintain the system viable (valid also for LOW CREDIBILITY and INADEQUATE ACCESS) (E.F.A Ismail, F. Imakorit-Oumo)

2. LOW CREDIBILITY

2.1. Participatory process to build joint ownership of information by decision makers

Information is most likely to be trusted if the decision makers have a stake in the system and really understand it. An important way to achieve this is through **collaboration in data collection, analysis and reporting**. The shift towards collaboration and networking has improved consensus over the conclusions and increased the likelihood of action in response to the reports:

- Multi-sectoral and sub-national/local participation, involvement of stakeholders and policy-makers in developing conceptual framework, national vulnerability guidelines... (C.Teller)
- Joint collaboration between several Ministries and partners on the development of FSN and nutrition analytical report (S. Boetekees, Tanzania)
- Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) in southern Africa: the VAC analysis has been extremely influential on FSN programming. Several evaluation exercises have consistently attributed this, at least in part, to extensive participation and broad membership (C. Lopriore)

2.2. Some good practices to help enhance the credibility of FSN information products (C. Lopriore)

- Supporting **mechanisms for involving stakeholders** in the collection and analysis of FSN information
- Documenting the methods used to collect and analyse information and validate them **during technical meetings with stakeholders**
- **Coordinating** with other FSN analysts, avoiding (apparent) inconsistencies
- **Explaining the reasons** for which information is inconsistent with other sources of information or previous recommendations
- Indicating your degree of confidence in the information provided and explaining the implications of limited confidence for decision-making
- **Systematically indicating the sources** of data/information

- Establish a **sustainable food security information system** (also valid for POOR RELEVANCE & INADEQUATE ACCESS) by building the government information system while gratifying the immediate needs of humanitarian actors. E.g: build the government-led the Food and Agricultural Market Information System (FAMIS) as an important platform to share information between different stakeholders. (A. Asfaw)

3. INADEQUATE ACCESS

- Challenge: how to find the necessary gate through which we can disseminate that information to the critical decision making body (A. Asfaw)
- Ensure that all this important information is made **available** and **accessible** and **user-friendly**. **Simple packaging** of this information without losing content for all stakeholders shall be vital in up scaling and mainstreaming FSN in the policy stream (C. Lagu)
- Research findings should reach the people in the communities and aim at empowering people for self-reliance because that is what is sustainable. Creating awareness of the communities about the simple and cheap (solutions) for improving their FSN. (K. C. Luswata)
- Sharing results and outputs of research activities to a wide audience. Publishing on web of Livelihood Profiles (A. Asfaw, Ethiopia) and of other project achievements like in the SERA project (Strengthening Emergency Response and Action) in Ethiopia (C. Teller)
- **Communication as a participatory process** and breaking the usual vertical flow of information, especially with **new technologies** creating tremendous opportunities for people from all over the globe to exchange ideas and knowledge and flattening many of the usual barriers related to gender, rank, etc (D. Melvin). Examples:
 - **Online and participatory knowledge sharing networks** (Indicators Bridging Food Security and Nutrition D-group-A. Solal-Celigny and the FSN Forum-H. Tran);
 - Examples of how **blogs and mobile phones**, especially in Africa, are at the cutting edge in delivering all sorts of information presented at Web 2 for Development Conference in Sept. 07 at FAO (D. Melvin).
- Communication objectives have to be specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic and time bound. Just as communication must command attention, the message passed should be able catch the receivers' attention (appropriate), clear message, communicate benefit, create trust, call for action and be consistent (F. Imakoriti-Oumo). E.g: developing a communication strategy for the project, developing technology Inventory for the Organization; guidelines for developing communication strategy; guidelines for developing communication materials for natural resources projects; guidelines for packages (fact sheets) of research outputs; initiated an 'Information Resource Centre' to act as one stop centre for information for the beneficiaries.
- Help fellow scientists to UNDERSTAND the BENEFIT of communication (F. Imakoriti-Oumo)
 - Establish a publication series with POLICY BRIEFS, well-written summaries where FAO presents (really to the point) main conclusions of the countless papers and reports produced every year (J.L. Vivero Pol)

VI. OTHER ISSUES

- Religious dependence of some agricultural products and cultural adaptability of food relief (F. Mirzaei, E. Islam, R. Lao)
- Environmental changes, which cause the loss of natural nutrients. Environmental degradation is an issue that requires further research in terms of its potential impact on future food insecurity in pastoral areas (F. Mirzaei & M. Smulders)
- Programmes/projects should improve human resources management, find the right people who could effectively contribute (E. Elamin)

VII. RESOURCES RECOMMENDED

- D. Melvin, Ethan Zuckerman's video from the conference held in FAO:
<http://wurtv.wur.nl/wurtv/viewer.html?path=Web2ForDev/2007/09/27/1/>
- D. Melvin, Food Security Information for Action Distance Learning Programme <http://www.foodsec.org/dl>
- D. Melvin, "Policy Research and the Policy Process: Do the Twain Ever Meet"?
<http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdf/full/6138IIED.pdf>
- H. Tran, Policy Assistance Literature Review, FAO
http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=266&nocache=
- R. Lao, THE JUSTICE OF EATING: Stories and Images of Philippine Realities on Food.
- C. Lopriore, EC-FAO Programme Food Security and Nutrition Training

<http://www.foodsec.org/tr.htm#rep>

http://www.foodsec.org/tr_fsip.htm#back

http://www.foodsec.org/tr_fsip.htm