

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE: PRODUCING FOOD TO NOURISH PEOPLE?

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One in four children under the age of five are either dangerously thin for their height (wasting) or much too short for their age (stunting) – two important forms of undernutrition.ⁱ

Poor nutrition is linked to nearly half of the deaths in children under the age of five and severely affects their physical and cognitive development.ⁱⁱ

Undernutrition ranks among the greatest challenges to global development – it causes annual GDP losses of 11% on average in Asia and Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ

The agricultural sector has a key role to play in reducing child undernutrition. However, research shows that few agricultural projects are able to prove their impact in reducing undernutrition.^{iv}



THIS FACTSHEET IS THE SECOND PUBLICATION BY GENERATION NUTRITION LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF PREVENTING CHILD UNDERNUTRITION. IT EXPLAINS HOW AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES CAN HAVE A BIGGER IMPACT IN REDUCING UNDERNUTRITION AND, IN DOING SO, FULFIL ONE OF THE SECTOR'S MAIN ROLES: TO PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH THE NUTRITIOUS FOOD THEY NEED FOR A HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE LIFE.

DOES AGRICULTURE IMPROVE NUTRITION?

This may seem like an odd question. Being a sector concerned with food production, agriculture is clearly intimately linked to nutrition. However, a research exercise which analysed over 7,000 agricultural programmes came up with the following unexpected conclusion: the overwhelming majority of agricultural programmes were unable to prove their impact on reducing undernutrition.^v While they can increase crop yields, they often have not been able to provide evidence of their contribution to improving people's diets and nutritional status.

'THE MAJORITY OF AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PROVE THEIR IMPACT ON IMPROVING FAMILIES' DIETS AND REDUCING UNDERNUTRITION.'

Increasing crop yields can contribute to tackling food and nutrition insecurity, but nutritional quality and diversity of crops, and balanced diets are critical for improving nutrition too. The highest prevalence of undernutrition is often in rural communities - the areas where most food is produced. This even includes areas with high crop yields, like in the Sikasso region in Mali or the Boucle du Mouhoun region in Burkina Faso. This phenomenon, which has diverse causes,^{vi} demonstrates that the link between food production and good household nutrition in the same communities is not automatic.



WHAT HINDERS THE POTENTIAL FOR AGRICULTURE TO IMPROVE NUTRITION?

DESPITE INCREASING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION ON THE LINKS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION, SEVERAL FACTORS ARE LIMITING THE POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE TO REDUCE MATERNAL AND CHILD UNDERNUTRITION:

01

INADEQUATE POLICIES

A multi-country review by campaign partner Action Against Hunger found that **nutrition does not feature as a priority** in many agricultural policies, strategies and programmes.^{vii} National governments and international donors often prioritise increased yields and higher incomes for farmers, paying insufficient attention to ensuring that agriculture provides poorer households living in food-producing areas with the nutritious food they need.

02

INSUFFICIENT FUNDING

This lack of political support results in **inadequate funding for 'nutrition-sensitive' interventions**^{viii} (interventions that maximize agriculture's contribution to nutrition with nutrition indicators included in its M&E framework). For example, in Nepal, separate government funding streams exist for agriculture and nutrition. This makes it difficult to analyse what proportion of funds for agriculture are tied to nutrition objectives (and vice-versa).^{ix}

03

LIMITED EVIDENCE

Very few agricultural programmes have a monitoring and evaluation system that uses nutrition indicators, such as an improvement in a child's dietary diversity. As a result, programmes are **usually not able to measure objectively the nutritional benefits** for individuals and households.^x Recently, the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the UN published a compendium of nutrition-sensitive indicators for agriculture, which could help to fill this gap.^{xi}

04

TOO MANY ASSUMPTIONS

Agricultural specialists **should not assume that increasing and diversifying production automatically leads to better nutrition.**

As the infographic below shows, the link is not so simple. Several intermediate steps are needed before agriculture can improve people's nutrition.

05

IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY

Women make up 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries.^{xii} They already face discrimination as they have unequal access to land, agricultural extension services, credit and technologies (such as labour-saving devices). Increased workloads of women on account of gender-insensitive agricultural practices can result in having reduced time to attend to their own nutrition and health, and to follow appropriate child care and feeding practices. This has adverse consequences for maternal and child nutrition outcomes.^{xiii}

WHAT ARE THE STEPS LINKING FOOD PRODUCTION AND IMPROVED CHILD NUTRITION?^{xiv}

FAMILIES PRODUCE DIVERSE TYPES OF NUTRITIOUS FOOD AND IN GREATER QUANTITIES



FOOD IS KEPT FOR HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION, NOT ONLY FOR SALE



FAMILY MEMBERS ARE WILLING TO ADOPT MORE DIVERSE DIETS



FOOD IS PREPARED HYGIENICALLY, AND IN WAYS THAT RETAIN ITS NUTRITIONAL QUALITY



CULTURAL NORMS AROUND FOOD ALLOCATION IN THE HOUSEHOLD ALLOW WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO CONSUME A SUFFICIENT QUANTITY OF NUTRITIOUS FOOD



HYGIENE, SANITATION, IMMUNISATION AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE HELP PREVENT ILLNESSES LINKED TO UNDERNUTRITION



A CHILD'S BODY IS ABLE TO ABSORB AND UTILISE NUTRIENTS FROM FOOD WHICH IS CONSUMED



CHILDREN ARE WELL-NOURISHED AND HEALTHY

GROWING BETTER NUTRITION, NOT JUST FOOD

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF NUTRITION-SENSITIVE INITIATIVES BY NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS, DONORS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS PROVIDE INSPIRING EXAMPLES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR SCALE-UP:

KENYA: AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN ACTION

The Ministry of Agriculture supported 500 agricultural extension officers across the country in delivering basic nutrition messages, educating people on nutritious food preparation, promoting traditional, nutrient-rich crops, supporting home gardening, advising on crop processing and preservation and promoting labour-saving technologies.^{xv}



MYANMAR: LINKING AGRICULTURE TO HOUSEHOLD NUTRITION

In Myanmar, the multi year SUSTAIN project, funded by EuropeAid and implemented by Action Against Hunger, Professionals for Fair Development, Welthungerhilfe, aims to sustainably improve the nutritional status of the most vulnerable population through different interventions, starting with agriculture but extending to the use of food by households. The project combines under a single umbrella the growing of nutritious, indigenous crops; hygiene education for households; cooking demonstrations; and improved infant feeding practices.

SOUTH SUDAN: DIVERSIFYING DIETS FOR FAMILIES

In the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region of South Sudan, People in Need with funding from EuropeAid supported women in running vegetable gardens that boosted the diversity of their families' diets, while providing much needed income. Local businesses contributed by increasing the marketing of inputs such as seeds and tools, which were previously lacking. The project team engaged in dialogue with both women and men in order to discuss and jointly agree on improving the dietary and hygiene practices of all members of their household. Many other households in the community subsequently adopted the same nutrition practices.



RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERATION NUTRITION CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS, DONORS, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER ACTORS WORKING IN THE AREAS OF AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING SIX ACTIONS:

01

Incorporate explicit nutrition objectives and indicators in the design of agricultural policy and programmes, showing a pathway for how agriculture will contribute to improved nutrition, especially for small-scale farmers and vulnerable groups, such as children under five and pregnant and lactating women.

02

Increase the funding available for nutrition-sensitive approaches in agriculture, while strengthening the implementation capacity of local stakeholders.

03

Focus on tackling recurring food shortages in the months preceding the harvest in order to reduce seasonal spikes in rates of acute malnutrition.

04

Ensure that efforts to improve dietary practices become a standard part of food security-oriented agricultural programmes.

05

Monitor and seek to avoid any potentially negative impact of agriculture programmes on gender equality, such as increasing women's workload.

06

Integrate aid for agriculture with other actions tackling the multi-sectoral causes of undernutrition, such as social protection or programmes reducing water-borne diseases.

END NOTES

- i IFPRI (2015) *2015 Global Nutrition Report*, accessed at <http://globalnutritionreport.org> and UNDESA (2015) *World Population Prospects*, accessed at <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>
- ii WHO (2016) *Factsheet No. 342: Infant and Young Child Feeding*, accessed at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs342/en/>
- iii IFPRI (2016) *2016 Global Nutrition Report*, accessed at <http://globalnutritionreport.org>
- iv Webb, P. and Kennedy, E. (2014) *Impacts Of Agriculture On Nutrition*, *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 1
- v Webb, P. and Kennedy, E. (2014) *Impacts Of Agriculture On Nutrition*, *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 1
- vi For instance, incomes for small-scale producers from the sale of crops may be too low, the crops grown may not be for household consumption or there may be a lack of investment in agriculture in these areas.
- vii Action Against Hunger/ACF (2013) *Sowing the Seeds of Good Nutrition. Making Agricultural Policies Deliver Better Nutrition*, accessed at <http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/en/content/seeds-of-good-nutrition>
- viii Complete definition accessed at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/icn2/news/news-detail/en/c/261494>
- ix UNSCN (2014) *The Nutrition Sensitivity of Agriculture and Food Policies: A Synthesis of Eight Country Case Studies*, accessed at http://www.unscn.org/files/Publications/Country_Case_Studies/UNSCN_Synthesis_Report_March_16_final.pdf
- x Ruel M., et al. (2013) *Nutrition-sensitive interventions and programmes: how can they help to accelerate progress in improving maternal and child nutrition?* *Lancet*, vol. 382, no. 9891, accessed at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(13\)60843-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60843-0)
- xi FAO (2016) *Compendium of indicators for nutrition-sensitive agriculture*, accessed at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6275e.pdf>
- xii FAO (2011) *The Role of Women in Agriculture*, ESA Working Paper No. 11-02, accessed at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf>
- xiii USAID (2011) *Nutrition and Food Security Impacts of Agriculture Programs*, accessed at <http://iycn.org> and FAO (2015) *Designing Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Interventions*, accessed at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5107e.pdf>
- xiv PIN (2015) *Nourishing the Next Generations' Bodies and Minds*
- xv ACF (2013) *Reconciling Agriculture and Nutrition: Case Study on Agricultural Policies and Nutrition in Kenya*, accessed at <http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/en/content/seeds-of-good-nutrition>

This factsheet was produced by People in Need (PIN) on behalf of the Generation Nutrition campaign, with additional inputs from the global campaign team, Action Against Hunger, Results UK and Bread for the World.

Generation Nutrition is a global civil society campaign, launched in 2014. We campaign for governments to bring about an end to child deaths from undernutrition. Around 80 partner organisations support the campaign, working in: Burkina Faso, Canada, Czech Republic, EU, France, India, Kenya, Philippines, Spain, UK, US; and at the global level.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, PLEASE CONTACT

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