

# NUTRITION-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEMS AND FOOD SECURITY

## Introduction

Actors in the agriculture and food sectors are renewing their commitment to nutrition. It stems from the recognition that a medical approach alone will not solve the malnutrition problem. For example, a 90% coverage rate for nutrition-specific interventions with proven effectiveness (mainly in the health sector) would reduce stunting in young children by about 20%.<sup>1</sup>

It also stems from the general awareness that an increase in agricultural production does not automatically translate into improvements on the food and nutrition front. In order to fully contribute to healthy and nutritious food, national agricultural policies, programmes and projects must include nutrition objectives.

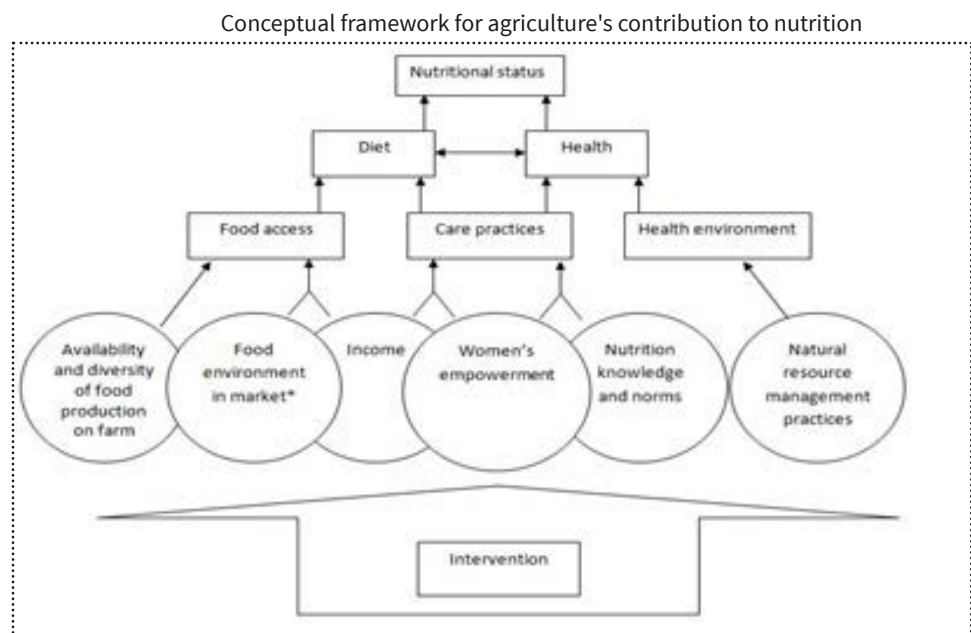
The “food system” approach (which includes production, processing, transport, and marketing as well as consumer purchasing power, demand and consumption) can make a significant contribution to good nutrition.

The “nutrition-sensitive agriculture, food systems and food security” panel will focus on the experiences of the different countries and how they could be scaled up.

<sup>1</sup> The 2013 Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition  
(<https://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition>)

## The conceptual framework

Agriculture can contribute to good nutrition through a number of results chains (as shown in the figure below). The three main chains (which overlap each other) contribute to nutrition by improving income and women empowerment and diversifying food production.



Source: Anna Herforth and Terri Ballard, 2016

## Main principles of the approach to nutrition-sensitive food systems

**1. Analyse the situation** with a view to designing policies and actions relevant to the context and its challenges such as crises, climate induced changes and urbanisation. For example, the University of Ghana and IFPRI<sup>1</sup> are conducting two research projects to 1) study the factors that led to nutrition improvements and anticipate future challenges and 2) determine how to leverage an evolving food system for continued progress on nutrition.

**2. Include explicit nutrition objectives and indicators.** An ever increasing number of programmes in the region have nutrition objectives, including those aimed at strengthening resilience. For example, the objective of the global “Food and Nutrition Security and Strengthened Resilience” programme (in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo) is to improve the food and resilience situation and measure its outcomes using, among others, an indicator of women’s dietary diversity (Minimum Dietary Diversity/ Dietary Diversity Score).

3. In line with the above conceptual framework, **the actions most often conducive to quality diet and nutrition are:**

- Increasing household income and purchasing power (in an equitable manner, by combating poverty);
- Supporting women’s empowerment (economic and decision-making power, etc.);
- Increasing the diversification of agricultural production (including fruits, vegetables and livestock) and the availability of nutrient-rich foods.

These actions must take into account sustainability, be it related to seasonal variations or production and consumption patterns. The agricultural value chains that support household poverty reduction and/or the consumption of fruits, vegetables/legumes and animal products also tend to contribute to good nutrition. National priorities with respect to agricultural value chains are, therefore, critical.

<sup>1</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://westafrica.transformnutrition.org/output/unpacking-the-complexity-of-improved-nutrition-in-ghana/>

**Improving food processing, storage and conservation** can contribute to a healthy and balanced diet. This involves fortifying foods and preserving vitamins and minerals during food processing, guaranteeing that foods are healthy (free from aflatoxins, for example) and promoting rural production while meeting the urban demand for food.

**Social protection**, including productive social transfers or those aimed at improving nutrition, plays an important role. Linking cash transfers with support to production (training, supplies and access to credit), as is done in Niger and Mali, provides poor households with economic opportunities.

**4. Prevent and mitigate health risks** (waterborne diseases and food safety) and those related to child care (tied to the workload of mothers). The IRRIGAR<sup>2</sup> irrigation project in Mali is a good example of managing such risks.

**5. Establish partnerships and look for synergies with other sectors.** Both are important on a number of levels, including the search for innovative solutions, scaling up actions, addressing the determinants of malnutrition concurrently and mobilising the expertise required to do so. For example, a number of food security projects in the region call on health services to promote good feeding and nutrition practices.

6. Include **monitoring and evaluation systems** for measuring outcomes. This is of particular importance because we do not fully comprehend the impact agricultural and food security programmes have on nutrition. For that reason, an ever growing number of projects and programmes in the regions enhance their monitoring and evaluation component and include an evaluative research component.

<sup>2</sup> Initiative to strengthen resilience by way of irrigation and appropriate resource management.

### QUESTIONS TO OPEN THE DEBATE



- Given the current situation in the region, what good practices could be scaled up in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, food systems and food security ?
- How can investments in the agropastoral sector be leveraged to strengthen nutrition?