



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Latin America and the Caribbean

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Title: Building Capacity on Food and Nutrition Security: The Experiences of Central America and the Dominican Republic

Malnutrition, including macro and micronutrient deficiencies, and the growing prevalence of non communicable chronic diseases remain as public health problems in Central America and the Dominican Republic, with resulting implications for individual well-being and the sustainable growth and development of the countries of the region.

Multi-sectoral policies at the regional and national level

At the regional level and in the framework of the Central American Integration System, SICA initiatives, strategies and policies have been adopted with the participation of different sectors, including health, agriculture, education, and environment. In 2008 at the Presidential Summit of Central America and the Dominican Republic, the Regional Health and Agro Environmental Strategy was approved as a result of a participatory process lead by the Council of Ministers of Health, Agriculture, and Environment of the eight participating countries. In this process and that of other regional initiatives the results of the evidence generated at INCAP in five decades of research on high impact nutritional interventions primarily targeting pregnant women and children under two years of age was used to develop regional, national, and local plans of action. This evidence was also used as a reference in the policy brief: "Scaling up Nutrition: a Framework for Action" prepared with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Japan, UNICEF, and the World Bank.

At the country level, the coordination of activities related to food and nutrition security are under the responsibility of the National Authority of Food and Nutrition Security which has a mandate to coordinate the participation of various sectors, including health, agriculture, environment, economy, and planning.

The technical cooperation and assistance activities that INCAP undertakes in the eight member countries, (Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama and the Dominican Republic) includes support for the formulation, implementation, and strengthening of national programs and multisectoral (health, agriculture, social protection, education and the private sector) and interdisciplinary National Commissions to reduce chronic malnutrition. Within this multisectoral approach specific pro-nutrition actions have been taken in the countries of the region accelerating actions on determinants of undernutrition like inadequate income and agricultural production. For example, in Guatemala a public private partnership led by the Association of Exporters in close coordination with the Ministries of Agriculture, Economy, Health and Social Assistance, Education, and the support of INCAP, provides

technical assistance to organized groups of small holder agriculture in the rural areas of the country as a strategy for poverty reduction, focusing actions in those municipalities where the prevalence of chronic malnutrition is over 45%. At present, more than one hundred groups of producers have strengthened their capacities for international certification in good agricultural practices with a real possibility of assuring markets and income for their families. DANIDA, FIDA, and USAID through the Fund for Competitiveness have sponsored this initiative. This program includes a component on health and nutrition for the reduction of chronic malnutrition in the families that integrate each of these collective producer associations. The direct nutritional interventions of this program include exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of age; complementary feeding for infants after the age of six months; improved hygiene practices including hand washing; access for families to health services including maternal and child programs, micronutrient supplementation including vitamin A, therapeutic zinc supplements for diarrhea management, iron and folic acid supplements for pregnant women to prevent and treat anemia, use of multiple micronutrient powders, consumption of fortified products (iron and iodine), and assistance of girls to the formal education system.

Some of the accomplishments include: access to health services by women and children under two years of age; introduction of food and nutrition security in the school curricula of the participating departments; nutritional interventions incorporated into smallholder agriculture, including the production and consumption of fruits and vegetables; identification of indicators for undernutrition for monitoring progress and judging overall progress in the agricultural sector; and improving women's access to income for enhancing household food supplies.

This initial effort can potentially highlight effective approaches and show what works and what does not. It is important to examine how successes can be adapted and scaled up, taking into consideration the lessons learned.

The main challenges:

- Governance and continued political commitment
- Impact assessment indicators for monitoring success
- Provision of substantially scaled up domestic and external assistance for the country owned nutrition programs and capacity
- Adaptation of this experience in other countries of the region

References

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