

Paper on Policies for building resilience for food and nutrition security

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For the Expert Group Meeting on “Strategies for Eradicating Poverty to Achieve Sustainable Development for All”, May 8-11, 2017, UN Headquarters, New York

Introduction

Africa has made remarkable progress on a range of social and economic development metrics in recent years, but there is still much work to be done in developing the continent’s resilience to regional and global risks (Manley, 2015). Prior to 1990, Africa experienced very low levels of economic development. Poverty was rampant. Economies were faltering. Investments in infrastructure were low; political and economic governance were weak. Africa as a continent was fragile (Adesina, 2016).

Things have changed since then and Africa has been on the rise. Africa has witnessed rapid growth and development over the past two decades. Extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa declined by 28% between 1990 and 2015. Economic policies, the business and investment environment, and political stability all improved across the region. Africa became a significant target for foreign direct investment, which rose from \$42.8 billion in 2004-2008 to \$66.5 billion in 2015 (Adesina, 2016). According to the World Bank, the GDP of sub-Saharan Africa has grown at an annual rate of 4.4% over the past two decades, and is expected to continue to increase (IMF, 2015).

The Challenges

As heartening as these successes are, Africa still faces fundamental challenges and remains vulnerable to a range of evolving foreign and domestic risk factors. Populations in Africa are increasingly exposed to natural hazards, to man-made crises (socio-economic shocks, conflicts, etc.) and protracted crises that threaten to wipe out years of development (FAO, 2014a). The frequency, magnitude and impact of these shocks affecting Africa and its agriculture (including livestock, fisheries and forestry) have increased over the last few decades. Agriculture in Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and change, given that it is largely rain-fed and also due to the fact that productivity is already low; hence, there is limited “shock-absorption” capacity (IPCC, 2012).

The expected effects of climate change, notably higher temperatures, extreme weather events, drought, rising sea levels, disruption of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity, will seriously affect agriculture and rural livelihoods if no action is taken to improve adaptation and mitigation capacity at local, country and regional levels. Between 75 million and 250 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change by 2020 (IPCC, 2012). In some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent. Agricultural production, including access to food, is projected to be severely compromised in many African countries. This would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition (Müller, 2011). According to the African Development Bank (2011) adaptation costs in Africa will be \$20–30 billion per annum over the next 10 to 20 years.

Furthermore, Africa experiences significant governance challenges and conflicts. Most countries in Africa are at a relatively early stage in their democratization process and, remain fragile and unstable (UNECA, 2013). Most countries face significant weaknesses in legislative effectiveness, judicial independence, human rights and respect for the rule of law. Most conflicts mainly affect rural areas and their populations. This is particularly true of civil and armed conflicts, which have tripled in recent years and are increasingly becoming prolonged. Such conflicts damage agriculture, disrupt food production and food systems, fuel the plundering of crops and livestock, and cause loss of assets and incomes. As a result, they are drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition, both acute and chronic (FAO, 2014b).

These are threats not only to the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, but also to the achievement of the aspirations of the Malabo Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agricultural growth and comprehensive food and nutrition security cannot be attained without increasing the resilience of vulnerable livelihoods to disasters and crises (World Bank, 2012). Building resilience of households, communities and nations to such shocks in order to mitigate their impact on food security and nutrition has gained further importance in the agenda of stakeholders, from the continental to the local level (Montpellier Panel, 2012).

Building resilience is more than bouncing back

Building resilience on Africa's small farms starts with people and investing in their capacity to bounce back after a shock. These shocks could be external, such as droughts and floods that wipe out an entire livestock herd or destroy a crop field; or, they could mean loss of income and physical assets, many times due to unforeseen prolonged illness. If a family member falls ill, their care is often financed by selling off productive assets such as livestock or agricultural tools. Harvest barely meets more than three months of the family food needs for most of the farmers. African smallholder farm families are amongst the world's poorest because there has been inadequate investment in helping them bounce back after major shocks. One dry season or one bout with malaria can push families into a poverty trap (von Grebmer et al, 2013). When households have depleted their productive assets (finances, livestock, farming implements), they can barely survive. How do we expect such households to improve and sustain their productivity? How can we expect a bounce back for communities that have lost elasticity?

Addressing the Challenges

Determine the vulnerability of farmers

At the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), for the past ten years we have been investing in quantifying the livelihood assets in farming families in 6,000 rural households in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Malawi. Using the FANRPAN Household Assets Vulnerability Assessment (HAVA) tool, we categorize farm families into (1) fully viable and coping, (2) moderately vulnerable and (3) welfare, on the basis of quantified livelihood assets.

Five metrics determine vulnerability over time:

1. natural assets (e.g. farm size, soil quality, rainfall)
2. physical assets (e.g. farming tools, livestock)
3. financial assets (e.g. income, remittances)
4. human capital (e.g. number of able-bodied family members versus dependents)

5. social capital (e.g. knowledge, coping mechanisms, strength of community and extended family relationships)

Over a ten-year period, we saw a decline in resilience and more people sliding into poverty. Chronic poverty increased from 14% in 2003 to 22 % of all assessed communities in 2013. The middle class, experiencing moderate vulnerability, has declined by 13 %, with 5 % of the households graduating out of poverty, while 8 % shifted deeper into chronic poverty (FANRPAN, 2011).

What communities have told us is that because of persistent droughts, mainly attributed to climate change, agricultural productivity and income from farming has gone down by up to 70 %, and farm families are persistently selling their productive physical assets such as livestock and farm implements to meet food requirements, education and medical bills.

Farmers bounce back with appropriate support. We have also witnessed the potential of farm families, as they respond positively to retooling with both food aid and relevant livelihood assets.

For too long in the development game, we have concentrated on no winners, but just losers and survivors. This explains why one billion people worldwide go to bed hungry every day and why up to 5 million children die annually as a result of malnutrition. The sad thing is that most of these deaths happen in farm families; the very people charged with the responsibility of feeding the nation are failing to meet their family food and nutritional requirements.

We cannot improve what we do not measure. There is a lot we do not know on how best to prepare farm families for shocks and how these interventions should differ amongst affected farmers. Farmers who cannot feed their families are a liability to the nation. Retooling smallholder farmers with productive assets is an imperative in building resilience. This will increase farmers' ability to bounce back to their original state or, help them become better off than they were before the shock. With climate change predicted to reduce agricultural productivity by up to 30 % in Africa, policy makers must act now to ensure that post-shock interventions are not solely about rescuing farmers with food aid but about building their resilience to withstand subsequent shocks (FANRPAN, 2011).

Build resilience

Building resilience means helping people, communities, countries, and global institutions prevent, anticipate, prepare for, cope with, and recover from shocks and not only bounce back to where they were before the shocks occurred. Food and nutrition security are, in themselves, important elements of individual resilience, but they can also enhance the resilience of whole economies by improving the health and productivity of individuals. At the same time, food and agricultural systems themselves need to be resilient to shocks, both large and small, to help preserve food availability and access, even when disaster strikes (Shenggen et al, 2014). How can we then create agricultural and food systems that contribute to human resilience through food and nutrition security and are themselves resilient to shocks?

Many efforts have been made recently to break the silos between the food-security, nutrition, and livelihoods sectors and to promote a global and comprehensive approach that includes both nutrition-specific interventions (interventions that address the immediate causes of malnutrition) and nutrition-sensitive interventions (those that address underlying and basic causes of malnutrition and avoid negative impacts on nutrition) (Bhutta et al. 2008).

Agriculture has a key role to play in both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. It can improve people's diets by increasing the availability, affordability, and consumption of diverse, safe, and nutritious foods and diets aligned with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability (FAO, 2014b).

The complex causes of nutrition and the wide range of participants influencing food systems need to be addressed through a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach. Implicitly, this means understanding the relationships among the actors, how they can work together and how they influence one another. Considering the entire food system in addressing nutrition provides a framework in which to determine, design and implement agricultural and food-based interventions to improve nutrition. Food systems are changing rapidly, but how they evolve can be influenced by policy decisions.

Ending the disconnect between agriculture and nutrition

Agricultural development initiatives have the potential to improve the nutrition of those most vulnerable to malnutrition, particularly women of child bearing age and young children below five years. While the link between agriculture and nutrition seems intuitive, it cannot be taken for granted. Direct evidence linking agricultural programs and nutrition outcomes is weak. The intense focus of many agricultural programs on increasing productivity of staple foods and value chain development can come at the expense of nutritional security. To fulfil their potential for reducing poverty and hunger, agricultural development initiatives must incorporate nutrition-sensitive interventions, and ensure consumption of diverse diets with essential proteins, minerals and vitamins and sufficient caloric intake.

Creating a Conducive Policy Environment

In order to maximize the nutritional impact of measures designed to improve resilience, the legislative and policy environment has to be strengthened. The following opportunities can be seized:

- *Convincing policymakers of the case for nutrition-sensitive resilience measures.* Policymakers concerned with resilience building must be made aware of the social, economic, and human costs of undernutrition. This awareness will increase the likelihood that nutritional considerations are fully taken into account in the development of policy, program, and coordination frameworks for disaster risk management (DRM) and food security.
- *Integrating nutrition in resilience/DRM planning and supporting synergies with food-security and nutrition policies, strategies, and coordination mechanisms.* Explicit nutrition objectives should be included in resilience and DRM policy frameworks as a means of ensuring that the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups are addressed and that resilience-building and DRM programs do not have negative impacts on nutritional status. Furthermore, there are opportunities to build stronger links between, on the one hand, development-oriented multi-sectoral policy support and coordination initiatives on food security and nutrition and, and on the other hand, more emergency-related coordination bodies and initiatives related to DRM and resilience at national, regional, and global levels.
- *Using nutrition as an enabling entry point for gender-sensitive resilience-enhancing measures.* Adopting a nutrition lens (that is, asking who is most at risk of malnutrition

and why) can be a neutral and practical entry point for gender-sensitive and equitable resilience programming. By orienting activities toward household food security and nutrition (for example, supporting women to grow vegetables for nutrition purposes, introducing labor-saving technologies to enhance women's availability for child care, and so on), one can address power relations, distribution of domestic chores, and women's access to productive resources without having to emphasize these subjects overtly.

- *Integrating nutrition to agricultural development efforts.* FANRPAN is leading an Agriculture to Nutrition African initiative focusing on how agriculture can deliver positive nutrition outcomes to smallholder farm families through the implementation of robust, evidence-based nutrition-sensitive interventions. To create a link between agriculture and nutrition, ATONU provides technical assistance to integrate tailored nutrition-sensitive interventions into agriculture development programs/projects through (i) generating tools and frameworks for diagnosing the opportunities to incorporate tailored nutrition-sensitive interventions into agriculture projects; (ii) provision of technical assistance for designing, testing, and rigorously monitoring and evaluating results of the tailored nutrition-sensitive interventions ; (iii) documenting best practices and evidence and adding to the agriculture for the nutrition knowledge base; and (iv) advocating for evidence-based decision making at all levels; and (v) strengthening the capacity of participating individuals and institutions to effectively mainstream NSIs. Capacity building will help to institutionalize the integration of agriculture and nutrition, and up-scaling of successful interventions.

Greater integration of nutrition-related information in food and agricultural information systems has several benefits, including improved monitoring of threats, situation and context analysis, and causal analysis. All of these attributes are beneficial for supporting resilience planning in the food and agriculture sectors. Effective capacity development, improved programming, and mobilization of financial and human resources will require developing the evidence base for effective strengthening of resilience and improved food security and nutrition.

Conclusion

In general, several policy commitments and strategies documented in this report are yet to generate the expected results. Many country experiences illustrate the feasibility of the right combination of cross-sectoral policies and programs towards eliminating hunger and malnutrition. Countries in the region need to clearly review and exert effort in order to improve the translation of political commitments and declarations into effective programs on the ground, particularly in the context of the ambitious targets set in the African Union's Malabo Declaration for 2025 and the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030.

Continued policy reforms to sharpen the focus and the creation of an enabling environment for investment and participation by all relevant stakeholders is critical to ending hunger and achievement of food security and nutrition. Specifically, development of innovative resource mobilization from a broad set of public and private sector actors and financial instruments is essential if actions are to be implemented in a sustained manner and to scale in sub-Saharan Africa. As the magnitude and impact of crises and disasters increase – aggravated by the overexploitation of natural resources and climate change – more and more households, communities and governments in the region are less able to absorb, recover and adapt, making them increasingly vulnerable to future shocks. Governments must intensify their efforts to ensure that years of gradual agricultural development gains are not wiped out by

recurrent shocks. Increasing the resilience of agricultural livelihoods and promoting and financing climate smart agricultural practices would be a powerful lever to help deliver on the pledge of the Sustainable Development Goals “*to leave no one behind*”.

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