



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING NUTRITION THROUGH AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems provide for all people's nutritional needs, while at the same time contributing to economic growth. The food and agriculture sector has the primary role in feeding people well by **increasing availability, affordability, and consumption of diverse, safe, nutritious foods and diets** aligned with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability. Applying these principles helps strengthen resilience and contributes to sustainable development.

Agricultural programmes and investments can strengthen impact on nutrition if they:

- 1 Incorporate explicit nutrition objectives and indicators into their design**, and track and mitigate potential harms, while seeking synergies with economic, social and environmental objectives.
- 2 Assess the context at the local level, to design appropriate activities to address the types and causes of malnutrition**, including chronic or acute undernutrition, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and obesity and chronic disease. Context assessment can include potential food resources, agro-ecology, seasonality of production and income, access to productive resources such as land, market opportunities and infrastructure, gender dynamics and roles, opportunities for collaboration with other sectors or programmes, and local priorities.
- 3 Target the vulnerable and improve equity** through participation, access to resources, and decent employment. Vulnerable groups include smallholders, women, youth, the landless, urban dwellers, the unemployed.
- 4 Collaborate and coordinate with other sectors** (health, environment, social protection, labour, water and sanitation, education, energy) and programmes, through joint strategies with common goals, to address concurrently the multiple underlying causes of malnutrition.
- 5 Maintain or improve the natural resource base** (water, soil, air, climate, biodiversity), critical to the livelihoods and resilience of vulnerable farmers and to sustainable food and nutrition security for all. Manage water resources in particular to reduce vector-borne illness and to ensure sustainable, safe household water sources.
- 6 Empower women** by ensuring access to productive resources, income opportunities, extension services and information, credit, labour and time-saving technologies (including energy and water services), and supporting their voice in household and farming decisions. Equitable opportunities to earn and learn should be compatible with safe pregnancy and young child feeding.
- 7 Facilitate production diversification, and increase production of nutrient-dense crops and small-scale livestock** (for example, horticultural products, legumes, livestock and fish at a small scale, underutilized crops, and biofortified crops). Diversified production systems are important to vulnerable producers to enable resilience to climate and price shocks, more diverse food consumption, reduction of seasonal food and income fluctuations, and greater and more gender-equitable income generation.
- 8 Improve processing, storage and preservation** to retain nutritional value, shelf-life, and food safety, to reduce seasonality of food insecurity and post-harvest losses, and to make healthy foods convenient to prepare.
- 9 Expand markets and market access for vulnerable groups, particularly for marketing nutritious foods** or products vulnerable groups have a comparative advantage in producing. This can include innovative promotion (such as marketing based on nutrient content), value addition, access to price information, and farmer associations.
- 10 Incorporate nutrition promotion and education** around food and sustainable food systems that builds on existing local knowledge, attitudes and practices. Nutrition knowledge can enhance the impact of production and income in rural households, especially important for women and young children, and can increase demand for nutritious foods in the general population.

Agriculture programmes and investments need to be supported by an **enabling policy environment** if they are to contribute to improving nutrition. Governments can encourage improvements in nutrition through agriculture by taking into consideration the 5 policy actions below.

Food and agriculture policies can have a better impact on nutrition if they:

1

Increase incentives (and decrease disincentives) for availability, access, and consumption of diverse, nutritious and safe foods through environmentally sustainable production, trade, and distribution.

The focus needs to be on horticulture, legumes, and small-scale livestock and fish – foods which are relatively unavailable and expensive, but nutrient-rich – and vastly underutilized as sources of both food and income.

2

Monitor dietary consumption and access to safe, diverse, and nutritious foods. The data could include food prices of diverse foods, and dietary consumption indicators for vulnerable groups.

3

Include measures that protect and empower the poor and women. Safety nets that allow people to access nutritious food during shocks or seasonal times when income is low; land tenure rights; equitable access to productive resources; market access for vulnerable producers (including information and infrastructure). Recognizing that a majority of the poor are women, ensure equitable access to all of the above for women.

4

Develop capacity in human resources and institutions to improve nutrition through the food and agriculture sector, supported with adequate financing.

5

Support multi-sectoral strategies to improve nutrition within national, regional, and local government structures.

These recommendations have been formulated following an extensive review of available guidance on agriculture programming for nutrition, conducted by FAO (see: www.fao.org/docrep/017/aq194e/aq194e00.htm), and through consultation with a broad range of partners (CSOs, NGOs, government staff, donors, UN agencies) in particular through the Ag2Nut Community of Practice. They are also referred to as “guiding principles” by some partners.

The present key recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture target policy makers and programme planners. These recommendations are based on the current global context, and may be updated over time as challenges and opportunities to improve nutrition through agriculture shift.

