



The Role of Agriculture in Nutrition Security

Scaling Up Nutrition Senior Level Meeting

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Summary of ways agriculture can improve nutrition security



Focus on:

- smallholder farmers as a way to increase their incomes as the best and often only option to escape poverty
- food quantity (cals) as well as on quality (variety, diversity, nutrient content and safety) of food
- producing a surplus to feed the food industry, adding value and increasing widespread employment
- targeting improved technologies and R+D on small farmers
- closing the “nutrition gap”, safeguarding nutrition content of foods all along the food chain to reduce nutrient losses, and reduce food losses and food waste
- provide social protection for the landless poor and others unable to benefit from development – twin track approach

FAO's mandate and comparative advantage in nutrition



- “ . . . to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy”
- Looks at nutrition from the perspective of food and agriculture as the sustainable solution to hunger and malnutrition
 - Ensures that agricultural development has a people focus that leads to improved availability, access to and consumption of food for better nutrition

“Food and Nutrition Security”



Embed nutrition into food security – “food and nutrition security”

because:

- ‘food security’ and ‘nutrition security’ are not the same thing
- adding nutrition emphasises nutrition is the ultimate goal
- ensures nutrition is not lost or forgotten by food economists
- not just calories but also food quality and dietary diversity
- considers both under and over nutrition
- unless we improve nutrition security, ending hunger and raising levels of nutrition will not be automatic

Central role of agriculture for improving Nutrition



Agriculture has 3 purposes:

- producing food for direct consumption
- generating income, employment and livelihoods as well as producing primary products for food processing industries
- safeguarding the natural resource base

High level of dependency of many of the worlds poor and nutritionally vulnerable on agriculture – this sector offers the greatest potential for achieving sustained improvements in the nutritional status of the rural poor

Nutrition-enhancing and food-based approaches (1)



FAO advocates for *nutrition-enhancing* food and agriculture-based approaches as the sustainable strategy for improving the nutritional status of populations

Multiple social, economic and health benefits

Year-round access to and availability and consumption of nutritionally adequate amounts and varieties of foods

Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food-based approaches (2)



Consumption is key → importance of a nutritionally adequate diet

Not only energy, protein and fats but also micronutrients (vitamins, minerals and other trace elements) necessary for normal growth and development

Narrowing the “nutrition gap”

the gap between what foods are available and what foods are needed for a healthy diet



- Poor diets low in quantity, quality and variety lead to hunger and undernutrition

Increase production of staple foods – Yes but at the same time...

- Ensure production, local availability and access of the right mix of foods (dietary diversity) in all seasons
- Provide nutrition education and dietary counselling to build knowledge and skills to optimise children’s diets
- Collaborate with social protection programmes to reach the poorest



International Symposium – selected findings

- Food and agricultural-based initiatives for improving nutrition have been systematically neglected and underfunded
- Food and agriculture is the foundation for nutrition and health
- Agriculture consists of a broad field of activities concerned with the production, processing, storage, distribution and marketing of food and other commodities, along with related social, economic and environmental concerns
- The multi-functionality of agriculture results in multiple nutritional benefits as the nutritional benefits of agricultural and food-based interventions arise from more than just the nutrient content of the foods consumed
- **Nutrition is a key link between agriculture, socio-economic development, food security and health**

International Symposium – selected findings



Make household a viable social and economic unit able to meet the needs of all family members

Better dietary intakes and positive nutritional outcomes need better targeted, designed, implemented and evaluated policies, strategies, plans and programmes

FBAAs address malnutrition at its source and have further social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits

Local bottom-up solutions are more likely to lead to long-term sustainable improvements in nutrition

Unless the basic and underlying causes of poverty, malnutrition, FS, and poor health and sanitation are tackled, success in reducing hunger and all forms of malnutrition will likely not be achieved

Better designed, implemented and evaluated nutrition-sensitive FS and agricultural policies, strategies, plans and programmes, have great potential to alleviate poverty, hunger and improve the food and nutrition situation in both urban and rural settings

Women as primary caregivers and producers and processors of food are central in improving household FNS

Need an engaged political process and enhanced governance mechanisms and institutional frameworks

International Symposium - Recommendations



- Public health interventions such as breastfeeding, supplements and fortified foods, should not neglect food and agriculture
- Improve nutritional quality, diversity and safety of food, not just quantity (energy)
- **Improve consumption and utilization by the poor of adequate quantities of good quality and safe food for a nutritionally adequate diet, not just on increasing production, raising incomes and improving access;**
- Nutrition education, behaviour change and communication strategies important considering the evidence that agricultural improvements alone do not necessarily lead to improvements in diets.
- **Identifying best practices to improve nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture based approaches on a large scale and translate this knowledge into operational capacities within households, communities and governments, including policy guidance**
- Increased production, access to and consumption of an adequate quantity, quality and variety of food by the vulnerable and food-insecure

International Symposium - Recommendations



- Create the policy, institutional, social and physical environments that are conducive to ensuring access by all people to nutritionally adequate diets
- Invest in crop and dietary diversity to narrow the “nutrition gap”, the gap between what foods are grown and available and what foods are needed for a healthy diet.
- Biofortification providing micronutrient-rich plants is a feasible means of reaching malnourished populations in relatively remote rural areas with limited access to commercially marketed fortified foods, requiring a one-time investment in plant breeding with no further financial outlays
- Incorporating nutrition-sensitive, agriculture and FBAs into nutrition improvement policies and programmes
- More effective articulation of nutrition objectives, concerns and considerations and their better integration into the design and implementation of FS, agriculture and other sector development policies and initiatives to ensure they are i) not detrimental to nutrition and that ii) potential opportunities to improve nutrition are identified and fully utilized
- **Technical support for the collection and analysis of evidence of the effectiveness and impact agriculture and FS interventions have for improving nutrition as defined by access to improved dietary diversity, nutritional intakes and reductions in child undernutrition**
- **Document the impact food and improved diets have on human health, growth and mental development to show how agriculture-based interventions can improve nutrition outcomes. This is essential to increase the visibility of agriculture on national and international nutrition agendas;**

Investment options for improving dietary diversity



- promote production of animal sourced foods for improving diets and nutrition
- diversify production of vegetables and fruits with micro-nutrient rich varieties
- invest in sustainable forests and pasture management
- protect biodiversity to protect the quality of diets
- select crops based on nutritional content in addition to yields and market value
- R&D programmes to breed plants and livestock that enhance nutritional quality
- increase availability and access to fertilizers
- reduce post-harvest losses via improved handling, preservation, storage, preparation and processing techniques
- train extension staff and households in basic nutrition and food preparation skills to ensure that food security is translated into nutrition security

Improving food and nutrition security: policy response



- Technical assistance in refining/developing nutrition policies, strategies, plans of action
- Promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture policies and programmes
- Mainstreaming nutrition in government development plans and programmes
- Capacity building in nutrition, and technical assistance to national and sub-national programme actors

Improving food and nutrition security: operational response



- Nutrition education strategies increase consumption of adequate and diverse diets
- Promote improved family feeding practices and complementary feeding for young children based on locally available foods
- Conduct baseline surveys and nutritional impact assessments of agriculture interventions
- Promote nutrition messages that extension agents can disseminate through agriculture extension services and farmers field schools
- Promote small-scale/home-based food processing and preservation techniques
- Promote/improve water harvesting and irrigation systems
- Develop small-scale agro-enterprises and link small-holder farmers to markets



Lessons from Malawi

Nutrition Education has many entry points:

Agriculture Programmes

- ✓ FFS
- ✓ JFFLS
- ✓ Schools
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Homes

Agriculture Activities

Production diverse & integrated plants & animals in:

- ✓ Gardens
- ✓ Orchards
- ✓ Fields
- ✓ Forests

Post Harvest processing & storage

Home Processing, Preservation, Preparation



Lessons from Malawi

Following the 'SUN' care group model:

- 2 community nutrition facilitators per village (400) trained a lead farmer (agric) and a community health volunteer (health) who trained 15 caregivers (3000) with children 6-18 mo. on how to:
 - optimally use local seasonal foods to improve meals
 - improve hygiene & sanitation
- Nutrition education combined with crop and dietary diversification and good hygiene practices improves nutrition security
- CSOs as implementing partners, inter-sector coordination, documentation of lessons learnt/methodologies used and communication are key for sustainability

Policies which *inadvertently* impact nutrition



- Strengthening the food supply chain – e.g. cold chains, infrastructure, training
- Research and technology for increasing productivity
- Penetration of the food marketing sector
 - increased availability and access to all foods, including high energy low nutrient–dense foods
- Trade liberalization and commodity specific policies – taxes, subsidies, regulation

Policies which aim to impact nutrition



- Promotion of dietary diversity
- Food fortification and bio-fortification
- Changes to the nutrient content of processed foods –
 - Enhancement, fortification, depletion – low fat, fat replacers, sugar substitutes etc.
- Food aid and food assistance

Promoting efficacy



- Ensure that increased purchasing power leads to improved nutrition outcomes
- Ensure that generating employment opportunities for women does no harm
- Address all forms of malnutrition present in target population
- Nutrition education to ensure that nutrition-enhancing policies have the desired effect

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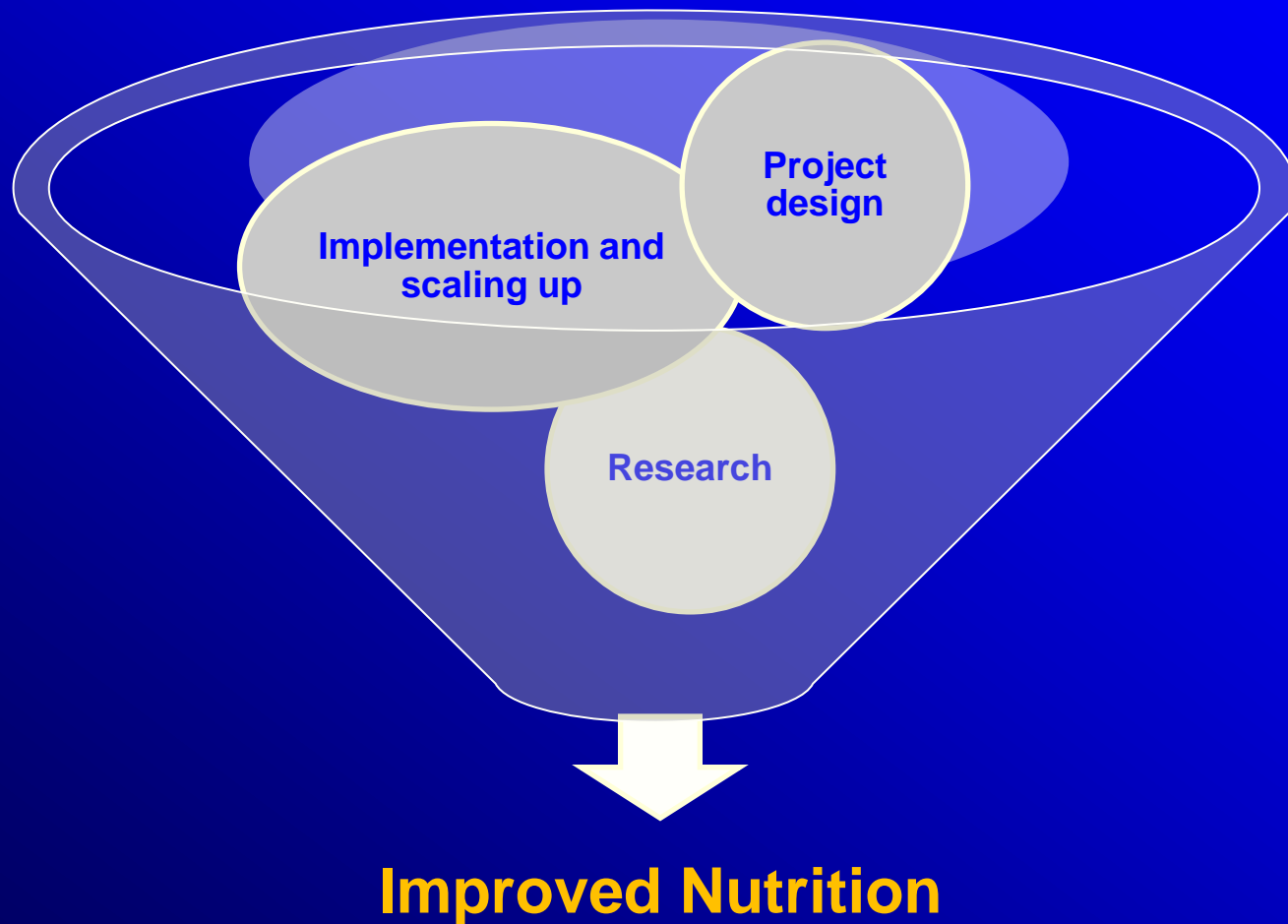


**Identification of “win-wins”
to increase compatibility with
market signals**

**Improved
nutrition**

**Economic demand
Production
possibilities**

Examples of mainstreaming nutrition in agricultural programmes





Next steps

- Raise food and nutrition security higher up the political agenda (ICN2)
- Create an enabling environment and increase investments in smallholder agriculture
- Recognize the vital role of women in agriculture and rural development
- Promote nutrition education and consumer awareness
- Improve the information base and monitoring and accountability mechanisms