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THE NUTRITION SENSITIVITY OF AGRICULTURE & FOOD POLICIES

A Synopsis of Eight Country Case Studies

Agricultural and food systems throughout the world have evolved to become more complex and globalized. The quality of food production, processing, and consumption – as determined by the food system – is intrinsically related to the World Summit goal for all people to have the opportunity to lead a healthy and active life.

More than 20 years after the first International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), the second ICN (ICN2) cannot use a “business as usual” approach. The world has profoundly changed and nutrition has profoundly changed, as nutrition is now recognized as being multi-sectoral, multi-level, multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary. There is demand from countries for practical tools, guidelines, and sharing of experiences, as well as lessons learned on how to align sectoral policies to improve nutritional outcomes.

Nutrition-sensitive agriculture aims to maximize the positive impact of the food system on nutrition outcomes while minimizing any unintended, negative consequences of agricultural policies and interventions for the consumer.

The relationship between nutrition outcomes and broader agriculture and food systems is undeniable, as is its potential to combat hunger and malnutrition. It is clear that the policy priorities for agriculture should include explicit nutrition objectives. What remains unclear is the best path for translating policy into effective programmatic action to achieve the desired improvements in dietary patterns and nutritional outcomes.



United Nations
System

Standing Committee on
Nutrition



THE OBJECTIVES OF THE COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

The purpose of this research, commissioned by the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (www.unscn.org) is **to contribute to the understanding of effective nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food policies and commitments, and the food-based solutions that help inform countries in their efforts to scale up nutrition.** Eight country case studies, including Brazil, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Thailand examined the nutrition sensitivity of agriculture and food policies, through the identification, description and assessment of food and agriculture strategies, policies, and investments that incorporate nutrition-sensitive actions and recommendations.

The multi-country study also describes policy processes and the political environment of nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture policy-making and identifies factors contributing or impeding collaboration and cooperation between relevant ministries.



All of the country case studies demonstrated that there is already a level of commitment to achieving positive nutrition outcomes, as well as an understanding, to varying degrees, that the agricultural sector has a pivotal role in achieving nutrition objectives. The studies collectively highlight the importance of a supportive policy environment, well-developed human resources, and effective systems for planning, implementation, and monitoring impact for creating successful, nutrition-sensitive agriculture policies and programmes.

Good practices and transferable lessons can be drawn from each country case study:



1 BRAZIL

The food and agriculture policies and plans which are related to the promotion of the family farming model are the most nutrition sensitive. The policies and plans are strong as they take a sustainable approach to improved food and nutrition security, increasing food production, targeting the most vulnerable, expanding access to markets, and improving food processing and storage. However, they lack sufficient emphasis on increasing production of nutrient-rich foods, improving processing to retain nutritional value, reducing post-harvest losses, and the integration of nutrition education.

2 MALAWI

Since 1995, a surge in activities has led to improved nutrition outcomes in Malawi, many of which link to developments in the agricultural sector. There is a high level of commitment to improve nutritional status through agriculture, and clear ways to incorporate nutrition into agricultural planning. Existing practices and programmes can be better monitored and evaluated for impact, and directly built into policy and implementation strategies.

3 MOZAMBIQUE

Although nutrition has gained momentum in the country, it is not as much of a national government priority as other issues (e.g. reducing poverty, promoting economic development and increasing food production and productivity). Nutrition-sensitive agriculture would benefit from prioritizing the production of food crops relating to nutritional needs, targeting vulnerable groups, including nutrition indicators in non-nutrition interventions/programmes, and building explicit nutrition objectives into policies and hold them as overall goals rather than health-specific goals. Additionally, there is an opportunity to use agriculture services as delivery platforms for nutrition interventions.

4 NEPAL

The current food and agriculture plans are ambitious and commendable. As a young country, facing a long path towards development and economic security, Nepal's nutrition goals and targets should be ambitious, but also realistic and achievable in the appropriate time scales. To make substantive improvements, Nepal should focus on several key populations: children under two years of age, pregnant and lactating women and the landless, to optimize coordination and impact of the plans. Additionally, it is important for food and nutrition security to be embraced as a major objective of long-term national development strategies.

5 SENEGAL

There are a number of experiences with food value chain approaches (i.e. fruit and vegetable value chain or innovation platform for the incorporation of local cereals in bread) within the food system in Senegal. Promoting varieties on the basis of micronutrient composition of the crops is considered a promising strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies and promote local foods. There is willingness and enthusiasm to incorporate nutrition objectives into the overarching agricultural framework for Senegal. Building nutrition capacity among government leaders in various sectors, particularly agriculture, will address the knowledge gap and confusion that still exists around nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

6 SIERRA LEONE

The key national agricultural policy in Sierra Leone does not contain specific nutrition objectives or identification of funding channels. There is a growing interest from initiatives and advocates such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (<http://www.caadp.net/>), REACH (<http://www.reachpartnership.org/>), and the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (<http://scalingupnutrition.org/>), to integrate nutrition, and international funding is increasingly available. In order to achieve nutrition sensitivity in agriculture, a policy conduit will have to be created or amended, with the appropriate coordination, capacity and monitoring at the highest level of government. All sectors have the opportunity to have nutrition objectives and indicators built into their frameworks.

7 SOUTH AFRICA

Food and agriculture policies in South Africa focus primarily on increasing agricultural productivity, increasing access to markets, and increasing household buying power. There is need for a greater focus on educating key stakeholders on the value of investing in nutrition, increasing agricultural diversity, and including more nutrition-based indicators in programme monitoring and evaluation.

8 THAILAND

As Thailand continues to work to eliminate undernutrition while also stepping up interventions to address the increasing rates of overweight and obesity, it is critical for the country to continue to build capacity at all levels of the process. Additionally, further inter-sectoral coordination would be of great benefit. The current plans and strategies are nutrition-sensitive, but effective implementation and assessment are critical to addressing the double burden of malnutrition in Thailand.

KEY MESSAGES OF THE COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

- Food and agriculture policies and programmes have a major role to play in improving a country's nutritional outcomes.
- Many of the case studies demonstrated increased awareness of the multi-sectoral nature of nutrition and political will to address the problems of undernutrition and overweight and obesity.
- Many of the policies analyzed, incorporated nutrition objectives and indicators to measure progress, targeted the vulnerable and women, and focused on diversified food production; some did not emphasize interventions to improve processing, storage, marketing and utilization of foods; yet very few countries have assessed the impact of their policies on nutrition outcomes.
- Major policies often include nutrition objectives, but there is a tendency to prioritize explicit sector priorities within ministries at the expense of nutrition.
- Developing increased nutrition-focused human resources capacity is a critical component of implementing multi-sectoral approaches to achieving food and nutrition security.
- Robust monitoring and evaluation, and innovative monitoring tools are essential to understanding the impact and effectiveness of nutrition-focused policies and programmes.
- The rising levels of overweight and obesity, which often exist alongside undernutrition, are a challenge that must be addressed moving forward.

More information on the *Nutrition Sensitivity of Agriculture and Food Policies Case Studies*, the full reports of the individual country case studies, the synthesis report (En/Fr) and an executive summary (En/Fr) can be found on the UNSCN website:

http://www.unscn.org/en/publications/country_case_studies



UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM STANDING COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION

The United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) is the food and nutrition policy harmonization forum of the United Nations. Its vision is a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where there are no longer impediments to human development.

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