

NEPAD'S initiatives for food security: the case for nutrition

A number of measures are being supported by NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, to address the continent's serious and widespread malnutrition problem. Development strategies have frequently neglected the issue of nutrition and are suffering from a lack of co-ordination among individual actors. NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) seeks to help remedy this and promote action in a wide range of areas, including school feeding, maternal and child feeding, and dietary diversification.

Malnutrition is chronic and widespread in Africa. For example, over 50 million African children are suffering from chronic malnutrition, and 40 percent of women are malnourished. Annually, 60 percent of the under-five children and 50 percent of maternal mortalities are due to malnutrition, while the country-specific statistics are as high as 60 percent. Malnutrition is the major leading cause of death and disability in the world and Africa in particular; and the most vulnerable are children under five years and school-aged, pregnant and lactating women, and women of childbearing age.

NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and its Pillar III in particular (increasing food supply, reducing hunger and improving responses to food emergency crises), especially calls for regional and national sector reforms to directly address hunger, food inse-

curity and nutrition among the chronically poor and vulnerable populations. This is clearly in line with African leaders making an urgent plea to achieve set national targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

■ NEPAD Agency food and nutrition flagship programmes

■ **Sustainable home grown school feeding.** In 2003, African governments endorsed the Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) Programme as a flagship programme of CAADP. In the same year, the African Union (AU) identified HGSF as having an immediate impact on food insecurity in Africa, with the potential to contribute to long-term development goals. In New York in 2005, world leaders recognised HGSF as a

pathway to reducing poverty, and in 2007 African Ministers of Education also endorsed the HGSFP. In December 2006, the African Union Special Food Summit called for an expansion of HGSF to reach at least 20 percent of member states by 2008. School feeding was included in the Africa-European Union Summit Action Plan 2008–2010 and identified as an important strategy at the 2007 meeting in Dakar of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA).

The new sustainable Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) approach is in



Photo: C. Kovermann/terre des hommes

An adequate quantity of food is only one aspect in the fight against malnutrition.

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Photo: C. Kovernari/terre des hommes

Access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation are key to preventing and controlling acute malnutrition and diseases.

■ **Food fortification to combat vitamin and mineral deficiencies.**

The large scale of micronutrient malnutrition (including iron, folic acid, zinc and vitamin A) throughout Africa and its consequences for economic development call for immediate and large-scale action. The most cost-effective strategies to address micronutrient malnutrition are fortifying major food vehicles (staple food) like wheat or maize flour with iron, folic acid, zinc and other micronutrients, plus sugar and oil with vitamins A and D. A number of African countries are making progress on food fortification, with some

demonstrating significant impact on improved nutrition and survival.

In line with NEPAD's Ten Year Strategy, concentrated efforts are needed to launch and support scaled-up elimination of Vitamins and Mineral Deficiencies (VMDs), which has expansion and support of food fortification initiatives as one of its central foci. The Ten Year Strategy emphasises multiple approaches including dietary diversity; hence strong collaboration with the agriculture sector is imperative.

■ **Maternal and child nutrition.**

Nutrition security implies more than just access to adequate quantities. Food has to be safe, and a variety of good-quality foods (including micronutrients) must

be available. Also, dietary intake needs to be improved. All this requires optimal household and community practices in childcare (e.g. infant and young child feeding), and access to key social services to prevent and control acute malnutrition and diseases. These include access to quality healthcare services (e.g. immunisation, early detection and management of acute malnutrition, nutritional management illnesses such as diarrhoea, malaria, and HIV and AIDS etc.), access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation, environmental health, hygienic and safe food preparation practices. Food and nutrition security is achieved when adequate food (quantity, quality, safety, socio-cultural acceptability) is available, accessible, and satisfactorily used and taken advantage of by all individuals at all times to live a healthy and active life, and when good quality care exists and healthcare services are available.

■ **Dietary diversification to improve nutrition.**

As noted above, nutrition security is more than food quantity. Availability of and access to a sufficient quantity is a necessary but not sufficient response to Africa's burden of malnutrition. While food security is a prerequisite for development, global experience confirms that an adequate supply is not enough.

Improving dietary diversity, food quality (including safety aspects), availability and affordability of fruits, nuts/seeds and vegetables is important and urgently required in most countries. This can be achieved by revising agricultural policies, providing technical advice and market incentives for local horticulture, including urban horticulture, reducing trade barriers to imports, and ensuring a reduced risk of pesticide residues.

In addition, specific programmes under the Food Based Dietary Approach would for example include the following: promotion of small livestock, poultry, eggs and aquaculture/fisher-

line with African Union-NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (AU-NPCA) priorities, which call for long-term sustainable solutions to food security.

The value added by school feeding to child development and educability has long been recognised by many governments and organisations. The United Nations 2005 World Summit recommended "the expansion of local school meal programmes, using home grown foods where possible," as one of the "quick-impact initiatives" to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. School feeding responds directly to the MDGs related to hunger and poverty (MDG 1), education (MDG 2) and gender equality (MDG 3), and contributes indirectly to all other MDGs.

ies production to improve protein and vitamin A status; increased production and utilisation of foods rich in vitamin A, e.g. yellow sweet potatoes, palm oil etc; and nutrition education directed at improving food habits and micronutrient status. In addition, promotion of local traditional and indigenous African foods can play a vital role in improving food and nutrition security. The knowledge around the production, preparation and utilisation of these foods is already abundant and must be tapped into at the earliest.

■ Nutrition neglected in development strategies

The world-wide pursuit of vital strategies to improve nutrition will need backing through a strong public information programme which focuses on the importance of (a) making the economic impact of under-nutrition visible, (b) engaging decision-makers as activists for attention to under-nutrition in the context of food security, health and social protection in order to tackle this negative economic impact, and (c) encouraging public participation in a social movement that empowers households and communities for better nutrition (David Nabarro, 2010).

A group of Nobel Laureates in economics recently ranked a series of core and proven nutrition interventions among the most cost-effective solu-

tions to global development challenges, including micronutrient supplementation (Vitamin A and zinc), micronutrient fortification (iron and salt iodisation), de-worming, exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding, and community-based nutrition programmes (Susan Horton et al, 2008). The per capita cost of these interventions is estimated at less than 10 US dollars (USD); with relatively quite high cost/benefit ratio. A global investment of USD 60 million per year for vitamin A and zinc supplementation, for instance, would yield benefits of USD 1 billion.

At present, because many stakeholders are involved, nutrition policies and programmes are often planned and implemented by separate institutions – and are the main business of none. Clarifying leadership and co-ordination among sectors is therefore a major challenge to securing political support, building consensus, and mobilising resources to stem the tide of malnutrition in Africa.

■ Achieving the CAADP Compacts and investment plans for food security

Since its inception in 2003, CAADP has clocked a number of successes and milestones in its delivery. So far, 25 countries have undergone their Roundtable processes and signed the Compacts. Furthermore, 19 investment

plans have been drafted, reviewed and validated.

The key priorities and common investment areas in these plans include:

- Food and nutrition security and emergency preparedness (38 %)
- Sustainable land and water management (3 %)
- Value chain promotion and market access (34 %)
- Science and technology applied in food and agriculture (1 %)
- Enhanced institutional capacities and co-ordination – including enabling environment (5 %)
- Intensification and development of production and productivity systems (18 %)

The relevance of food and nutrition security in the development agenda at country level is demonstrated above by the percentage of budget allocated to the priorities in the investment plans. This fact sheet is a clear recognition by African policy-makers of food and nutrition security as the heart of the continent's economic growth and development.

This new and positive trend in favour of food and nutrition is encouraging. And we hope to see concrete impact at national level in the coming years.

A full list of references can be obtained from the author.

Zusammenfassung

Unterernährung ist in Afrika ein gravierendes und weit verbreitetes Phänomen. Das Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklungsprogramm für Afrika (CAADP), das Teil der Neuen Partnerschaft für Afrikas Entwicklung (NEPAD) ist, ruft zum Handeln auf, um die Versorgung mit Lebensmitteln und Nährstoffen auf regionaler und nationaler Ebene zu verbessern. Zu den Maßnahmen zählen das Schulspeisungsprogramm mit Produkten aus lokaler Produktion (Home Grown School Feeding – HGSF), die Anreicherung von Lebensmitteln, um Vitamin- und Mineralstoffmangel zu bekämpfen, die Ernährung von Müttern und Kindern und

die Diversifizierung der Ernährung. Das Thema Ernährung wurde in den Entwicklungsstrategien lange vernachlässigt, und eine Abstimmung der Akteure ist nötig, damit die Maßnahmen in Gang kommen. Bisher haben 25 Länder die CAADP-Compacts unterzeichnet, in denen die notwendigen Maßnahmen skizziert sind.

Resumen

La desnutrición es un problema muy serio y muy extendido en el continente africano. El Programa Integral para el Desarrollo de la Agricultura en África (CAADP), que forma parte de la Nueva Alianza para el Desarrollo Económico de África (NEPAD),

hace un llamado a la acción para afrontar los problemas alimentarios y nutricionales a nivel regional y nacional. Las medidas incluyen el Programa de Alimentación Escolar con Productos Locales (HGSF), la fortificación de alimentos para combatir las deficiencias de vitaminas y minerales, la nutrición materna e infantil, así como la diversificación de las dietas para mejorar la nutrición. El tema de la nutrición ha sido dejado de lado en las estrategias de desarrollo y se requiere una coordinación entre los actores para que las medidas tomen impulso. Hasta ahora, 25 países han suscrito los CAADP Compacts que esbozan las acciones necesarias.