



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Social Levers

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Title: Working with Community Institutions in Afghanistan and Mauritania

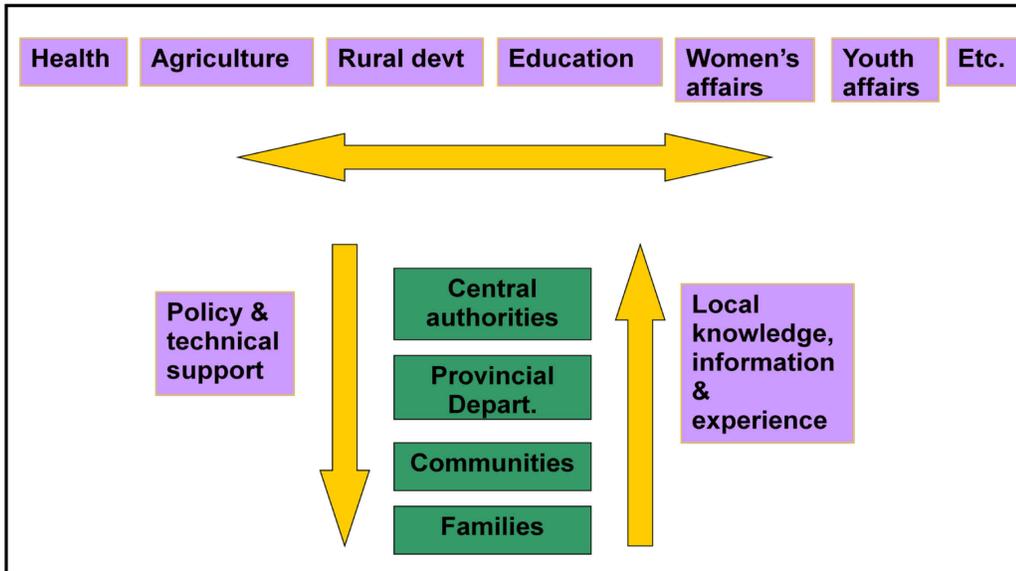
Through this presentation, I will share the experiences of working with different community institutions for strengthening agriculture-nutrition linkages, focusing on the examples of Afghanistan and Mauritania.

The **main messages** of this presentation are:

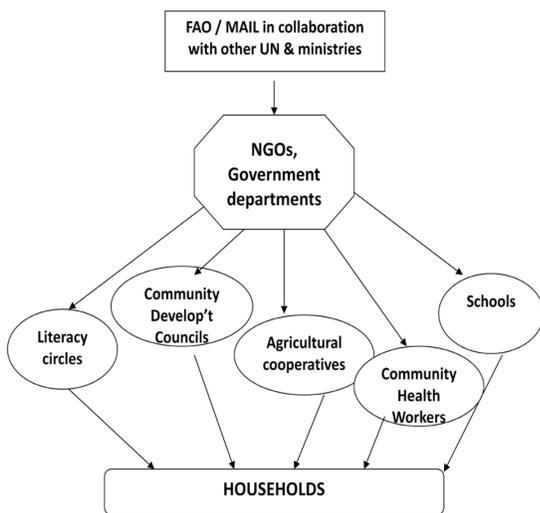
- to emphasize the opportunities we have for strengthening agriculture-nutrition by **working with various community institutions**. (By community institutions we refer to any existing group or structure used by members of a community to organise aspects of its social, economic and/or political life—it can be a school, a women’s group, a literacy circle, a cooperative, etc.)
- When doing so, an essential success factor entails **developing synergies** between these institutions.
- This requires establishing a **common language, a common understanding of the nutrition situation, and mechanisms for bringing people together**.
- This approach has implications for the type of skills and capacities that need to be developed at various levels for promoting nutrition. In addition to a basic understanding of nutrition, skills are needed in **facilitation, joint planning, and coordination**.
- Community-level work, if associated with advocacy and capacity-development of government institutions can become a **political lever** for mainstreaming nutrition in agriculture and other sectors

“Supporting Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods in Afghanistan”

This German-funded FAO project was designed to mainstream nutrition in agriculture and food security policies and programmes and promotes food-based approaches to nutrition. This entailed working across all key sectors related to food and nutrition security. It did so by combining advocacy and policy support, sensitization and capacity development of government institutions at central and provincial levels, and providing technical assistance to field level workers (government or NGOs) (see graph below).



At provincial level, the project started by gathering staff from various government departments (health, agriculture, rural development, education) and NGOs and facilitating the preparation of malnutrition problem and solutions trees for vulnerable livelihoods groups. This ensured all partners had a common understanding and vision of the situation. Based on the joint analysis, the project team then worked with partners to integrate various nutrition interventions (nutrition education, improved complementary feeding recipes, home-based food processing, home gardens, school gardens) in ongoing development programmes, using different channels to do so (see graph below).



Synergies started to operate spontaneously between project components. (Example of synergy between nutrition education in women's literacy circles and school gardens: this combination motivated and enabled children and their mothers to grow more vegetables at home for own consumption). The project activities were also an opportunity to strengthen cooperation between different government departments.

The MDG-F UN Joint Programme on Children, Food Security and Nutrition in Mauritania

This UNJP is implemented by UNICEF, FAO, WFP and WHO in the context of the REACH partnership. It aims to achieve three outcomes: (1) to improve household food security, (2) to strengthen the management of acute malnutrition and improve feeding practices, and (3) strengthen coordination and institutional capacities for

joint action on nutrition. The programme team is developing interesting modalities to strengthen coordination and synergies at decentralised levels. In addition to the establishment of regional steering committees composed of representatives from relevant government departments and NGO partners and UN technical staff, the programme team have established technical groups at district level (composed of the head doctor and technical staff from NGOs and government district offices) and "nutrition kernels" composed of field workers implementing activities at village level (head of agriculture cooperative, heads of nutrition rehabilitation centres, managers of village food stocks...). The purpose is to facilitate joint targeting, ensure appropriate referral of families between the different services, and to create a team in which members can mutually support each other in addressing malnutrition at the local level.

Conclusion

Working through different community institutions simultaneously makes sense *technically* (households where malnutrition occurs need different types of support) and *socially*: it generates a supportive environment that can empower communities and households to better address malnutrition with the resources they have. The power of nutrition is that everybody can feel personally concerned because everybody eats, and everybody is concerned about their health. Nutrition interventions can be a lever for joint social action and for promoting resilient local food systems. When associated with advocacy and capacity development of government institutions, the social levers can become political levers for mainstreaming nutrition in national policies and programmes.