

Concept Note:

Regional Workshop on linkages between nutrition and food security

“Maximizing the Nutritional Benefits of Food Security interventions in West Africa”

D a t e s : 24-27 May 2011, 3 ½ days

L a n g u a g e s : French and English

Rationale

FAO estimates that globally 925 million people are undernourished in 2010 worldwide. Most of the world’s hungry live in developing countries, where they account for 16 percent of the population. The proportion of undernourished people remains highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, at 30 percent in 2010.

The food and nutrition problem in West Africa is significant: since 1990, of the 14 West African countries surveyed by the FAO in the *State of World Food Insecurity 2010*, only 4 countries (Ghana, Mali, Niger and Nigeria) have reduced levels of hunger, while 4 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Sierra Leone) have not experienced any reduction in hunger in absolute numbers of malnourished people, and 6 countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal and Togo) have experienced slight to dramatic increases in hunger. The West Africa region is also challenged by some of the highest infant mortality and malnutrition rates in the world, where malnutrition is the underlying cause of up to 56% of mortality among under-fives. Malnutrition is also highly associated with other morbidities and it ultimately impacts the social and economic development of countries in the region, and 14 of the 30 countries with the highest under-five mortality rates in the world are located in Western Africa.

The lack of progress in reducing hunger in West Africa is a critical issue that needs special attention. **Without question, the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger in the region by 2015 cannot be realized if policy and action do not progress quickly.**

Within the framework of MDG-1, the battle to protect and improve people’s nutritional status (and in particular of children under five years old) is an essential component of the wider range of efforts aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of populations, especially the most vulnerable groups. Nutrition is a key area in which no stakeholder can, alone, achieve significant progress.

Fighting against malnutrition is not just a matter of public health. Addressing these problems will require solutions that capitalize on evidence-based approaches to be developed at the intersection of the agriculture, health and social protection. Much has been learned in recent years about how the three sectors are connected, but significant information and knowledge gaps remain. **Many policy makers and practitioners in the agriculture, health, social protection and education sectors continue to work in isolation despite the potentially strong synergies among initiatives to improve nutrition and health through agriculture.** (IFPRI 2020 conference – “The Challenge”)

The basic concept of synergy between agriculture and nutrition is simple: agriculture involves producing food for consumption and/or generating income; good nutrition and health result from adequate health and care practices, including illness prevention and cure, as well as consumption of diverse, safe foods. (*Johnson- Welch et al. 2005*). Nutrition is therefore intrinsically multisectoral, and strategies to improve nutrition outcomes should seek to purposefully include contributions of all relevant disciplines.

Overview

Despite an international dynamic that is supported by favourable policy changes as well as growing international commitment for nutrition, professionals in food security, agriculture, in nutrition and in health still “speak different languages”. Major efforts are still needed to overcome this barrier and to concretely establish the synergistic linkages between food security, agriculture, nutrition, and health.

Research shows that when projects neglect to consider effects on nutrition and food security in the planning stages, they miss an opportunity to improve nutrition and health outcomes for women, children, and other vulnerable populations. (*USAID’s IYCN project – Achieving Nutritional Impact and Food Security through Agriculture*). Nevertheless, agricultural projects rarely measure their effects on improving household food security and nutrition.

Based on the recognized recommendations from recent international and regional forum and conferences¹, and on the basis of recent publications and research², the **Nutrition Working Group for West Africa** is **organizing this workshop to explore concrete ways to link food security and nutrition, for the benefit of Program managers in the field in West Africa.**

This regional workshop aims to give concrete ways to maximize nutritional benefits from food security interventions, by reviewing examples of successful programs and initiatives from throughout the region, while offering a chance to learn from the researches done by REACH, USAID’s IYCN project, ACF and FAO in the region.

Participants are to be decision makers with direct influence over programming, who will deepen their understanding of ways to integrate nutrition and food security, improving their capacity to strengthen their programmes. Follow-up activities at country level are envisaged for the year after the workshop.

This workshop is organized by FAO, ACF and Save the Children, as part of their work within the Nutrition Working Group for West Africa, and is seeking participation from various other organizations and initiatives, including IFPRI, USAID’s IYCN project, REACH, and HKI.

The Nutrition Working Group for West Africa (NWG) brings together organizations actively combating malnutrition in the region and committed to close collaboration, and aims to support countries to scale-up their action in nutrition. The

¹ IFPRI, Leveraging agriculture for improving Nutrition and Health, international conference, February 2011 | 11th ECOWAS Nutrition Forum, Freetown 2008 | The Workshop on “Food and Nutrition Security Policies for West Africa: Implementation Issues and Research Agendas”, Bamako, 2004

² USAID’s IYCN project, Nutrition and Food Security Impacts of Agricultural Projects, 2011 | World Bank, From Agriculture to Nutrition, Pathways, Synergies and Outcomes, 2008 | ACF, Nutrition Causal Analysis research, 2011 | FAO, Research on measuring Nutritional impact of Food Security Program in Mauritania, 2010 | REACH, Linking Agricultural Development to Nutrition Interventions: A West African Case Study, Sierra Leone, 2011

NWG focuses on: coordinated advocacy and communication; the development of effective regional and national coalitions; regular situation analysis and dissemination, technical harmonization and updating; and expanding and improving human resources in national and regional governments. The NWG is supported by a REACH Facilitator.

Regional Workshop Goal:

To build the competencies of individuals responsible for nutrition and food security programming so that more programs in the region include integrated approaches to food and nutrition security, and that the impact on nutrition of these projects is increased, and well monitored and documented.

Objectives of regional workshop:

- To strengthen participants' skills in design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of integrated food and nutrition security interventions.
- To share regional examples of successful integrated food and nutrition security projects, and to identify gaps that would inform future planning.

To achieve these objectives, the workshop program will include sessions on:

1. **“How to align Food security activities with Nutrition”**
 - a. Elements to take into account for the design of a program
 - b. Different methodologies to identify those elements
 - c. Sharing experiences, success stories, best practices and case studies from the field
2. **“Framework for evaluating and monitoring the nutritional impact of a food security programs”**
 - a. Process and methodologies able to show nutritional impact of a food security program
 - b. Tools for impact evaluation for food and nutrition security interventions
 - c. Sharing experiences, success stories, best practices and case studies from the field
3. **“Reflections on how to improve and scale up integrated food and nutrition security interventions in West Africa”**
 - a. How to build local capacities to replicate evidence-based programs at scale and adapt them to varying contexts?
 - b. How to strengthen synergies between sectors
 - c. Priorities for short-, medium-, and long-term action and responsibilities of participants and other key players towards these goals

Expected outcomes:

It is expected that participants of the workshop will in turn strengthen the food and nutrition security linkages in their programs and that in the years following the workshop participants will contribute to the following outcomes:

- More government departments and partners working in nutrition-related sectors understand how their work can be leveraged to improve nutrition and include specific nutrition objectives and activities in their programmes.

- Government and partner food and nutrition security programs have improved impact assessments for nutrition outcomes.
- Government and partners participants raise awareness in their countries of the importance of strengthening linkages among key stakeholders intervening in nutrition and in food security, at the central and decentralised levels.

Participants:

The countries targeted by the workshop are ECOWAS and Sahel countries, but the final list of participant countries and individuals will depend on the successful identification of appropriate participants on a country-by-country basis

List of eligible ECOWAS and Sahel candidate countries:

Benin, BurkinaFaso, Cap Vert, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

Current key components of agenda:

REACH / SLARI / Wageningen University : Field research in Sierra Leone on "Linkages between nutrition programming and local agricultural procurement from smallholder farmers"

REACH / WFP : "Mali feasibility study to assess the plausibility of producing fortified blended foods (FBFs) locally for nutrition interventions"

REACH / FAO : Research in Mauritania on "Creating consensus on nutritional indicators to be used in agricultural and food security interventions in Mauritania"

ACF: progress on Nutrition Causal Analysis, and Guidance study on "aligning food security with Nutrition"

USAID's IYCN project on "Achieving Nutritional Impact and Food security through Agriculture"

Introduction to participatory planning tools and nutrition impact assessment tools for food and nutrition security interventions

Two half days sessions on "Experience-sharing of country successes"