



The African Nutrition Strategy: Policy Actions at Regional Level

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The State of Food and Nutrition security in Africa remains fragile. Over 240 Million are undernourished. And since most the Africa diets are largely starch-based, many millions more do not have access to the essential vitamins and minerals, therefore they suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. This situation has been exacerbated by the food crisis of the recent past and the high burden such as HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. Africa's spend on food alone and its food import bill exceeds \$30billion annually.

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 child bearing age. Annually 60% of the under-five children and 50% of maternal mortalities are due to malnutrition while the country specific statistics are as high as 60%.

This situation in a continent that can potentially feed itself and export food commodities to other regions of the world brings into question several issues; 1) The obtaining agriculture and food security policies 2) the organization and management of the national and regional nutrition system and coordination of programmes and actions thereof 3) the current levels and quality of capacity to deliver on key nutrition, health and agriculture programmes 4) and last but not least the ability and commitment to hold sectors/partners/stakeholders accountable for nutrition security actions, progress and outcomes along the value chains.

Since its inception in 2003, The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), has clocked a few 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. CAADP Pillar III in particular [**Increasing food supply, reducing hunger and improving responses to food emergency crises**], deliberately calls for regional and national sector reforms to directly address hunger, food insecurity and nutrition among the chronically poor and vulnerable populations.

The key priorities and common Investment Areas in these CAADP Plans include; Food and Nutrition Security and Emergency Preparedness (38%); Value Chain promotion and market access (34%); Development of production and productivity systems (18%), Enhanced institutional capacities and coordination –including enabling environment (5%); Sustainable land and water management (3%) Intensification; and Science and Technology applied in food and agriculture (1%)

Food and Nutrition Security Policies: 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. Therefore clarifying leadership and coordination among sectors is a major challenge to securing political support, building consensus, and mobilizing resources to stem the tide of malnutrition in Africa. Focusing on the major AU-NEPAD flagship programmes of home grown school feeding, infant young child and maternal nutrition, dietary diversity and food fortification remains central to all programming.

Diversifying production systems: Nutrition security is more than food quantity. Availability of and access to a sufficient quantity is a necessary **but not sufficient** response to African's burden of malnutrition. While food security is a prerequisite for development, global experience confirms that an adequate supply is not enough. Improving the dietary diversity, food quality (including safety aspects), availability and affordability of fruits, nuts/seeds and vegetables, fish, poultry and livestock products 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 for instance.

Looking ahead, the continent is poised to intensify its advocacy, capacity development, and revamping the nutrition systems at national, regional and continental levels. Major advocacy efforts signalling further political commitment include the Kampala, Uganda 2010 AU-Summit Decision to commemorate an “Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day” on 30th October each year in all member states. This is also backed by initiatives to strengthen the evidence base and information for nutrition through undertaking a major study on the “The Cost of Hunger in Africa: Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition”. One other major area is strengthening intra-African trade of strategic commodities for delivering nutrition better. And finally, introducing and keeping an annual food and nutrition security score card and delivering a comprehensive report to the constituencies, policy makers and political leaders. This annual status report will foster accountability and timely actions for improved nutrition.