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Improving nutrition through accountability, ownership and partnerships

Organized by CTA, the ACP Secretariat, the European Commission, Concord in collaboration with the IFPRI-Led CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH).

Notes by Klaas de Vries, Food & Business Knowledge Platform

Please note that this is not the formal report of the meeting. Please visit the website of [Brussels Briefings](#) for Power Point presentations by keynote speakers, background material, and other relevant documentation

Introduction

After an introduction by Isolina Boto (Manager, CTA Brussels Office) and introductory remarks by a representative of the ACP Group of States, Jean Pierre Halkin of the EC explained that the EC regards ICN2 as a success and expects nutrition to play a prominent role in the upcoming SDG system. The EC sees making food security programs nutrition sensitive as the main challenge.

John McDermott (IFPRI) posed two questions that would be central in the rest of the meeting:

- How can agriculture improve nutrition outcomes?
- How can agriculture work together with other sectors (Social, health) in LMICs

Within the scope of these questions, he emphasised the importance of the role of gender, M&E for accountability and partnerships

Director of CTA, Michael Hailu, raised the issue Non communicable diseases (NCD) related to malnutrition as one of the main problems, particularly in the Pacific and Carribean regions. He stated that agriculture has been focussing on increasing quantity and that the focus on dietary diversity is lagging behind.

Panel 1: Enhancing nutrition: a multi-sectoral approach

This panel reviewed the key challenges and opportunities for enhanced nutrition of relevance to the agricultural sector and the lessons learned from research and practice.

1. Overview of undernutrition & malnutrition: what do we know about how to improve nutrition at scale?

By Marie Ruel, Director, Division Poverty, Health and Nutrition, IFPRI

Malnutrition is a continuum from hunger (lack of food), to deficits in protein, energy, essential micronutrients to unbalanced diets (excess sugar salt), leading to overweight/obesity/NCDs.

Currently the main challenges are:

- The relative prevalence of stunting is reduced, but progress is too slow. The number of stunted children is actually increasing.
- Basically in all of SSA countries, people are suffering from high deficiencies of iron, zinc and vitamin A. This is also the case in countries in SEA, like Indonesia.
- Obesity is increasing faster than reduced rates of undernutrition. These phenomena's are happening in the same countries.
- Effects of under and over nutrition even in the same household.
- Breaking malnutrition is crucial for breaking the transgenerational cycle of poverty.

There have been 10 nutrition specific interventions identified that focus on food, health and care, but we need to do more than this. We need to work multi-sectorally, because we need to address the underlying determinants

(e.g. lack of health services, lack of sanitation, poverty). Gender is central in this approach and this will facilitate improvements. Empower women in terms of, for example, care, productivity and labor.

Food systems need to be leveraged more. An increase in the availability of and access to nutrient rich food and diets is necessary. In addition, value chains should become more nutrition sensitive and inequalities (e.g. income, gender) should be reduced. In order to do this successfully, we should amongst others invest in PPPs in food marketing sectors.

In conclusion, Ruel arrives at the following key messages:

- Be purposeful about nutrition and gender
- Make multisectorality a mindset
- Develop/embed right set of incentives for multisectoral work at all levels (top to ground)
- Strengthen capacity
- Build solid partnerships
- Recognise opportunities, risks, limitations of agriculture/food systems
- Exploit incentives to work multi-sectorally
- Ensure policy coherence & coordination
- Invest
- Document and measure (build evidence)

2. Support partner countries in attaining their nutrition goals: the National Information Platforms for Nutrition Initiative

By Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head of Unit, Rural Development, Food & Nutrition Security, EC

The main task of the EC is to support partner countries in such a way that the EC objective of reducing stunting in children under 5 by at least 7 million, is achieved by 2025 (10% of the WHA target). We have to show that the money that we invest is bearing fruit and therefor showing that we have achieved the objectives.

As part of their efforts to provide a concerted response to countries' needs, a group of donors, UN Agencies and universities is currently developing an initiative to strengthen national information platforms for nutrition (NIPN). Users of the information will include decision makers from government, civil society, business, donors and parliamentarians. The program includes an expert panel for additional expertise. The EC wants to include top experts in the world in this panel. There is also a stakeholder group for strategic guidance.

A technical team will be responsible for analyses and interpretation and different media channels will be important to share this information with the public.

Key Messages:

- Having a centralized information database is important but this should be linked to prioritization and addressing of problems.
- Platform deals with data, information and analysis.
- Comprehensive approach needed, which brings together the elements for nutrition. NIPN brings together data and analytical tools to answer these questions
- There are critical gaps to knowledge and understanding for governments; what are the best systems for funding, programming, reporting and measuring results? It is possible to pull all relevant information from multiple sectors and programmes into a central database.

EC supports projects that are based on the country/community structures. Those projects are supported through the NIPN program, which is active in Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Laos and Niger

The NIPN program gets inspiration from the SUN initiative's approach in the sense that NIPN works with country led platforms. It is a System which wants to add to the knowledge related to nutrition in those countries. Currently, the EC is looking for support from the Gates Foundation for NIPN.

Halkin emphasised that decision makers of development organisations need to understand that nutrition is a challenge that we can handle. By 2019 we should show that we are making progress.

3. Key findings of the global nutrition report: improved accountability and ownership

By Lawrence Haddad, Senior Researcher, IFPRI

- Assess programs in nutrition: how are we doing?
- What can we do to improve?
- What can we do to improve accountability

Haddad presented key findings from the Global Nutrition report, along the same lines as he did earlier this year at a meeting of the NWGN.

The main messages of the report are:

1. Nutrition is a foundation for SDGs
2. Malnutrition is a concern for all countries
3. Multiple burdens are 'new normal'
 - a. Double burden: 45% of countries are dealing with undernutrition and overweight. We are fighting the same kind of factors
4. Progress slow globally but there are spectacular country advances
 - a. Good example: Maharashtra (big Indian state): stunting fell from 37% to 2% in 7 years
5. We need more ambition on targets
6. Scaling up more possible than ever
7. Nutrition accountability needs extra efforts

Key facts:

- 45% of all under five deaths from poor nutrition. We have to use this fact and leverage it.
- 16 dollar of return for every dollar invested in nutrition programmes. This means a 30 year compound rate of interest of 10%
- 10% of median income is lost to obesity in the workplace (USA)

However: nutrition is only mentioned ONCE in SDGs (169!) --> we need to fight at UN and various fora to embed nutrition more broadly in SDGs

Food systems and diets are in the middle of: a) hunger and undernutrition, b) overweight/obesity, c) sustainable land use and climate change

We need to speak to other sectors about nutrition, and learn each other languages

Recommended action:

1. Embed nutrition in SDGs
2. Develop more ambition 2030 targets
3. Embrace complexity of multiple burdens
4. Relentless focus on coverage of nutrition-specific interventions
5. Find resources outside the health sector for nutrition-sensitive interventions
6. Invest in nutrition data revolution. Does not cost much (maybe 1% of ODA, just like you spend 1% of project budget on M&E)
7. Be accountability champions

Current rate of progress (2015 GNR): some current stunting rates are even lower than the required stunting rates. However, we do not yet know enough about why countries are doing well (responding well) to nutrition interventions and why others are not.

In the 2014 GNR three countries were doing well in terms of budget for nutrition (Zambia, Tanzania, Guatemala). In 2015 report improvement is recognised: about 20 countries have required budget for nutrition. Other concerns are that 49% of countries do not collect all required WHA target data and 40% of countries have child growth data older than 5 years.

4. The role of CSOs in improving nutrition

By Stineke Oenema, Co-chair of the working group on food security, Concord

European CSO group CONCORD advocates that we should build interventions on four pillars:

- Human rights and rights-based approach to food and nutrition security
- Coherent and coordinated management of nutrition throughout the lifecycle and at all levels
- Sovereign local food and agriculture systems based on agro-biodiversity
- Democratic governance of food and nutrition and global and national regulatory framework

Nutrition is intersectoral. We should also include private sector actors, although this remains a sensitive topic. It is important to reach BoP consumers. The private sector can bring in resources like knowledge, but also take into account the governance: who is in charge of food systems. Governments should stay in control. Often in cooperation with private sector, where there regularly are conflicts of interest.

Q&A

Marlene: Can we see a (causal) relationship between countries that have sufficient data on nutrition and countries that are doing well in terms of reducing malnutrition?

Halkin: NIPN working with countries that are doing well in data collection. We cannot see a causal relationship yet, but would like to investigate whether there is such a relationship

Haddad: If you don't measure you don't know what is driving the results. Bigger question: How do you assess the return to data collection?

Wientjes: The largest food producer in the world is the private sector. The largest solution provider is the private sector. What do you expect from the private sector?

Haddad: Chapter in 2015 GNR. ATNI indicators (over 100) on largest companies in the food industry. 25 of about 170 indicators where food companies are not performing (advertising to young children and food labelling)

Panel 2: Best practices in addressing nutrition challenges

This panel looked at examples and drivers of successes in nutrition programmes at national level and successes in sustainable partnerships and action by local communities.

Panelists:

- Drivers of success in biofortification: the case of Iron-biofortified beans in Rwanda
Lister Katsvairo, Country Manager, HarvestPlus, Rwanda
- Examples of nutrition support through community participation and action
Rose Ndolo, Senior Child Nutrition & FS Programmes Adviser, World Vision UK
- Best practices in measuring impact of agriculture on nutrition
Boitshopo Giyose, Senior Nutrition Officer, ESNP, FAO

1. Successes in country leadership and ownership in addressing nutrition challenges

By Robinah Mulenga, Executive Director, National Food & Nutrition Commission, Zambia

Zambia is often mentioned as a positive example in addressing under-nutrition, it has a committed government. Multi-sectoral approach is deliberately integrated in the Nutrition strategy of the Zambian government. Several ministries work together in this strategy, but they have different structures at community level to deliver their services. There is still a gap there. When closing this gap, better results could be achieved.

- Invest in human resources
- Increasing budget yearly by 20%
- Matching increased donor contributions to nutrition
- Involve the private sector more
- Improving governance of the nutrition sector

Zambia could do better to invest effectively in nutrition. There is no mechanism to identify financial flaws to investing in nutrition.

Key challenges and way forward:

- Difficulty in quantifying and tracking investment
- Nutrition governing bodies are not yet fully functional
- Currently no functioning multisectoral body

2. Successes in PPPs and the role of the private sector in support of nutrition

By Fokko Wientjes, Vice-President Corporate Sustainability & PPPs, DSM

Why is the private sector interested in addressing under-nutrition? We are not the bad guys. We have means to do things (know-how, innovation power, products). Acceleration and scale are key.

Wientjes expressed that he is concerned about agricultural policies: they are often focussed on staples that are not meeting the needs of the body. There is a mismatch between food and agriculture policy.

Build partnerships around the complementary competences of organisations and include the private sector. Wientjes mentions the example of a partnership between DSM and WFP. Their program is now reaching over 25 million WFP beneficiaries with more nutrient dense DSM products.

How do we reach large numbers of beneficiaries to improve nutrition? By mainstreaming. We could invest in fortification of staples like rice, for example.

Trust is key in being able to work together in partnerships. When there is a conflict of interest, people tend to point their finger at the private sector because of its interests. But organisations should only sit at the table where decisions are made when you have an interest. Everybody has an interest if they have something valuable to add.

Lesson learned is that we should have more attention for:

- Doing a good due diligence (check on your partner)
- Trying to get out of our silos, work in networks and based on trust. Still long way to go.
- Work with a shared vision and each has their own accountability

3. Drivers of success in biofortification: the case of Iron-biofortified beans in Rwanda

By Lister Katsvairo, Country Manager, HarvestPlus, Rwanda

Biofortification is cost effective: it is a central, one-time investment. Breeding of biofortified crops increases nutrients without reducing yields.

Within the Harvest Plus approach, the government owns the initiative which means a large number of beneficiaries can be reached. Key partners are mainly governments and international governmental organisations. Private sector is involved as well (e.g. seed companies and marketing channels). In addition, key aspects in programs are empowerment of women and using mass media to create demand (example of musicians).

Next steps:

- Scale up
- Strengthen seed systems
- Increasing market share of iron beans
- Introduce more biofortified crops
- Generate and share evidence to tell the story

Also check out the Biofortification priority index: <http://www.ifpri.org/tools/bpimappingtool>

4. Best practices in measuring impact of agriculture on nutrition

Boitshepo Giyose, Senior Nutrition Officer, ESNP, FAO

Identifying good practices is key, but can only be done by measuring.

What should we measure:

- Situation (FNS) Baseline
- Actions
- Outcomes

(See also full PowerPoint on the website of the Brussels Briefings)

Q&A

Klaas – To what extent is there a business case for (bio)fortification? Under what conditions?

John McDermott – Biofortification has a cost effectiveness comparable to vaccines, which is very good. That's why there is so much attention, but more evidence needed.

Biofortification is popular because it can reach scale. Not easy, but think about when we could fortify rice.

Haddad: Powerful multisectoral actions are needed to overcome malnutrition. On DSM WFP collaboration: very positive relationship, but is there independent evidence that the collaboration accelerated the delivery of nutrition services? Wouldn't the same have happened when the partnership wouldn't have been there?

Is there a causal link between the positive results in reducing malnutrition and the 30% increase in budget?

Reflections John McDermott:

- Keep eyes on the ball that is nutrition
- Not wave our hands any more. Get evidence, get accountability
- This will have implications for the way we work (referring to multisectorality and different types of partners)
- Align our work with WASH, health sectors
- We're a nutrition team made up from different sectors
- There's a lot to be done