

Food-based micronutrient interventions: Key requirements for achieving SDG 2

A paper presented by Dr. Yemi Akinbamijo, Executive Director, FARA during the High-Level Political Forum at the Agriculture and Food Day

Date: 13th July 2017

Venue: Yale Club, 50 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York NY 10017 in New York City

1. Opening courtesies
2. Tribute to Late President Bingu wa Mutharika – getting the African quota sorted – No child should go to bed hungry. High level buy-in with the institutionalization of the ADFNS – Oct 31
3. Largest population growth is expected in Africa. A food-secure Africa is crucial to global food and nutrition security and the attainment of SDG 2.
4. The significance of having global goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs) speaks for itself. The goals have become a rallying point for countries, continents and the world around which attention or development should be focussed.
5. The targets and indicators and their publication not only offers a gauge for assessing progress but puts countries in a race that in itself inspires countries to compete, usually with good outcomes where everybody wins.
6. In Africa, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) is the **continental** framework that spells out the goals, targets and indicators for SDG 2 (food and nutrition security).
7. At national level, most African countries have aligned their agricultural strategies, investment plans and programmes to CAADP. These national frameworks define the field-level actions and investments that add up to achieve SDG 2 targets.
8. It is noteworthy that national level actors plan and implement agricultural actions primarily to achieve their national development priorities, and not SDG targets.
9. So, whereas alignment to SDG targets is a desirable objective for countries, it is not a primary driving force for them.

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



10. The alignment of national and continent frameworks to SDGs is an outcome that requires concerted effort by mandated supra-national entities such as FARA, SROs and CGIAR centres.
11. The Forum for Agricultural Research (FARA) is mandated to facilitate the alignment of national research and innovation strategies for improving food and nutritional security with the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A)—the continental framework for mobilising research and innovation to achieve CAADP targets and in particular the target for doubling agricultural productivity by 2025.
12. The S3A organises the portfolio of research and innovation required to achieve CAADP targets into four themes and three cross-cutting issues.
13. Nutrition security is a key component of the S3A theme on food systems and value chains. The S3A prioritizes nutrition because it (nutrition) provides a vital foundation for human development yet the prevalence of malnutrition remains unjustifiably high—one in every three children under 5 years is stunted and it is only in Africa and Oceania that the number of stunted children under 5 is not declining. According to UNICEF, in SSA this number of stunted children rose by 23% from 42 million in 1990 to 58 million in 2014
14. At the same time, over nutrition is on the rise with the prevalence of obesity among adults standing at 11%.
15. Nutrition is vitally important to development because when its status improves, it leads to a host of positive outcomes for individuals and families. The economic consequences of malnutrition represent losses of 11% of GDP every year in Africa, whereas preventing malnutrition delivers USD 16 in returns on investment for every USD 1 spent. In light of the scope of the nutrition challenge, there is now a push towards making agriculture to improve its nutritional outcomes, i.e. to be nutrition sensitive.
16. Micronutrient deficiency is a particularly insidious form of malnutrition. It is often referred to as ‘hidden hunger’ because it develops gradually over time, its devastating impact not seen until irreversible damage has been done. While a child may go to sleep each night with a full belly, micronutrient deficiencies mean that his or her body is still hungry for good nutrition.

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



agrifood.net

17. Micronutrient deficiency affects millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with women of reproductive age and children being the most vulnerable. The most prevalent micronutrient malnutrition in SSA are vitamin A and iron deficiency.
18. An estimated 163 million children and women of reproductive age are anaemic, while about 44% of pre-school children in the region are vitamin A deficient, and 24% of all child deaths are attributable to vitamin A deficiency.
19. Micronutrient deficiencies increase the risk of low birth weight, birth defects, stillbirth, impaired mental development and learning ability, wasting, stunting, and even death in pregnant women.
20. Although micronutrient deficiency presents serious challenges, the SDG 2 does not provide sufficiently explicit indicators for tracking progress of food and nutrition interventions that target micronutrients.
21. Recognising this gap the FAO has formulated nutrition-sensitive agriculture indicators to guide countries and programmes to track their progress. The CAADP results framework also provides a detailed set of indicators on micronutrient deficiencies. In fact whereas CAADP has two indicators for food security; it has five indicators for nutrition security.
22. Because of the enormity of the challenge posed by 'hidden hunger' to health, productivity and long term human capacities, FARA's interventions on nutrition are focused on overcoming micronutrient deficiencies.
23. Current efforts to address micronutrient malnutrition in SSA include:
 - (i) Supplementation programmes that provide iron and vitamin A capsules to women of reproductive age group and children under the age of five, through the health sector.
 - (ii) Food-based approaches which include commercial fortification of salt with iodine, cooking oil, sugar and margarine with vitamin A; flour and maize meal with iron, and B-vitamins; and the biological production of nutrient dense foods (Biofortification and their consumption).

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



24. In sub-Saharan Africa, many rural communities have limited access to commercially processed and fortified foods and often locally processed and unfortified foods are more readily available and cheaper. On the other hand, Biofortification has the potential to reach the remote rural areas not easily reached by the other initiatives.
25. Biofortification increases nutrient density through conventional plant breeding, agronomic practices or biotechnology. Examples of vitamins and minerals that can be increased through biofortification include Provitamin A carotenoids, zinc and iron.
26. Clearly, the contribution of agriculture to addressing micronutrient deficiencies is through the food-based approaches. It has already shown promising results over 12 years of concerted research. This research has shown that:
 - a. Conventional breeding can increase the nutrients in the crop
 - b. When consumed, nutrient levels can make a measurable and significant impact
 - c. Farmers are willing to grow, and consumers are willing to eat biofortified crops
27. For the reasons cited above, FARA's interventions in combating hidden hunger are focussed on Biofortification. FARA's roles span advocacy, information exchange, capacity strengthening, and brokering of partnerships.
28. FARA performs these roles in the context of S3A implementation, which in turn contributes to achievement of CAADP goals and ultimately SDG 2.
29. Cognisant of the fact that the changes necessary to achieve global nutritional targets happen at country level, FARA works with the SROs to assure that their agriculture strategies and in particular the research and innovation are nutrition-sensitive. The main mode of this engagement is through: (i) mainstreaming the S3A in national agricultural strategies; (ii) leveraging FARA's convening power, and (iii) thematic projects.
30. Here below I present two interventions by FARA and the recommendations drawn from FARA's engagement in combating hidden hunger.
 1. Convening policy makers and technocrats
 - a. Side event jointly organised by FARA and NEPAD at the CAADP PP in May/June in Kampala, Uganda. At this event technocrats discussed how best

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs

CO-HOSTED BY:



to track progress towards the attainment of CAADP targets on nutrition security. The meeting observed that:

- i. The capacity at regional and national levels required to monitor and track nutrition priority indicators is inadequate. This observation is important because capacity is a conditioning factor, without which the outputs of the monitoring and reporting effort cannot be relied upon.
 - ii. FARA thus aims to coordinate the bridging of these gaps by flagging it as a key investment area for S3A implementation.
 - iii. Urgent attention should be directed to harmonisation of indicators adopted by individual countries so as to enable them (countries) to easily align their investment plans with both continental and global requirements. The S3A implementation offers a good opportunity for addressing these gaps.
- b. Policy dialogues on nutrition security. These are being organised in the context of national consultations on rolling out the S3A to countries. The dialogues are held in the five initial countries for the roll out of the S3A i.e. Rwanda, Malawi, Egypt, Ghana and Senegal.

The policy dialogues provide countries facilitated space to discuss their nutrition status and what should be done to improve it including the setting of targets. Countries greatly appreciate a space that brings together all actors engaged in nutrition (health, agriculture, education, industry and farmers) to reach a common understanding on nutrition issues and to agree on how they will better coordinate their interventions in future.

2. Advocacy: FARA is currently partnering with CGIAR institutions (CIP, IITA, IFPRI, etc) to implement the Building Nutritious Food Basket (BNFB) with the goal of helping to reduce hidden hunger by catalysing sustainable investments in the utilization of bio-fortified staple crops at scale.
 - a. The project focuses on production of maize, cassava and sweet potato Biofortified with vitamin A as well as iron-rich beans.

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



- b. FARA is coordinating policy engagement and advocacy efforts for increased investments and policy change to support scaling up Biofortified crops at the regional and sub-regional levels in SSA.
- c. The advocacy also aims to incorporate in national and regional policies, programmes and investment plans, Biofortified crops as a food-based intervention to combating micronutrient deficiency.

Furthermore, FARA recently commissioned a Situational Analysis of regional and sub-regional policies, frameworks and strategies that support bio-fortification. The findings showed that:

- a. Policies in support of nutritional security have tended to be piecemeal and often lack a cohesive and coordinated approach. The study also highlighted the challenge of inadequate capacity to translate policies and strategies into action.
- b. Scaling up production and consumption of bio-fortified crops requires multiple interventions that include; (i) Sustaining the enabling policy environment at the global, regional and national levels, (ii) Behaviour change communication that facilitates the adoption of bio-fortified crops, and (iii) Identification of opportunities that have the potential to increase demand for bio-fortified crops e.g. home-grown school feeding programme, and social protection programmes.
- c. Most of the ongoing work on nutrition-sensitive agriculture is largely donor supported with little or no domestic funding. While the donor support is greatly appreciated, it is recognised that reliance on it alone is not sustainable. More advocacy is required to unlock local investment into this area. The cost of malnutrition should be an incentive for governments to act. The donor funding should also be used to leverage domestic funding for example through the productivity programmes supported by the World Bank (WAAP, APSA) and through TAAT and AARP.

31. Conclusion

- a. Nutrition and especially hidden hunger is a major challenge the world must address. The slow progress in this area can be characterised as scandalous.

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



- b. In Africa there is a growing movement of champions for nutrition. They are making some progress on the awareness and policy fronts. However their efforts will not have much traction unless the capacities required to implement the relevant policies and programmes are in place.
- c. The S3A is an excellent opportunity for scaling up/ mainstreaming nutrition in national and regional agricultural development plans and in particular in their research and innovation components.
- d. FARA welcomes partnership in strengthening its interventions towards achieving nutrition targets, especially in areas of capacity strengthening, and engagement with countries to increase their ownership and investment towards making agriculture nutrition-sensitive.
- e. We have talked and learnt enough about SDG2 – Now let's do something about it!

CO-HOSTED BY:

Follow the conversation on social media using: #Ag4SDGs



agrifood.net