



## Speaker Summary Note

**Session:** Africa

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**Title:** Agriculture and Nutrition Policies Coordination in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges

The FAO Status of Food Insecurity (SOFI) 2000 report (FAO, 2000) revealed a dramatic reduction in undernourishment levels in Nigeria, from 44% of the population in 1979–1981, to 16% in 1990–1992 and down to 8% in 1996–1998. Despite these reductions, Nigeria has been far less successful in combating its high level of malnutrition. IFPRI (2001) warns that “unless more aggressive measures are taken, progress against child malnutrition is likely to slow down.” Malnutrition levels in Nigeria have not changed over the past decade.

The National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS 2008) in Nigeria revealed poor nutritional indices, including high rates of stunting, wasting and under-weight, especially among the under-5 children despite annual increase in food production in the country. The gap between food production and nutritional status of the vulnerable groups (women, under-5 children, and the aged) has remained unabridged in the last decade. This is an indication that meeting adequate nutritional requirements of the populace is beyond food production ability.

The causes of malnutrition are many and complex and have been classified according to the UNICEF framework into three broad categories, which include basic causes (resources control, human, economic and organizational, political and ideological superstructures); underlying causes (insufficient household food security, inadequate maternal and childcare and insufficient health services and unhealthy environment) and immediate causes (inadequate dietary intake and diseases). This conceptual framework shows that the basic causes of malnutrition are crucial to the formulation, execution and proper coordination of nutrition- and health-related programmes for successful outcomes. They play a vital role in terms of policy development. Policies, as guided statements by stakeholders, are necessary for appropriate coordination of programmes.

In Nigeria, there have been several sectoral policies and programmes in Agriculture and Nutrition to address the problem of malnutrition. Implementation has however remained uncoordinated and limited in scope and thus has not achieved the much desired goal. Policies on Agriculture are devoid of information regarding nutrition and health and the Food and Nutrition policy, which was developed by nutrition professionals, contains few elements of Agriculture. The void created by the poor integration of Agriculture and Nutrition policies is now drawing attention from organized stakeholders in Nigeria. Along this line a conference on how to link Agriculture with Nutrition was held in December 2010, in Abuja, Nigeria by the Nigerian Academy of Science. The conference was the first time professionals in the two fields would come together to deliberate on how to improve the nutrition of women and children by closely working together.

The conference highlighted the need for collaboration between the two fields for improved outcome, especially in terms of nutritional status. The meeting ended with a communiqué calling for the establishment of a

coordinating body for all nutrition programmes at the national level and the involvement of all crucial stakeholders in nutrition.

It is becoming obvious now than ever before that Agriculture and Nutrition policies cannot work in isolation since neither can achieve its set goals successfully without consideration for some areas of overlap. Opportunities to integrate Agriculture and Nutrition policies exist. Creating a platform for those in charge of the two areas to work together will be an opportunity for synergy. It is equally possible to reconsider the curricula of higher institutions running Agriculture and Nutrition programmes with a view to updating such to ensure that both disciplines have some courses in common that will make the students understand the strong interconnectedness between the two fields.

The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), which is a government poverty reduction body has recognized nutrition as one of the bedrocks of national development and therefore will support any policy development on linking Agriculture and Nutrition. Another opportunity through which Agricultural and Nutrition could be linked is through macro-economic policies which can utilize nutritional status as one of the indices of national development. This will have a reverberating effect through the incorporation of food production technologies including biotechnology to improve nutrient quality of agricultural staple foods.

As much as there are opportunities, there are also challenges of working with the two separate policies to achieve one goal of promoting national development. One major challenge is how to make the professionals in the two fields work together to achieve this common goal without subjugating one another. Another challenge is the source of funding to organize professionals from the two fields to develop a joint-policy that will reflect the need for Agriculture and Nutrition experts to work together for the common good. Presently, the link between Agriculture and Nutrition is very weak and much effort will be required to bring the experts in the two fields together at the initial stage. Agriculture has been receiving more attention over the years through budgetary allocation but Nutrition has been mainly donor driven.

Development of a joint Agriculture and Nutrition policy document will provide the roadmap that will reveal how the two fields can work closely together to reduce the level of malnutrition in the country. It will also create institutional capacity strengthening for young professionals in the two fields. Success along this line will provide a more cost effective means of reducing the burden of malnutrition and improving health.