



Fruits and vegetables export as a vehicle to link agriculture and nutrition

In the afternoon of Friday October 30, twenty representatives from companies, knowledge institutes, NGOs and government met in the Ministry of Economic Affairs in The Hague. The event forms part of a series of action-oriented discussion events organized by the NWGN, Food & Business Knowledge Platform and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs of the Netherlands. The aim of this series is to scale up Dutch efforts towards achieving Nutritional Security. The series are inspired by the importance of nutrition security on the international and national agenda, and the cabinet's call for joint action: "based on the strength of the Netherlands, to end global hunger in one generation, and creating a foundation to feed 9 billion people by 2050 in a sustainable way".

This particular event explored how (Dutch) agribusiness companies involved in activities related to the import of agricultural produce from developing countries to the Netherlands can contribute to nutrition security in agriculture. The event was opened by contributions from Patricia Wagenmakers (Ministry of Economic Affairs (EA)), Marcel Beukeboom (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FA)). Building on the joint policy letters from the two ministries, EA and FA are looking for innovative partnerships that use the Dutch Diamond approach to address the great challenge of achieving food and nutrition security for all. An objective that is reflected strongly in the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in SDG2.



Inspirational experiences

After a welcome by Herbert Smorenburg (GAIN) on behalf of the organisers, the meeting continued by providing examples from projects in the tea value chain that showed that nutrition-specific and – sensitive interventions do not have to cost a lot, can be practically integrated in existing business operations and may be a good business investment as well.

Mieke van Reenen (GAIN) presented the case of a nutrition sensitive program in the tea value chain in Indonesia. In the areas where tea is sourced from in Indonesia, under-nutrition is very severe. The level of stunted children, an indicator that is generally accepted as an indicator of under-nutrition, in those areas reaches levels as high as 40%. The project aims to address this issue by building a bridge between the agricultural sector and the nutrition sector and stimulating more healthy and diverse diets of tea farmer households. It uses existing agricultural supply chain structures as a delivery mechanism. The focus on dietary diversity seems to be working well with the tea farmer households because it is easily understood and there is a clear link with agriculture. The project promoted home gardening, intercropping, animal husbandry and fish ponds to improve access to nutritious foods. Tea farmer households were supported to introduce these ways to produce nutritious foods.

Herbert Smorenburg provided a presentation on a similar project of GAIN and IDH with tea farmers and plantations in Malawi. In Malawi, nutrition indicators in tea sourcing regions are even more worrying than



in Indonesia. Stunting levels can reach 50%. However, GAIN's nutrition sensitive project related to the tea supply chain seems to be picked up well by local farmers. In the case of this project, fortification of Current Maize Flour, nutritious meals in plantations and communication plans to increase nutrition awareness are introduced in collaboration with farmers and plantations.

Discussion on how to integrate nutrition security objectives in value chains

After the presentation of the cases of Indonesia and Malawi, Klaas de Vries (WUR-CDI) asked the event's participants to explore what nutrition interventions may be practically included as part of agribusiness operations, particularly in relation to the import of agricultural produce from developing countries to the Netherlands.

As a first input in the discussion the representatives from the private sector explained that they would potentially be open and interested to become involved in projects where nutrition objectives are central. Companies have a high interest in the sustainability of the chain and when agriculture can be linked to promoting sustainability goals companies can stay within their comfort zone. However, companies do not have a full and detailed picture of the nutrition situation in the countries where they work. Furthermore, they do not have all the required expertise and would depend on knowledge institutes and NGOs to support them to implement activities aimed at improving nutrition security of farmers and their households.

Representatives from NGOs that participated in the event declared that they see that complementarity as well. They would be happy to work with companies to find ways to stimulate nutrition security for the benefit of the sustainability of the supply chains in which those companies are working. Solidaridad, Fair and Sustainable highlighted that they will start a new program, together with the University of Utrecht and supported by NWO-WOTRO that investigates which different agribusiness models manage to achieve inclusive growth in Ethiopia, Kenya and Ghana. This program also touches upon the issues discussed during this event and specifically looks at the link between the activities of Dutch agribusinesses and local food security.

Representatives from the Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC) confirmed that we need to collaborate in order to tackle under-nutrition in export value chains, because companies cannot do it on their own. However, it is tricky to find the right point of entry. Produce is regularly allocated for export at the level of farmer cooperatives and traders, but under-nutrition should be addressed at the level of the farmers and their households. Not all food importers will be able to reach those farmers and their households using their current infrastructure. This is something to consider when designing activities.

Mario Leeftang (Ministry of FA) argued that there are different organisations that sit at the table with different interests, but that we could help each other in achieving our objectives. But to be successful, we need to understand each other. There is a need for information on the broader sector, which in this case is the fruits and vegetables sector. A sector overview and analysis would help us to identify possibilities to address under-nutrition through agriculture.

Conclusions and next steps

The event should be the first step in a trajectory that leads to action in which organisations from all corners of the Dutch Diamond could play a role. To this end, the participants were asked in the final part of the meeting to work in small groups and write down what should be a next step in this process or which question would need to be answered in order to proceed.



There was a lot of positive energy from the participants to take this topic forward and identify follow-up opportunities together, including from the side of the private sector. One company representative said that this would be something that the sector needs to be involved in on top of already existing commitments. The result of this exercise was that the participants expressed a clear need for more information on what would be possible activities to address under-nutrition in specific agro-export supply chains and on the nutrition status of specific countries. There is also a need for short and sweet information, for example to appeal to the private sector. In this regard, drafting a 2-pager to get other suppliers informed and interested was suggested. With such a brief document, suppliers across fruits and vegetables sector could follow to see who would also be interested to contribute.



Representatives that were more experienced in working in agriculture-nutrition linkages programs argued that now is the time to move from pilot projects to scaling up successful programs. NGOs indicated that they now have many examples of how nutrition can be addressed through supply chains. They indicated that it is up to them to be proactive and share these examples with others in the Dutch Diamond. This way, we avoid that we reinvent the wheel. Participants also argued that such projects need to be linked to educational systems and defining the role of governments more clearly, for example when it comes to promoting healthy diets. This goes both for local governments (at different levels) as well as for development cooperation donor governments.

In order to be able to scale up, the participants agreed that the dialogue needs to be expanded by including more sector actors. This event was regarded as an excellent start to bring this process further to eventually create a win-win-situation for all actors involved. Several of the participants indicated that they are motivated to reach out to others to motivate them to take part in these kinds of event, aimed at follow up action. There should especially be a focus on engaging with unusual suspects, for example mobile technology companies that can provide platforms to disperse nutrition information. Participants also see a bigger role for organisations like MVO Netherlands.

Although there was a lot of energy to move forward and look for ways to address under-nutrition through agri-import supply chains, we should also reflect on whether we are achieving the objective we aiming at by using organized farmer structures. A key question is whether working through supply chains will reach the most nutrition insecure groups in societies. Monitoring and evaluation of results is therefore important, which is something that some of the NGO representatives indicated that they have experience in.