

Summary of Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition 28th and 29th October 2013

Background

The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition was formed after the Nutrition for Growth event in London on 8th June 2013. There are 12 members of the Panel, including members from governments, regional bodies, the private sector and civil society. It is co-chaired by John Kufuor, Former President of Ghana and Sir John Beddington, Former UK Chief Scientific Advisor, UK. The two day meeting on 28th and 29th October was the first time that the Panel had met. Six Panel members attended in person. There is a Secretariat led by Professor Jeff Waage, Director of London International Development Centre (LIDC).

Outcomes of the Panel Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to start to define objectives, approach and activities for a three year time-frame. As this was the first meeting, the exact 'language' is still being developed.

Approach: The Panel aims to take a multi-sectoral approach, engaging a broad community of stakeholders in the public and private sector. It will concentrate on developing activities that complement and add value to existing initiatives on improving nutrition.

Objectives and Activities: Three broad objectives were defined during the meeting:

1. To contribute to the generation of and stimulate a stronger evidence-base for how agriculture and food systems can improve nutrition.

The emphasis will be on the political economy of agriculture and food systems, and generating information, analyses and case studies on effective political and policy processes. The collation of existing experience was highlighted rather than commissioning of original new research. Desk based mapping taking a longer and broader approach to engage a wider community, rather than a narrow, more confined academic process was favoured. Toolkits and guidelines will be considered, which could be used by governments when they review their agriculture policies to ensure that these policies are nutrition-sensitive.

2. To create a new global understanding of the current role and future potential of agriculture relating to nutritional outcomes.

In order to share new information and concepts to advance the public and policymaker understanding of the connections between agriculture, food systems and nutrition, the production of a series of briefings were suggested. The specific subjects of these briefings are still under discussion.

3. To stimulate collaborative actions in agricultural and food systems which will improve diets and nutritional outcomes.

A number of events were highlighted which could provide opportunities for stimulating collaborative action and engaging in high level political processes. These include: May 2014 World Economic Forum for Africa will be held in Abuja; the Committee on World Food Security; Friends of Food Security and Nutrition chaired by Dutch in New York. In addition, it was suggested that in place of 'consultations', a series of 'hearings' to help frame thinking, and 'soundings' when propositions emerge which require testing, take place. Panel members were invited to commit to take part in hearings over the next 6-8 months.

Communication: The concept of nutrition security (which includes obesity) was introduced as a way of helping people reach precision in the broad and foggy area of agriculture, food security and nutrition. The importance of developing inspiring language and concepts was highlighted: nutrition-sensitive is not necessarily very inspiring but inspiration is a key role for the Panel. Means of communication through blogs, monthly electronic newsletters and short updates on the status of the Panel were suggested.

Official launch of the Global Panel

The official launch of the Global Panel took place in the evening of the 29th October at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Five of the Panel Members presented their views followed by Q&A. There were questions on the role of genetically modified crops, risks of urbanization, role of bio-fortified crops, sustainable economic models, incorporation of WASH, link with neglected tropical diseases. The Panel shared similar views on most of these subjects and stressed the importance of policy transformation.