



NutriHAF Policy Brief No. 2

Towards the Integration of Nutrition and Gender in the Agriculture System of Ethiopia

Executive Summary

The Agriculture sector in Ethiopia is still practiced in a traditional way and has become incapable to provide food and nutrition security for the majority of the population. As a result, malnutrition has remained to be one of the leading health challenges in Ethiopia being responsible for 53% of infant and child deaths (USAID, 2014). With the objective of identifying policy gaps in implementing nutrition sensitive agriculture at local, regional and national level in Ethiopia and situating best pathways of addressing identified issues, data was collected at Yayu and Hurumu districts, and Illu Ababora zone of South-West Ethiopia. Then, a follow-up policy advocacy workshop was undertaken at national level. The findings show that the current agricultural policies are hardly nutrition sensitive. In addition, the existing coordination among different sectors (particularly agriculture and health sectors) in mainstreaming nutrition is weak. The findings also indicated that the current agricultural extension systems is focusing on the production of staples and cash crops such as coffee. As a result, horticultural crops production, marketing and consumption still remains neglected. The findings highlight the need for inculcating nutrition in agriculture, education and health sectors, and the need for strong integration between these sectors in mainstreaming nutrition. Home economics position needs to be also re-structured at local, regional and national level with a clear mission and budget.

Introduction

Despite the fact that the agriculture sector of Ethiopia is the key driver of the economy and livelihood for 80% of the population, its productivity remains to be low and could not feed the growing population of the country (MoFED, 2013; FAO, 2014). The country is one of the most food-insecure countries in the world where the number of food insecure people reached 10.2 million by end of 2015 (FAO, 2016). In addition, it has been estimated that chronic child under-nutrition cost Ethiopia approximately 55.5 billion birr, i.e. 16.5 percent of its GDP in each year (UNICEF, 2013). Natural disasters such as El Nino droughts, low productivity of the sector due to limited access to agricultural technologies coupled with ill-conceived agriculture and nutrition policies have been some of the underlying causes for the food and nutrition insecurity in the country (Taylor, 2012; Feed the Future, 2016). This brief contributes in identifying policy gaps in ensuring nutrition sensitive agriculture in Ethiopia in general and South-West Ethiopia in particular and suggests some policy options in addressing the identified issues.

Approach

This brief is prepared based on data collected at district and zonal level and a follow up policy advocacy workshop at national level on identifying best pathways in diversification of agriculture for balanced nutrition in Ethiopia in February, 2017.

Initially, an interview guide was developed to collect data at district (Yayu and Hurumu woredas) and at zonal (Illu Ababora zone) of Oromia regional state, South-West Ethiopia. Data was collected from local officials and experts working in the area of agriculture (including agricultural extension, horticulture and crop sciences), nutrition, health, marketing and gender. Based on the identified policy issues and gaps at district and zonal level, a policy advocacy workshop was undertaken with stakeholders from regional and federal offices. The main guiding themes used for policy advocacy include: nutrition sensitivity of the current agricultural policies, production and consumption of horticultural crops, value chains and gender issues.

Results

The policy advocacy workshop undertaken at district, zonal and national level identifies policy issues and gaps in making agriculture diversified and nutrition sensitive. The findings at all levels emphasize that the current agricultural policy of the country lacks nutrition sensitivity. The following are some of the main issues identified.

▪ Lack of integration of nutrition into extension and advisory services

It has been identified that both health extension agents and development agents lack knowledge on nutrition and they have been hardly in a position to convey nutrition messages properly. While health extension agents focus mainly on hygiene and family planning, development agents focus on production and marketing of crops and livestock, particularly cash crops. Nutrition education has long become no one's responsibility and a neglected sector. In addition, low attention has been given to home economics experts who are frontiers to handle nutrition issues at the bureau of agriculture.

The findings recognized the existence of national nutrition policy that involves nine ministries. However, the coordination among them in terms of policy implementation is regarded as weak.

Both the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) activities on nutrition have not been coordinated. In addition, human nutrition has not been practically and properly inculcated into the education sector (particularly adult education system) due to lack of budget and clearly defined responsibilities.

▪ Less attention given to horticulture sector

The findings show that attention is given for staple crops. Horticulture remains to be a neglected sector. In addition, horticulture production is limited because of factors related to shortage of wetland holdings, lack of irrigation infrastructure, lack of access to inputs and low awareness to the benefits. The current agricultural extension policy promotes mostly production and productivity and gives less attention to nutrition. Since home economics/nutrition experts are few and are only present at woreda level, they cannot address all farmers effectively. In addition, there exists confusion on government structure that puts rain-fed horticultural production under the responsibility of the agriculture office and irrigated production under the irrigation authority. Awareness of farmers towards the importance of fruits and vegetables has been reported to be low and hence they prefer production of staple crops such as maize and cash crops such as coffee. Cereal based monotonous diets have been the main consumption pattern.

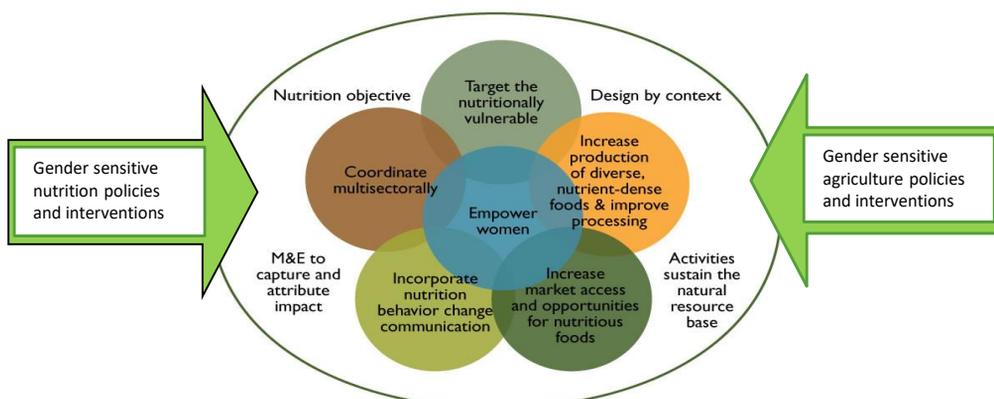


Figure 1: Six guiding principles to improve nutrition impact through agriculture (adopted from Du, Lidan, 2014)

The findings also show that production of horticultural crops are limited in the study area and hence market problem is not a concern at the moment.

▪ **Ambiguous participation of women in nutrition sensitive agriculture**

Women play a dominant role in the production of vegetables. They are also responsible for meeting nutritional needs of families given the fact that they are involved in production and especially preparation of food for their families. Although the current policy supports women empowerment and equality, the involvement of women in implementing nutrition sensitive agriculture is poor.

Women still carry the burden both at home and in the field. Production of garden vegetables which are cultivated by women has added more work burden to women though they can be a source of income for them as well. In addition, the current gender policy by itself added more burden to women than before because it advocates women to participate on various activities in addition to their home tasks. This has put burden on women in contributing more in production and processing of vegetables. On the other side, technologies introduced to address women needs (such as modern cooking stoves) are not accessible to most rural women and could not meet their needs. Women have been challenged by low capacity of using technologies, and access to labor and time saving technologies are also low. As a result, implementation of gender sensitive nutrition policies has remained to be a challenge.

▪ **Lack of proper implementation of existing nutrition policy**

Despite the need to revise or develop specific policies on nutrition sensitivity, the existing nutrition policy lacks proper implementation.

The existing nutrition policy provides less attention on how to improve food habits; rules and regulations to fix responsibility for the proper implementation of the policy documents has been missing; the health extension agents are not well-equipped with budget and skills to train the farmers and to implement nutrition policies.

Production of vegetables and fruits under coffee forest has been also challenged by the damage of wild animals. Wild animal management policies and regulations lack proper implementation.

Policy Recommendations

The following are policy recommendations echoed by participants of local, regional and national stakeholders during policy advocacy workshops.

1. There is a need to strengthen and follow-up the newly designed extension strategy.
2. Nutrition is multi-dimensional and needs multi-sectoral partnership.
3. There is a need to have a home economics/nutrition structure with a clear mission and budget from national to woreda levels.
4. Sector offices need to work together to have clear and coherent regulations and guidelines towards implementing policies that address less benefited (marginalized) groups in the society.
5. Horticultural crops need to be linked to potential local markets to motivate farmers engage in horticulture and increase their income through higher production and marketing. Increased income could also help families to purchase nutritious food.
6. Nutrition policies and strategies could be made gender sensitive given the fact that women play a vital role in production of vegetables and fruits.
7. There is more need to be worked out by sectoral offices on implementing nutrition policies and strategies by revising guidelines and programs and raising awareness to implementers.

References/Further Reading

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