

Approach to assess the level of integration of nutrition into agricultural development plans in Sub-Saharan Africa: the case of National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs)

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CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Sub-Saharan Africa is confronted to a triple burden of malnutrition, with under nutrition coexisting with over- nutrition (overweight and obesity) and micronutrient deficiencies (mainly vitamin A, iron, iodine, zinc deficiencies). In 2017, stunting or chronic malnutrition affected 32.6% of children aged less than 5 years, while 6.9% of children in the same age group suffered from wasting or acute malnutrition (out of which 1.8% are affected by severe wasting).. In 2015, 4.1% of under-five children were overweight. The majority of Sub-Saharan Africa's countries still experience high rates of nutritional anaemia among women in reproductive age (15-49 years) (prevalence from 20% to 40%, with some countries even exceeding 40%)¹. The same trend apply to vitamin A and iodine deficiencies among under-five children.

Malnutrition can lead to impaired cerebral development of children, thus affecting the school performance and the productivity in the adulthood^{2,3}. It also exposes to higher vulnerability to morbidity and mortality, especially in childhood^{4,5}. Studies have also shown for developing countries huge economic losses due to malnutrition, from 1.9% to 16.5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP)⁶.

Malnutrition being a multi-causal issue, fighting this condition will need large-scale implementation of complementary and synergic nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. Among nutrition-sensitive sectors, food and agriculture plays a significant role. In fact, this sector is in charge of the food production in quantity and quality. It also employs the majority of the active population, including women. Therefore, agriculture can ensure healthy food availability and accessibility.

¹Data is from UNICEF, WHO and The World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates 2018 edition and WHO Global Targets 2025 Tracking Tool

²Taras, Howard. "Nutrition and student performance at school." *Journal of school health* 75.6 (2005): 199-213.

³Jukes M, McGuire J, Method F, Sternberg R. Nutrition and education. In: United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination/Sub-committee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN), ed. *Nutrition: A Foundation for Development*. Geneva: ACC/SCN, 2002.

⁴Bryce, Jennifer, et al. WHO estimates of the causes of death in children. *The Lancet* 365.9465 (2005): 1147-1152.

⁵Black, Robert E., et al., 'Maternal and Child Undernutrition: Global and regional exposures and health consequences', *The Lancet*, vol. 371, no. 9608, 19 January 2008, pp. 243–260.

⁶ African Union Commission, NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, UN Economic Commission for Africa, and UN World Food Programme. *The Cost of Hunger in Africa: Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Egypt, Ethiopia, Swaziland and Uganda*. Report. Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2014.

The role of agriculture and food systems has become more understood over years, mainly because of support from international partners such as United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Various initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025, the African Union 2014 Malabo Declaration aligned to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) now put an emphasis on mainstreaming nutrition into agriculture and food systems.

Within the framework of the CAADP, Sub-Saharan Africa's countries have elaborated their first generation of National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs), to impulse the development of Agriculture and its contribution to their economic development, poverty reduction actions and food security. The CAADP initiative and NAIPs formulation offer an important opportunity to improve the integration of nutrition into the agriculture sector. To this purpose, it is necessary to assess the first generation of NAIPs, in order to analyse the level of integration of nutrition aspects and formulate recommendations for improvement.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The assessment of NAIPs is carried out using an evaluation grid based on FAO's Toolkit on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems that includes key recommendations for improving the mainstreaming of nutrition into agricultural policies, plans and investments⁷. The different nutrition elements assessed are:

- The objectives and priorities: do NAIPs integrate pertinent and realistic nutrition objectives and priorities? Are realistic and pertinent indicators defined?
- The situation analysis: do NAIPs have a detailed nutrition situation analysis with key nutrition problems, causes and geographical repartition?
- The targeted populations: which populations are targeted as key beneficiaries? Does the targeting mechanism include nutrition situation?
- Gender consideration: are women and youth among the key beneficiaries of interventions? Are nutrition indicators gender-disaggregated?
- The strategic approach: is nutrition considered in the development approach of the agricultural sector?
- The description of the priority interventions such as strategic food production, agribusiness and access to markets, food safety, management of food security and nutrition crises (including social protection measures), research and technology development and dissemination, sustainable management of natural resources and climate change, food security and nutrition governance, strengthening of institutional and human capacities, etc.) : Are the nutrition dimensions integrated in the prioritization of these interventions? Were the positive and negative impacts of these interventions to nutrition analysed?
- Coordination and synergies (within Agriculture sector and with others sectors): what are the arrangements for better coordination with other sectors involved in nutrition?

⁷ Accessible through <http://www.fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes/toolkit/en/>

- Implementation and monitoring and evaluation frameworks: Are the relevant nutrition indicators for agriculture and food systems included? How other institutions involved in nutrition are taken into account in the frameworks?
- Budget allocation, gaps and resource mobilization strategy: what is the budget allocated to interventions with higher impact on nutrition, in comparison to the total budget? What is the funding gap? What is planned to cover the gap?

Each element is analysed and the level of nutrition integration is defined using a color coding system:

- Red colour for “no or low integration of nutrition”
- Orange colour for “nutrition moderately integrated”
- Green colour for “nutrition adequately integrated”

The table below shows the overview of the assessment grid.

Items		Level of integration of nutrition
Objectives, targets and priorities of the NAIP		
Situation Analysis		
Targeted beneficiaries		
Gender		
Strategic Approach		
Priority interventions	Food production/value chains promotion/ agribusiness	
	Management of food security and nutrition crises	
	Research, technologies development and dissemination	
	Agricultural sector governance and capacity strengthening	
	Climate change adaptation and mitigation	
	Food safety	
Synergy and complementarity between NAIP Programmes/Components		
Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and Results Frameworks		
Implementation, coordination and concertation mechanisms		
Budgeting		

The authors have recently applied this methodology to the assessment of NAIPs of three countries in central Africa (Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of Congo). Below is the illustrative example of results from the assessment of Democratic Republic of Congo's NAIP

Items		Level of integration of nutrition
Objectives, targets and priorities of the NAIP		Orange
Situation Analysis		Red
Targeted beneficiaries		Red
Gender		Orange
Strategic Approach		Orange
Priority interventions	Food production/value chains promotion/agribusiness	Green
	Management of food security and nutrition crises	Orange
	Research, technologies development and dissemination	Red
	Agricultural sector governance and capacity strengthening	Red
	Climate change adaptation and mitigation	Green
	Food safety	Red
Synergy and complementarity between NAIP Programmes/Components		Red
Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and Results Frameworks		Orange
Implementation, coordination and concertation mechanisms		Green
Budgeting		Orange

WAY FORWARD

The assessment using this methodology should be conducted in a participatory and inclusive manner, with all key stakeholders actively involved including nutrition and food system experts. In case the NAIP did not adequately integrate nutrition, the causes should be identified in order to take the corrective actions. The results of the assessment should be used as information to guide the formulation or update of current NAIPs and to adapt the food systems for better nutrition.