

# ROSA Focus

## This Month's Highlight: The way forward for the EC to prioritise nutrition and to develop a nutrition strategy

As a part of the process of reviewing its involvement in the field of nutrition in developing countries<sup>1</sup>, the European Commission organized a seminar - "Enhancing EC's contribution to address maternal and child undernutrition and its causes" - in May 2008. It brought together nutrition experts and EC staff to advise the EC on priorities, strategy and responses to tackle undernutrition. Following the seminar, a **concept paper** has been developed by AIDCO E6, based on a full consultation with stakeholders. It draws on the recommendations of the seminar and that of recent publications such as the Lancet series on nutrition (2008). It is primarily intended for EC staff at headquarter and in delegations. It is also meant to inform other stakeholders in nutrition and contribute to better coordination and complementarities. The concept paper suggests a **way forward for the EC to prioritise nutrition and to develop a strategy/nutrition operational plan**.

This article presents some of the key elements of the draft concept note<sup>2</sup>. It provides an overview of the donor environment in nutrition and related areas and highlights the EC's strengths and comparative advantages. It also suggests next steps: actions for EC internal implementation and activities to be undertaken in partnership/collaboration with others.

<sup>1</sup> The EC has undertaken a similar process on social transfers. The concurrent development of both concept notes facilitated the convergence of the two processes and enables the EC to take advantage of social transfers to reduce undernutrition.

<sup>2</sup> This is still a working paper discussion draft.

### Why EC investment in nutrition?

Although a major player in the fight against undernutrition through indirect interventions, EC is reviewing its involvement in nutrition in order to:

- Capture and maximise the impact of its resources on food security and nutrition and better support progress towards the first MDG target.
- Significantly reduce chronic malnutrition, which has largely been overlooked
- Better coordinate responses to malnutrition during emergencies and post-crisis situations and hence strengthen the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in order to agree on the analysis of the main causes and to properly tackle malnutrition.

### Concerted actions at national and international levels

Given the complex interplay of factors, addressing undernutrition in the long term requires acting concomitantly on several determinants and different levels of causes (immediate, underlying and basic causes).



Generic interventions –**addressing immediate causes and symptoms**– that have proven their effectiveness should be prioritised, e.g. breastfeeding promotion, appropriate complementary feeding or supplementation with vitamin A and zinc. A further reduction of undernutrition prevalence in a sustainable manner is also dependent upon **addressing underlying and basic causes** (e.g. primary health care, education, agriculture, livestock, water programmes, safety-nets), in coherence with existing integrated food security strategies.

The pre-requisites to achieve a substantial and lasting reduction in undernutrition prevalence call for **a set of conditions at country level**: i) political commitment and government leadership; ii) adequate and sustained financial resources; iii) adequate technical, strategic and management capacity; iv) appropriate institutional arrangements, strategic frameworks and coordination mechanisms bringing together the relevant actors; and v) implementation at scale of the right actions and effectively reaching those in need.

The above would be greatly enhanced by a clearer international leadership and a better coordination of the international community in nutrition.

## EU added value within the current donor environment

### Key characteristics of the donor environment

Overall investment in nutrition is characterised by:

- **A questionable prioritisation of available resources both in geographic terms and type of actions funded.** The geographical allocation of resources reflects a variety of agenda rather than a prioritisation of countries with a high burden of undernutrition<sup>3</sup>. Total funding for basic nutrition interventions per annum from 2000 to 2005 did not exceed US\$250-300 million. Over the same period, funding for food aid/food security amounted to US\$1.375 billion while US\$5.7 billion was allocated to HIV/AIDS per annum.
- **An under-funding of basic nutrition.** Relatively few donor governments substantially support basic nutrition. Both the IDS analysis (which estimated the investments made by governments and the EC to tackle stunting) and the Lancet Series 2008 showed that the USA is the largest donor government for basic nutrition followed by the Netherlands, Canada and the UK.

- **Indirect<sup>4</sup> investments too rarely aligned behind nutrition objectives and designed to improve nutritional outcomes.** These investments have the potential to prevent/reduce undernutrition through addressing its underlying and basic causes. However, they seldom have specific and stated nutrition objectives and they are not necessarily designed to maximise nutritional outcomes. Consequently, there is no guarantee that they have an impact on undernutrition and if they do, it is rarely measured.

- **An insufficient investment in supporting strategies.** A World Bank analysis – which did not include the EC – reviewed donors' investment. It concluded that most of the effort in capacity development “*goes into training nutritionists to be better nutritionists rather than in orienting key government staff toward nutrition and building commitment and support for nutrition in ministries of finance and planning*”. Few of the donors reviewed invested in monitoring/evaluation, commitment building and mainstreaming nutrition into PRSPs and sectorwide approaches. This reflects the low level of interest in nutrition and its lack of prioritisation in development agenda.

### EC's positioning, strengths and comparative advantage

The EC could give a higher strategic priority to combating undernutrition overall as it already does in emergency contexts. EC interventions in basic nutrition tend to fall under the remit of the health sector, which is not always a priority area. Current EC's instruments and their procedures restrict the ability to operate on a *contiguum*. Nevertheless, the EC has a **distinctive set of strengths** which it could build on to enhance its contribution to addressing undernutrition and its causes.

The EC is **the source of large resource flows with a high profile in indirect interventions** which have the potential to address underlying causes of undernutrition. Between 2000 and 2004, the EC was the second largest donor for development food aid/food security assistance. According to IDS, the EC ranked first on indirect investments made by governments and the EC. For instance, its investments in research, agriculture, social protection and the more recent allocations to offset world food price rises could have a significant impact on undernutrition.

<sup>3</sup> For example, between 2000 and 2004, emergency food aid went principally to 6 countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, and North Korea, a clearly politicised distribution (Lancet Series 2008).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. support to agriculture, food security, health system, education, governance.

The EC is **involved in both development and humanitarian aid**. The latter – through ECHO - gives a high priority to acute malnutrition. Of DG ECHO's spending in 2008, to date almost €350m went on food and nutrition. In line with previous years, more than €60m were provided for direct support to the prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition, or almost 10% of ECHO's budget. ECHO also supported broader packages of interventions aimed at reducing acute malnutrition through a better understanding of the situation analysis, the reduction of food and livelihood insecurity as well as through a significant support to mitigating measures with support to health, water and sanitation or education of mothers.

The EC has **significant influencing potential**. It has significant country and regional presence. It considers political dialogue as a key dimension of its cooperation. Therefore, it has the potential to exercise political leverage to get undernutrition higher on political and development agenda in aid recipient countries. The EC can influence EU Member States policies to mobilise more support for nutrition within the EU.

The **combination of these strengths** places the EC in a unique position to: i) exercise more leadership in nutrition amongst (poorly coordinated) EU actors with a view to help identifying clear global leadership; ii) increase its contribution to tackle undernutrition, and iii) have a major impact on progress towards MDG 1, 4 and 5.

## EC internal priorities for actions

Seven **priority actions** are identified for EC internal implementation.

**1) More impact on nutrition** can be achieved by **applying a nutrition lens** to existing programmes and adjusting them accordingly: focus on effective interventions, inclusion of nutrition indicators, targeting (e.g. focus on core target from pregnancy to 24 months of age), and integration of nutrition activities with other sectors. The EC should also consider: i) including a nutrition situation analysis in annual Country Technical Papers and ensuring nutrition features in subsequent guidelines and ii) adding nutrition objectives into new calls for proposals and applying a nutrition lens when designing the calls. Countries with a high burden of undernutrition should be priorities.

**2) Under LRRD**, to tackle undernutrition, it is important to overcome the barriers that prevent better cooperation between development and emergency.

**3) Better integration of nutrition in EC's relevant policies and inclusion of nutrition indicators in reporting frameworks** (e.g. underweight as an indicator for MDG1). The use of nutrition indicators to report progress is important within all food security-related interventions, including safety nets and social protection, governance, water and health.

**4) Sensitisation of EC staff** and increasing expertise in public nutrition. Outside of ECHO, nutrition expertise is scarce within the EC. Providing guidance papers (e.g. similar to the "Environmental integration handbook") and sensitising staff across sectors and at all levels could be a first step towards strengthening competence. The development and implementation of a comprehensive nutrition strategy will require more understanding of public nutrition within the EC.

**5) Develop a full strategy/operational plan in time for the revision of the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF**. The EC's actions in nutrition need to be quickly guided by a comprehensive strategy/operational plan. Moreover, this plan will:

- provide the necessary framework to maximise impact on nutrition by aligning resources from relevant areas –such as poverty reduction, agriculture or economic development– behind nutrition objectives;
- provide coherence, structure and incentives to address undernutrition; and,
- ensure nutrition is given a high operational priority within existing food security strategies.

**6) Research priorities to guide the development of the EC nutrition strategy/operational plan**. Conducting a review of EC's direct and indirect nutrition spending will enable the EC to understand what is being spent on nutrition, the impact it has and draw recommendations on how to make future spending more nutrition-friendly. In addition, measuring the effectiveness of different aid mechanisms (e.g. budget support, project aid) to address undernutrition could be linked to a governance agenda, reviewing institutional set up and aid modalities.

**7) Identifying nutrition champions/focal points and institutional arrangements** within the EC bringing together DGDev, ECHO, AIDCO, RELEX and the delegations to implement the strategy.

## Priorities for action in partnership/collaboration with others

1) For the EC to place a greater emphasis/priority on nutrition, it requires **political commitment** at Member States and European parliamentary committee levels.

2) **Support capacity building** in nutrition to enhance the ability of a broad set of actors to address undernutrition and to increase the pool of nutritionists competent in both structural and transitory issues.

3) **Linking nutrition to the governance agenda.** For example, nutrition could be included in the EC political dialogue with aid recipient countries particularly during budget support negotiations.

4) Strengthening a sustained **management of acute malnutrition**, e.g.:

- Promote free access to treatment of severe acute malnutrition as part of a health package
- Support the reform in the management of acute malnutrition with the introduction of the new WHO growth charts
- Support community-based treatment of acute malnutrition
- Encourage synergies between development and emergency actors to ensure adequate prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition

5) Promote **better integration of nutrition at country level in development agenda, national poverty reduction and relevant sector plans<sup>5</sup>**. The EC could play a role in revitalising political dialogue on nutrition and putting nutrition on the agenda of central and decentralised governments. For instance, the EC could support further integration of nutrition in PRSPs and food security strategies. Additionally, nutrition should be integrated in the EC 4-years Country Strategy Papers and EDF negotiations.

6) Consider **pilot countries** initially to test a comprehensive approach. The following criteria should be considered to select countries: willingness of the EC delegation to engage in the pilot, countries with a high burden of undernutrition, and presence of partners willing to embark on such a process and with the political will.

7) **Foster a better coordination of the international community.** The EC could foster greater leadership and coordination within the international community through supporting the Standing Committee on Nutrition. Greater coordination and cooperation with other donors is needed to ensure a fairer aid allocation that covers the spectrum of actions required to address undernutrition and its causes. For instance, the EC could build on and co-finance initiatives with other donors including EU Member States, the World Bank or the Gates Foundation.

8) **Positioning the EC strategically within the donor environment**, to help ensure **increased investment for nutrition**, more harmonised and fairer allocation of resources. The EC should consider addressing some of the shortfalls in international funding for nutrition. Some of the options are: i) increasing investment in basic nutrition for actions that have proven to be effective; ii) additional investments to ensure actions reach target groups; and iii) increasing investment in countries with a high burden of undernutrition.

Aware of the need to improve its response, and adapt to the present challenges, the EC has undertaken a process that should contribute to develop a strategy/operational plan. The scope of the future strategy could encompass both treatment and prevention malnutrition, tackling its causes, within a broader food security framework.

**This article is based on the draft concept note developed by the EC under the leadership of the AIDCO unit E6.**

<sup>5</sup> In the light of the Paris Declaration and its key principle of ownership, the sensitisation of recipient countries on the nutrition agenda will be increasingly important to ensure ultimate support.

# Current food security situation

West Africa –  
Mali

## Relative availability of food

Cereal production has increased considerably over the last fifteen years, proportionally to the increase in demand from the growing population<sup>6</sup>. Thanks to several successive good harvests, Mali has even been able to export cereals regularly to other countries in the sub-region.

Food availability at the country level has improved markedly. However, outside the irrigated areas, increased production is mainly due to greater acreage given over to growing cereals, and yield is improving very little<sup>7</sup>. Added to this are structural limitations affecting agricultural sector. These include i) vulnerability to climatic events; ii) inadequate infrastructures for production, processing and storing of agricultural products; iii) poor organisation among farmers; iv) lack of dialogue and coordination between the different actors of agricultural value chains.

Great inequalities exist within and between regions. Major farming regions like the cotton zone and the Niger Office zone have a surplus of cereals and better access to food. Nevertheless, some areas which have a surplus cereal balance are, paradoxically, among the worst hit by acute and chronic undernutrition (cf. below).

By contrast, the northern half of the country is a region that traditionally suffers from food insecurity (cf. Box 1). In these structurally deficient areas, food problems are recurrent because of the low cereal production and their isolated situation.

### Box 1: Food and nutrition in the north of Mali

The main problems that have a structural effect on food and nutrition security in northern Mali are: food availability and accessibility (low-yield production, management of resources in pastoral areas, market dependency, etc.) poor access to and poor use of basic services.

Moreover, northern Mali is particularly affected by cyclical shocks. Existing production systems are very dependent on rainfall and/or the water level of the river Niger.

<sup>6</sup> Since the early 2000s, the crisis in the international cotton price has led many producers to grow cereals instead of cotton, but using the integrated organisation of the cotton sector for procurement of agricultural inputs and funding the growing season. (Oxfam-Save the Children, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Oxfam-Save the Children, The impact of rising prices on the food situation in Sahel countries, 2008.

Anthropic risks from the deterioration of the political situation internally and in neighbouring countries are also very prevalent. These conflicts can affect the arrival of food. People from the north of the Kidal region are the most vulnerable, because they produce no cereals, and so are almost totally dependent on external sources for their basic food.

In these areas, it is important to improve the structural situation, but this will only work if it is linked with work **preparing people, communities and institutions to anticipate and deal with the crises.**

*Source: Action contre la Faim, "Mieux comprendre pour mieux répondre" (Better understanding for better response), August 2007*

## Deterioration in child nutrition

According to the preliminary results of the Demographic and Health Survey carried out in 2006 (EDSM-IV), 34% of children under 5 suffer from chronic undernutrition and 13% from acute undernutrition. These levels are even higher in certain age groups. The prevalence of chronic undernutrition is 51.5% in children aged 18-23 months, and the prevalence of acute undernutrition is 26 to 27% in children aged 9-11 and 12-17 months. This situation is very worrying. The results of the main surveys (cf. Table 1) make it difficult to reach any significant conclusion on the trend in the nutrition situation. However, it is possible to see that it deteriorated structurally between 1987 and 2006<sup>8</sup>.

**Table 1: Trend in the state of nutrition of children from 0 to 59 months**

Year	Size-for-age (%<-2SD)	Weight-for-height (%<-2SD)	weight-for-age (%<-2SD)	Source
1987	24.4	11	31	EDSMI
1989	27.1	17.7	42.9	EBC
1996	32.8	24.5	43.3	EDSMII
2001	38.2	10.6	33.2	EDSMIII
2006	33.9	13.3	31.7	EDSMIV-interim

Source: IRD/CILSS, 2006, EDSM IV (preliminary results)

<sup>8</sup> SWAC-CILSS, Food security profile, Mali 2008.



This situation varies according to the region. The Sikasso, Timbuktu, Mopti, Koulikoro and Ségou regions are particularly affected by chronic undernutrition. Acute undernutrition is also very high in Kidal, at 27%, followed by Gao and Timbuktu (17%), Koulikoro and Sikasso (16%).

Low income, particularly in rural areas, poor access for most people to drinking water and health structures and poor use of health services are some of the reasons for growing levels of undernutrition in Mali. Added to this, diets are poor and nutritional educational and breastfeeding practices need improving.

***Factors depending on the current situation and structural causes are closely interlinked in food insecurity***

In this type of situation of structural vulnerability, phenomena such as drought, locusts, soaring prices, etc. can reduce the adaptability and resilience of vulnerable populations. So the rise in food prices since late 2007 made living conditions even more fragile in structurally vulnerable regions, and also among the urban poor. The current upward price trend (cf. Box 2) may have immediate consequences for these households, which seem to lack micronutrients in their basic diets, even in normal circumstances.

**Box 2: The recent trend in the price of cereals in Mali**

A short explanation for the current rise in prices, despite good harvests, is the high demand for cereals for constituting private, community and public stocks, and for export. Prices remain higher than the mean over the last five years at the same periods. Compared to 2004/05 which was a period of high market tension, the price of millet in January 2009 is 23% higher and the sorghum price is 26% higher.

*Source: Fews Net, December 2008/January 2009*

***Sustainable solutions to food and nutrition insecurity***

Given the analysis of the current situation, it seems essential to set up actions that will improve food security sustainably. This implies acting at two complementary levels: building the capacity of vulnerable households so that they can deal with crises and treating the structural causes of vulnerability.

With this in mind, and to ensure an appropriate response, the EC Delegation in Mali has adopted an innovative structural approach that takes better account of the nutritional aspect of food security programmes, and to develop concerted actions with their main partners.

The EC Delegation is working more closely with ECHO to share a common analysis, and support integrated actions to fight against undernutrition. The two organisations are working together to try to create bridges between DG ECHO's Global Plan for preventing and treating acute malnutrition<sup>9</sup> and structural actions supported by the EC Delegation, particularly through food security support programmes. These programmes give a very clear priority to questions of nutrition<sup>10</sup>.

In response to the increase in food prices, the EC Delegation contributes to other current initiatives. As part of the food facility, the UNICEF will provide a support to mitigate the negative effects of high food prices and reduce acute malnutrition and mortality of the most vulnerable populations<sup>11</sup>. The food facility will include a support to increase agricultural productivity. This project, led by the World Bank, will be focused on agricultural infrastructures, services provided to producers and support to policy dialogue among all stakeholders.

In addition, the World Bank will also work on gaining a perspective on trends in nutrition policies and strategies, for a better understanding of the institutional context and the role of the various entities involved in formulating and implementing these policies.

**This article was written with the help of delegation of the European Commission in Mali.**

<sup>9</sup> The aim of the Sahel Plan is to help reduce acute malnutrition and mortality in the most vulnerable groups in 5 Sahel countries.

<sup>10</sup> The 2008 call for proposals invites NGOs to use the prevalence of acute malnutrition in children from 0 to 2 years as a starting point for understanding and treating the problem of households that are the most exposed to food and nutrition risks.

<sup>11</sup> This work will be focused on : i) supporting the management of acute malnutrition, ii) strengthening capacities for assessment and analysis of nutritional situation, iii) improving feeding practices and iv) enhancing coordination mechanisms on nutrition.

## International news

### Feedback from the High Level Meeting on Food Security

After the FAO Conference in June 2008, the high level meeting "Food Security for All" was held in Madrid on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2009. It gathered a large range of participants from 126 countries (governments, civil society, private sector, representatives of international and regional organisations).

The main aims of this meeting were to i) review progress made since the Rome food crisis meeting, particularly as far as government commitments were concerned; ii) move towards setting up the UN Global Framework for Action, drawn up as a response to soaring food prices and the need to improve the coordination of UN agencies and other key actors, in order to help the countries worst affected by the food crisis; iii) agree on the next priorities for immediate actions, and for rolling out medium and long term measures and results.

In a situation of deteriorating food security and nutrition situation, the participants were particularly worried about the impact that the economic crisis could have on mobilisable resources in the field.

Various propositions were also discussed to determine the best structure to set up to guarantee effective procedures to deal with soaring food prices. The High Level Task Force of the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF) proposed a global partnership that would include UN agencies, governments, NGOs and the private sector. The FAO suggested that more members should be added to the UN Committee on World Food Security. However, no decision was made. It was announced that a broad, inclusive consultation process would be set up to discuss the various possibilities.

### High Level Seminar on Nutrition

The NGO Save the Children is organising a high level seminar on nutrition. It will be held in London on 11<sup>th</sup> February this year. Its main aim is to discuss different viewpoints and produce proposals on i) changes needed to improve the international nutrition architecture in order to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), particularly MDGs 1 and 4; and ii) the most appropriate responses for dealing with rising food prices that will be effective for reducing undernutrition in developing countries.

Some presentations are planned for the early afternoon to start the debates, particularly presentations by the DFID (Department for International Development), the European Commission and the CGD (Centre for Global Development). Francesca Mosca, head of EuropeAid Unit E6 will talk about the role of the European Commission in combating undernutrition and the best way to give priority to nutrition.

*This bulletin was written by the GRET team in charge of animating ROSA (Operational Food Security Network). It is an initiative of AIDCO E6 (thematic support for food security, rural development and environment) in collaboration with AIDCO G4 (Training and Knowledge Management). The viewpoints expressed do not in any case represent the official European Commission viewpoint.*