



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Africa

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Title: **Regional Initiative in West Africa:
Optimizing the biodiversity to improve food and nutrition security**

INTRODUCTION

The 15 ECOWAS countries in West Africa as well as several others in the Sahel are facing the Double Burden of malnutrition. Undernutrition rates are some of the highest in the world with child stunting rates of one-third to one-half (except Ghana at 22%), yet overweight and obesity are emerging as well.

The 2009 Report of IDF estimates has shown that by 2030, without adequate interventions diabetes will increase up to 30% in Low and Middle Income countries, and incidence of other chronic diseases are still rising in the West Africa sub-region.

Food Insecurity is a chronic problem related to high poverty rates. We have a lot of food insecurity even before we experience food crises. Then we frequently have several kinds of acute food insecurity (on top of chronic) due to the 3-month hunger season that occurs every year before the harvests and due to “crises” of weather limiting crop yields or crises of political instability in the countries.

This year local crop yields were almost adequate except floods in Nigeria and Benin, but we are watching the global prices rise again, as they did in 2007–2008. This was highlighted at the 26th meeting of the Network for the Prevention and management of food crisis (Accra, December 2010). In West Africa one of our main staple foods is rice, and much of it is imported.

Food insecurity which typically affected just the Sahelian countries has become also a common problem in coastal countries.

From different meeting in the sub region we have recognized that:

- Any country provides 10% of the national budget to agriculture
- Agriculture and health/nutrition sectors are working separately (from policy formulation, program implementation, data collection, decision making...)
- Nutrition is not appropriately addressed in Regional Agriculture policies by most of the countries
- Agriculture sector is 70% of our workforce and 60 % of our GDP, the livestock sector can contribute up to 40% of our GDP.

Efforts are encouraged by NEPAD (2008, In the report), but it still a challenge to build strong collaborative pathways between agriculture and health nutrition sectors as discussed in 2008 at the ECOWAS Nutrition Forum (K. Kurz, I. Thiam, *SCN News*, 2010).

In 2005, Niger experienced a food crisis and the Assembly of Health Ministers asked to give more attention to nutrition within the food security issues. It is necessary to ensure food and nutrition security, to take into consideration: Food availability (supply side), Food accessibility (demand side, including prices incomes and purchasing power) and Utilization (food quality through dietary diversity to meet nutritional needs).

INITIATIVES

Multisectoral and multidisciplinary policies and programs are needed to change the current trends of the double burden of malnutrition (I. Thiam, K. Samba, D. Lwanga, *SCN News* 33, 2006).

In addition, to the implementing more fully the health and nutrition programs that already exist in the sub-region, WAHO and a variety of partners are addressing the huge gap around food consumption and dietary quality. Focusing on good dietary quality in addition to just the quantity of staple food available for consumption is the common denominator for reducing rates of under nutrition, overweight and obesity, and improving food security.

Dietary quality means that the full range of nutrients is being consumed, in addition to adequate amounts of energy from the food. Dietary quality is achieved through dietary diversity, for example, vegetables, fruits, secondary staples, and animal-source foods.

In some cases achieving greater dietary diversity will not be expensive for households, as in the promotion of local and traditional foods, like green leafy vegetables that are nutrient-dense but considered low status food. Local fruits and indigenous staple foods may also fall into this category. Animal source foods will be somewhat more expensive, but do not require promotion if household incomes rise due to consumption preference.

Since poverty is such a limiting factor in household's food consumption, our partnership brings together organization of smallholder farmers, as well as agriculture and health-nutrition policymakers and specialists. Smallholder farmers can produce and supply markets with the local foods that are being promoted for greater dietary diversity of consumers. At the same time, they will be promoting and preserving the biodiversity of local and traditional foods.

Coordination and Harmonization, Partnership and Advocacy

Following the food and nutrition crisis in Niger in 2005 and the mandate from the health ministers to improve the food situation in the sub-region, from 2006 to 2008, WAHO and CILSS in collaboration with a variety of international and regional partners, as well as the agricultural and nutrition officers in each of the countries, identified a set of nutrition indicators to be integrated into the Early Warning System of the Sahelian and ECOWAS countries.

Since 2007, our approach has broadened to promote dietary diversity. We focus on the promotion of the supply of a more diverse set of foods—agricultural production and marketing as a part of food systems that supply a full set of nutrients—and of the demand for the diverse set of foods—improved policies, nutrition education, public awareness, and advocacy.

The partnership is among WAHO, Bioversity International, FAO, The Commission of Agriculture of the ECOWAS Parliament, and the Network of Food Producers of West Africa (more than 1,500 community-based associations of food producers affiliated to ROPPA, Civil Society).

A major technical constraint that we are addressing first is that we do not always know the food composition of the local and traditional foods, thus we don't know which is promote for agricultural production and food consumption. And so we are compiling existing country information into a West

Africa food composition data base, and identifying the foods for which nutrient composition will need to be analyzed. Other important first steps are advocacy for policies conducive to diet diversity at the regional and national levels and raising public awareness about food and nutrition. Throughout is an emphasis on building the capacities we need to implement this throughout the sub-region (Abuja, Action Plan 2010)

In September 2011, The first Regional Local Food Composition table was finalized and disseminated at the 11th ENF, through a partnership WAHO, FAO, Bioversity International, INFOODS. This table is currently being updated with the data of Mali and The Gambia. WAHO has secured resources also to organize every year an experts meeting for the review of the table, and also to provide means for research institutions to improve the table as well.

Partnership was broadening progressively:

FAO, Bioversity, FAO were the basic leaders, others partners involved: CILSS, ADB, International NGOs and Associations (ENDA, AMLD, HKI...), Research (Universities, private sector), ROPPA, USAID/West Africa, Africa 2010/USAID, IFPRI (2007 meeting), ECOWAS Commission, ECOWAS Parliament, The IBD (starts). The Network for the Prevention of Food Crisis in Sahel and West Africa.

CONSTRAINTS

- Globalization in very negative for the regional market
- Demographic growth
- Poverty in urban and rural areas
- Climate changes issues: floods and drought
- These aspects have been discussed in 2008, at the 10th ECOWAS Forum (F. Egal, I. Thiam, M. Cohen. *SCN News* 38, 2010).
- Low resources for Agriculture and not articulated policies for the integration of food and Nutrition at Regional and at country level
- Coordination among partners (recommendation ENF, 2008)
- Governance (Hidden agenda)

CHALLENGES

- WAHO to secure resources to push the agenda (biodiversity, food and nutrition security)
- Strengthen and broaden partnership
- Mobilize additional resources for the implementation of the Abuja Action with the CBO of ROPPA, research institutions... (No partner is funding our initiative)
- Food and Nutrition security need a multisectoral collaboration especially
- Health and nutrition
- Agriculture
- Education
- Private sector (Food Industry)
- Research
- Civil Society

The need for collaborative partnership is increasingly being recognized in West Africa where, during the past four years, a strong regional collaborative, multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral is being strengthening. The overarching objective of this initiative is to ensure, through its activities, the effective promotion of use of local food resources from West Africa's traditional food systems in households, and in strategies and interventions against food insecurity, micronutrient deficiencies and diet related chronic diseases.