

# AGRICULTURE FOR IMPROVED NUTRITION OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN NIGERIA – POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

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The first brief in this series looked at some of the key nutritional and agricultural indices in Nigeria and explored the relationship between agriculture and nutrition from a broad perspective. This second brief will examine some of the key policy considerations affecting the formulation and implementation of agriculture and nutrition interventions in Nigeria, and how policy makers can potentially bring the sectors together to plan and work towards improved nutrition of women and children.

## Agricultural Policies and Programmes

The current Nigerian National Agricultural Policy came into effect in 2001. It has as its objectives the achievement of self-sufficiency in basic food supply and the attainment of food security; increased production of export crops and agricultural raw materials for industries through improved production and processing technologies; rational utilization and improved protection of agricultural land resources for the sustainability of agricultural production; generation of gainful employment for Nigerians; and improvement in the quality of life of rural dwellers<sup>1</sup>. The responsibility for implementing the policy rests with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. There are other policies that have bearing on agricultural activities in Nigeria, including the National Fertilizer Policy, the National Policy on the Environment, the National Policy for Integrated Rural Development, and

<sup>1</sup> Federal Ministry of Agriculture (2001) National Agricultural Policy. Abuja, Nigeria

various fiscal, monetary and trade policies guiding macroeconomic activities in Nigeria.

Nigeria has over the years launched programmes to boost agricultural productivity. These include the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (1972), Operation Feed the Nation (1976), the Green Revolution Programme (1980), the National Special Programme for Food Security (2002), and various Agricultural Development Programmes funded by the World Bank between 1974 and 2009. There have also been a number of “Presidential Initiatives” between 1999 and 2007, aimed at increasing the production of various food crops notably the Presidential Initiatives on cassava, cotton, rice, cocoa, fisheries, rubber, livestock, and maize<sup>2</sup>. In addition, there are a multiplicity of agricultural research institutes in Nigeria which focus on developing improved products, processes and equipment to improve agricultural productivity in different areas.

## Nutrition Policies and Programmes

Nigeria has a National Policy on Food and Nutrition which was launched in 2002<sup>3</sup>. The overall goal of this policy is to provide guidelines to tackle the multi-faceted problems of food and nutrition, across different sectors and levels of the Nigerian society, using a multisectoral and multidisciplinary programme approach. Specific objectives of the policy include establishing a viable system for coordinating food and nutrition activities undertaken in the various sectors and at various levels of the society; incorporating food and nutrition considerations into development plans; allocating adequate resources toward addressing problems pertaining to food and nutrition; promoting habits and activities that will reduce the level of malnutrition and improve the nutritional status of the population; identifying sectoral roles and assigning responsibilities for the alleviation of malnutrition; enhancing care-giving capacity within

<sup>2</sup> Federal Ministry of Agriculture (2006) Nigeria National Report at the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, 7-10 March 2006, Porto Alegre, Brazil (available online at [www.icarrd.org/en/icard\\_doc\\_down/national\\_Nigeria.doc](http://www.icarrd.org/en/icard_doc_down/national_Nigeria.doc))

<sup>3</sup> Nigerian National Planning Commission (2002) National Policy on Food and Nutrition. Abuja, Nigeria



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households regarding child feeding and childcare practices, including addressing the care and well-being of mothers; ensuring that nutrition is recognized and used as an important indicator to monitor and evaluate development policies and programs; and improving food security at the household and the aggregate level to guarantee that families have access to adequate and safe food in both quantity and quality to meet nutritional requirements for a healthy and active life.

The National Committee on Food and Nutrition, under whose purview falls the coordination of nutrition programmes in Nigeria, has developed a National Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition in Nigeria which details activities aimed at addressing the basic, underlying, and immediate causes of malnutrition while promoting partnerships among all stakeholders working together to achieve results<sup>4</sup>. Since its launch in 2004, the Plan of Action is yet to be fully implemented. The framework for its implementation involves sectoral ministries, institutions of higher learning, the private sector, communities and community based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies. The Food and Nutrition policy and plan both have a lifespan of 15 years and remain operational until 2016.

Other policy documents which make mention of nutrition as part of their mandate include the National Policy on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Nigeria<sup>5</sup>, the Integrated Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Strategy document<sup>6</sup>, and the National Economic Empowerment

Development plan (NEEDS 2) which includes nutrition as a cross-cutting issue<sup>7</sup>.

Nutrition interventions in Nigeria have typically been implemented under the umbrella of programmes with broader health objectives. This excellent approach, in addition to leveraging resources maximally, recognizes and addresses the contributory roles of inadequate healthcare, poor hygiene and disease in the aetiology of malnutrition. Examples include the fostering of key household practices aimed at improving the nutritional situation of household members using the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses approach, the Vitamin A supplementation being implemented alongside the National Programme on Immunization, the community-based growth monitoring programmes that are implemented as part of Maternal and Child Health services in primary health centres across Nigeria; and the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Program which aims to provide a nutritionally adequate free meal for a child each school day alongside other preventive health services for Nigerian school children.

### Linking Policy in Agriculture and Nutrition

Thus far in Nigeria, there has not been a deliberate national policy thrust to link the agriculture and nutrition sectors for improved nutritional outcomes. Several of the agricultural policies and programmes mentioned earlier have the achievement or improvement of food security as desired outcomes; however they do not focus attention on the development and implementation of strategies to ensure that agricultural interventions translate into improved nutrition. The objectives are typically focused on improving productivity, income and rural infrastructure, with an assumption that achievement of better nutrition

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<sup>4</sup> Nigerian National Planning Commission (2004). National Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition in Nigeria. Abuja, Nigeria.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Ministry of Health (Nutrition Division) (2005) National Policy on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Nigeria. Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>6</sup> Federal Ministry of Health (2007) National Integrated Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Strategy. Abuja, Nigeria

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<sup>7</sup> Nigerian National Planning Commission(2004) Meeting Everyone's Needs: the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. Abuja, Nigeria



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is given once the above objectives are achieved. Research has however proven this assumption to be flawed. A participatory rapid assessment of household nutrition and food security in Nigeria that was carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organization in 1997 found that 30% of malnourished children came from rich, food secure households<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, an analysis done by Akinyele on food and nutrition security in rural Nigeria concluded that agricultural interventions that focus exclusively on increased production and incomes may have little impact on food security and nutrition<sup>9</sup>.

In order for agricultural interventions to impact positively on nutritional status, they must be “nutrition-sensitive”, which means that they must incorporate strategies that are known to improve household access to nutritious food. These include programmes targeted at women, those that increase small-scale food production and processing, and projects that improve the micronutrient content of commonly consumed food crops. The National Agricultural Policy, as well as other policies which influence agriculture and food production can be used as instruments for increasing the number of nutrition-sensitive agricultural programmes by making clear statements that foster inclusion of nutritional objectives and indicators in agricultural programmes. This will encourage state and local governments as well as the indigenous and international donor community to preferentially support agricultural programmes that enhance household nutrition.

The Nigerian Policy on Food and Nutrition, like its agricultural counterpart, also falls short on linking

the agriculture and nutrition sectors for more effective interventions. The policy makes mention of food security as a pre-requisite for improved population-level nutrition, but does not describe a clear institutional framework for engaging the agricultural sector. There is no existing multisectoral forum for planning and monitoring nutritional interventions, with the result that the agricultural policymakers and research communities are typically not involved in formulating interventions for improved household nutrition. For both agriculture and nutrition, the aim of government should be to institutionalize a culture of engaging expert professionals from several fields of expertise during policy formulation as well as in the planning and implementation of development programmes.

Another major gap in the Food and Nutrition policy is its failure to define a platform at which the nutrition community can suggest research priorities for the various agricultural research institutes and university departments of agriculture, food science and nutrition. These institutions have the capacity, through selective breeding and other techniques, to develop improved strains of various food crops with enhanced nutrient quality, such as cassava rich in Vitamin A, zinc-dense wheat varieties, iron-efficient soybeans and cherry tomatoes containing increased levels of antioxidants. Such initiatives can only be stimulated by an awareness of the prevailing nutritional challenges.

### Conclusion

Nigeria has launched a number of policies and programmes in the areas of both agricultural and nutrition, however these have so far not translated into improved nutritional indices for Nigerian women and children. Although the web of causation for malnutrition is complex, policy guidelines have the potential to create an enabling environment in which agricultural and nutrition programmes interact to enhance population level nutritional outcomes. In order to engender this collaboration, there is a need for greater involvement of the agricultural sector in the formulation of policies on nutrition, and vice versa.

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<sup>8</sup> FAO (1997) Participatory rural appraisal on food security and nutrition in Nigeria. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

<sup>9</sup> Akinyele I. (2009): Ensuring Food and Nutrition Security in Rural Nigeria: An Assessment of the Challenges, Information Needs, and Analytical Capacity. Nigeria Strategy Support Program (NSSP), Background Paper No. NSSP 007, IFPRI, November 2009.



## **Gender Informed Nutrition and Agriculture – A “Nutrition-Sensitive” Agricultural Programme**

The Gender Informed Nutrition and Agriculture programme (GINA) was an offshoot of an earlier programme supported by USAID - The Agriculture Nutrition Advantage (TANA) which was implemented by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in partnership with other agencies. TANA was a national programme aimed at getting policymakers to recognize that food and nutrition issues need to be prioritized in Nigeria’s development efforts. GINA II’s overall goal on the other hand was to improve the nutritional status of women and children. It aimed to reduce the number of underweight children in GINA communities by 10 percent by improving agricultural practices, enhancing the care-giving capacity of mothers with children, building the nutrition-related capacity of local service providers, and sensitizing key local government officials about the importance of nutrition. The project has so far been implemented with support from USAID in three communities in Nasarawa, Akwa Ibom, and Kano states.

The program’s strengths included the involvement of multiple partners such as FBFI, COMPASS, BASICS III, and USAID working together, the provision of logistics and good working environment because of supportive relationships with state and local government area officials, the willingness of community members to participate and donate resources, and the provision of suitable crops and facilities for dry season farming. The programme showed positive returns on child malnutrition reduction through community-based growth monitoring. The programme has also recorded some challenges, including inadequate understanding of aims, roles, and responsibilities of stakeholders, illiteracy and lack of basic numeric skills, and inadequate communication between stakeholders, for example, beneficiaries not knowing that small loans given and part of the programme should be refunded. The lessons learned from both TANA and GINA can be applied to develop other nutrition-sensitive agricultural inventions

*Note: This document is the second in a series of policy briefs that resulted from a workshop titled “Linking the Agriculture and Nutrition Sectors for improved Nutritional outcomes” which was hosted by the Nigerian Academy of Science in Abuja in November 2010.*