



Linking agriculture and nutrition: potential of value chain approaches

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Currently, close to 1 billion people suffer from hunger and food insecurity. While these numbers are staggering, the problem of poor access to nutritious foods and to diets of adequate quality is even more daunting. Typically, poor households subsist on monotonous staple-based diets and lack access to nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, animal source foods (fish, meat, eggs, and dairy products) or wild foods of high nutrient content. Poor diet quality is a problem that affects not only the poorest of the poor, but also affects marginal populations in developing, transition, and developed countries. These populations rely on cheap sources of energy and consume excessive amounts of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods, which lead to increased risks of overweight and obesity and related chronic diseases.

Empirical evidence from agriculture-based development programs suggests that actions in the agricultural sector can lead to improved nutritional outcomes at a local level. In these projects, though, agricultural production and consumption by producer households is the primary focus. Yet the links between what is produced on the farm, the consumer, and the income received by the producer does not stop at the farm gate. Far from it: food is stored, distributed, processed, retailed, prepared and consumed in a range of ways that affect the access, acceptability, and nutritional quality of foods for the consumer. Producing for consumption in the home or for local markets remains important in many places, but, today, the more market oriented nature of agricultural policies means that more farmers are net-food buyers and are affected by commercial markets. Agricultural markets thus play a more important role in determining food availability and access—a shift reinforced by the role of urbanization in increasing the ratio of market consumers to market producers. Moreover, these markets are producing an increasingly differentiated array of products targeted at segmented consumer markets.

For this reason, if the agricultural sector is to play a more effective role in leveraging nutrition through increasing the access, acceptability, and quality of diets, there needs to be a greater focus on what happens between production and consumption (including in producer households). This means not just engagement with the agricultural sector, but with the other sectors involved as well. Approaches are needed to help overcome intersectoral barriers, which create disincentives to closer cooperation. One way of addressing these issues is through the adoption of “value chain” concepts. Value-chain approaches are already used in international development with the objective of enhancing the livelihoods of food producers, but they rarely consider diet quality and nutrition.

This presentation outlines if, why, and how value-chain concepts could and should be applied to enhance the ability of agriculture to leverage better nutrition. It finds that they are a promising way to enhance nutrition while also creating value for agriculture.

A brief and a full paper examining the potential of these approaches can be found at:
<http://2020conference.ifpri.info/>