



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Transforming Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health Linkages

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- The linkage between Agriculture, Nutrition and Health is taken for granted and not much is done to ensure it is real.
- Productive activities in agriculture are critical to ensure availability of adequate food stocks, locally, nationally and globally.
- Shortfalls in production constitute the principal reason for inadequate food intake by the poor, especially for subsistence farm families who have to produce most if not all of the food they consume. Nowhere is this more critical than in Africa where some 70 percent of the population is directly dependent on agriculture for food and incomes.
- Low productivity in agriculture, particularly smallholder agriculture, is the main reason for record levels of food prices that are being reported globally. The world is bracing itself for a new food crisis that is likely to be catastrophic. Indeed the political turmoil experienced by several developing countries over the last month or two has been fueled partly by hardships imposed by the record food prices. Inflation is being fueled by high food prices and economic gains are being compromised.
- Farmers need to be supported to have access to the inputs they need to ensure high and sustainable production of quality food commodities. They need improved storage to reduce the unacceptably high levels of post-harvest losses and secure access to markets. Appropriate and affordable financial products need to be developed for farmers, especially smallholders and more so women farmers, for whom increased productivity is a sure route out of poverty. This support is needed even more in the face of climate change.
- Inadequate consumption and the consumption of inappropriate foods are responsible for the unacceptably high rates of malnutrition in the world. Although globally malnutrition has declined significantly over the last three decades, it is still very high in Sub-Saharan Africa with some 30% of the population and nearly 40% Africa's children malnourished.
- The high rate of malnutrition in rural Africa where 70% of the population is engaged in agriculture is clear evidence that productivity and production levels are low. This is compounded by the high levels of post-harvest losses.
- High rates of under nutrition sap the energies of farmers and expose them and the rest of the population to increased health risks that reduce their capacity to work their farms thus impacting negatively on production.

- Consumption of high volumes of nutritionally unbalanced foods has also resulted in high levels of malnutrition.
- In view of the fact that most rural populations especially smallholder farmers depend on own production for most of their food makes it necessary to breed for improved nutritional quality in the crops consumed by them and the urban poor, for example orange flesh sweet potato, high protein maize, and crop varieties with high levels of essential minerals and vitamins. Crops mostly grown by women farmers should be a priority.
- Intercropping of grain legumes and cereal crops and mixed farming of crops and livestock afford poor rural farmers opportunities for balanced diets.
- AGRA is working all along the agriculture value chain to improve productivity, production, market access and access to credit by smallholder farmers. Risk reduction in the face of climate change is a high priority.
- Unfortunately policy and programmatic actions at national, regional and global levels are segmented and uncoordinated. They do not build on the strong linkages that should exist between agriculture, nutrition and health.
- This problem has been recognized and several resolutions have been adopted at international conferences calling for the establishment of national commissions on nutrition that will bring about closer linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health but few countries have functional and effective nutrition commissions. Nutrition, the bridge between agriculture and health continues to be an orphan. It need not be so.
- Given the considerable benefits that would accrue from more coordinated actions in the fields of agriculture, nutrition and health, it is recommended that national nutrition commissions be established and that they are provided adequate support at national, regional and international levels.
- Among key objectives of national nutrition commissions should be nutrition education especially for women of child bearing age. This is critical to break the mother to child transmission of low birth weight that increases infant mortality rates in addition to higher maternal mortality rates.
- Ministries of Agriculture should be transformed to Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security that promote production of nutritious food commodities and their safe handling through the marketing system to the consumer. Ministries of Health should be explicitly charged with nutrition responsibilities, mostly clinical. Such explicit mandates will enhance the coordination/clearing house roles of national nutrition commissions.
- Advantage should be taken of the education system to introduce notions of the linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health to young children. A concerted educational effort will yield considerable benefits. Community change agents should be trained and deployed to increase awareness, demonstrate the use of available commodities for nutritious meals and change mind-sets.
- To be effective, national nutrition commissions should report to the office of the President or Prime Minister.
- Governments have a responsibility to ensure that their poor citizens have access to adequate nutritious food for healthy lives. Efforts should be made to set up nutrition support schemes and safety-nets that provide access to adequate food and in ways that improve capacity to be self-supporting.
- School feeding programs are but one example of such actions that promote food production, consumption and the establishment of stable markets. Other forms of institutional feeding and social transfer programs can contribute to strengthening the linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health.