



SDC Working Paper on Nutrition

This content does not reflect SDC's approved policies, but reflects the position of the SDC internal working group on nutrition and is meant to give guidance, also regarding SDC's input to the ICN2.

Background (Why)

Hunger and malnutrition are a major challenge in today's world. While 842 million people chronically suffer from hunger today, two billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies and 1.4 billion are overweight¹. More than one third of young children suffer from under- or malnutrition with devastating consequences on their health, learning capacities, future earning potential and economic development for whole societies. Adequate nutrition in the first 1000 days of child's development is crucial as under- or malnutrition during this period have irreversible consequences on children's cognitive and physical development and thus are crucial for the individuals concerned as well as for social and economic development of societies. The rapidly increasing number of obese people worldwide, and particularly in developing countries, shows that the challenge of diverse, nutritious and balanced diet remains topical during the whole life-cycle of an individual and for societies in various contexts. Therefore, investments in improved nutrition are smart, as only people reaching their full potential can contribute positively to sustainable development. This is also reflected in the preparation for the Post-2015 - Agenda where food security and nutrition for all through sustainable agri-food systems is proposed as a stand-alone goal.

Approach (How)

SDC works on nutrition with a multi-sectorial and rights-based approach drawing on humanitarian and development instruments and lobbying for a change in agri-food systems² to make them more sustainable, nutrition-enhancing and healthy. SDC performs both, *nutrition specific* interventions, which supply the individual with the necessary macro- and micronutrients to avoid deficiencies or treat severe malnutrition as well as *nutrition sensitive* interventions which address the underlying causes of malnutrition, such as access to sufficient and diverse food, to clean water and sanitation, to health care services as well as empowerment of women as key actors for assuring diverse and nutritious diets. SDC can mobilize various units in nutrition-related efforts and outcomes responding to the size and impact of these challenges.

Fields of action (What)

Nutrition in (lasting) crises situations

SDC engages in humanitarian contexts to enhance the nutritional status of affected populations including access to nutritional food for IDPs and refugees in conflict areas. Approaches targeting adequate nutrition of small children, pregnant and lactating mothers are privileged. Direct Food Aid with nutritious food, such as milk-powder or supplements, addressed to people affected by acute or chronic under- or malnutrition significantly contributes to prevent irreversible physical or mental damages and improve nutritional status. SDC engages in cash and in kind programs, including school feeding programs. In protracted crises, promoting self-help and resilience building include securing access and control over land and natural resources as well as enhancing the nutritional status of the population.

Nutrition sensitive Agriculture

SDC promotes sustainable ecological agriculture by smallholders to improve dietary diversity, as it produces a diversity of food with nutritious value and improves resilience of communities to the impacts of climate change. Preserving biodiversity is key to ensuring nutritious primary production and thus diverse diets. Biofortification of single crop varieties with specific micronutrients is recognized as one possible intervention to combat malnutrition. However, it cannot be the most sustainable

¹ The Report on the State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013 by FAO, WFP and IFAD

² Food systems contain the resources, environment, people, institutions and processes with which food is produced, processed, stored, distributed, prepared and consumed.



alternative to improve dietary diversity or to build resilient agricultural production systems³. The potential of alternatives to animal sourced proteins deserves due attention, particularly in light of the growing pressure on natural resources (land/water). The prospects of pulses- and insect-based proteins in food shall be explored, taking into consideration their cultural acceptance. Models of diverse agricultural production in dense urban settings (urban farming) are also to be considered.

Nutrition preserving and enhancing processing and storage

The promotion of nutrition sensitive techniques, which reduce the loss of vitamins and minerals during food processing and storage, is a vital and significant contribution to improved nutrition. A smart utilization of agricultural raw material, not wasting parts with high nutritious value and considering food safety issues can also be investigated. Fortification of staple crops during processing or household cooking can be significant interventions for short term improved nutrition, without having the potential to fully replace the need for more diverse and sustainable primary production.

Nutrition and Health

Malnutrition is an important underlying cause of many acute childhood illnesses. It compromises the immune system and increases susceptibility to communicable and non-communicable disease. Particular attention is to be given to the needs of pregnant and lactating mothers. Balanced nutrition, supplementation, birth spacing and good breastfeeding practices are to be promoted. Health professionals need to be well prepared for the prevention, detection and treatment of nutrition disorders. Jointly with specialized Agencies, SDC supports the full implementation of quality nutrition related interventions in the Maternal, neo-natal and child health programs (MNCH), including training and supervision of health professionals, as well as strengthening of monitoring and evaluation.

Water and Nutrition

Access to clean drinking water remains a challenge for many millions of poor people in urban and rural settings. Considering the linkages of hygienic measures to nutrition and water being an essential part of food preparation, promoting access to safe drinking water is an important contribution to improved nutrition and taken up in a number of SDC-supported programs.

Education & communication on nutrition

Understanding of the significance of nutrition for personal and societal development has been growing, but consistent awareness campaigns towards the general public as well as decision makers are needed to accelerate the transformations towards nutrition enhancing frame conditions. Well informed consumers can positively influence availability, accessibility and affordability of diverse nutritious food to combat under- and malnutrition. Transparent product declarations regarding nutritious value of food is important and misleading promotion of products which are energy-dense but of poor nutritional value are to be banned. Including nutrition into education programs for children, youth and adults and raising the awareness of hygienic measures on nutrition and health are other crucial milestones for healthy societies.

Responsibilities of stakeholders (Who)

Governments

Governments are responsible for establishing adequate policy frameworks to make the food systems more nutrition enhancing (sustainable, equitable and resilient, healthy). The need for policy coherence requires mechanisms of collaboration between ministries and entities dealing with agriculture, health, water and education. SDC supports the implementation of such mechanisms to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of nutritional policies, programs and plans.

Multilateral or Regional Governance and Multi-stakeholder Initiatives

Trade policies, regional or global, influence market prices for food, access to and availability of quality products. They influence decisions on local food production and import/export strategies. Involving all relevant stakeholders in finding adequate solutions is crucial for their success and sustainability. Since

³ Biofortification of crops can be achieved through traditional breeding methods or through Genetical Modification. Regarding Genetical Modification of crops, see SDC's Position on GMO.



2010, the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has united different stakeholders in a collective effort to improve nutrition at national and global levels. SDC engages in a policy dialogue with multilateral partners on nutrition issues and it has supported the SUN Movement in a selected way.

Private Businesses

Throughout developing countries, food value chains have become rapidly globalized: Food and agri-businesses are key players in making nutritious food available and affordable to consumers. Sustainable and nutrition sensitive business practices offer a variety of nutritious and affordable food to consumers, rich in vitamins and minerals while reducing and avoiding excess sugar, salt or trans-fat. Misleading marketing of energy dense and nutrition-poor food, particularly to children, is excluded from such business practices. SDC encourages domestic and international businesses to developing nutrition sensitive products and sustainable business practices.

Civil Society Organizations (CSO)

CSO can play important roles, like increasing public awareness about nutrition and its impact on development. They are key actors in transferring different interests regarding availability, affordability and accessibility of nutritious and culturally acceptable food at policy level. Bringing producer and smallholders perspectives in governmental strategies on agriculture, lobbying for rules giving fair market opportunities to SME's and assuring transparency and accountability by all stakeholders are additional important roles of CSO. SDC encourages the participation of CSO in multistakeholder platforms and dialogues on nutrition relevant issues.