

A new approach to tackle nutrition issues facing the same old problems of sustainability

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In Rwanda and Burundi a project with a new approach on nutrition for food security is being piloted by UN Agencies that act as “Deliver as One”. This project, co-financed by SDC, contributes to poverty reduction and improvement of health by reducing causes of malnutrition, and in particular improving nutritional status of children under five, pregnant and lactating mothers. However innovative the approach of the project is, a project visit proved that long-term success and sustainability depend on the adaptability on-farm and the acceptability of the proposed solutions by the targeted households.



Project visit at two participating farmers to the ONE UN nutrition project in front of their vegetable gardens technology set-up, Nyamagabe District, Rwanda, November 2015.

This “One-UN Nutrition” project is a novelty in the sense that it has an innovative approach on nutrition. Nutrition needs to be tackled from a variety of angles such as health, food production, education, training, livestock breeding, home gardening, children feeding and financial management. Hence, the respective UN agencies WHO, UNICEF, WFP and FAO are implementing together with international NGOs and local partners. The project itself and the nutrition issue are not specifically a new issue for small holder farmers’

development. Already in the 1980s development approaches tried to improve home gardening (ex. self-help approach) with fruit trees and vegetables as well as composting to improve nutritional status of children. The difference nowadays is realizing the complexity of the nutritional issue. To reduce malnutrition and to improve nutritional status, neither WFPs’ fortified food supplies are enough nor are the temporarily set-up feeding centres during food shortage periods. These all are survival measures that do not guarantee livelihood development of poor households.

However, the project is following a livelihood systems approach using a variety of technologies, instruments and management tools of which I am not entirely convinced that they all are going to work. Furthermore, some of them are well-known such as for example using home gardens for vegetable and fruit production to improve child nutrition. For the home garden I wonder if the technology for growing vegetables is going to work as houses and home gardens are usually at the top of the hill and water is found at the valley bottom. The women must get the water from down below to water the vegetables. This is not obvious in the dry season. Usually vegetables are grown in plant nurseries nearby or besides rivers and other water sources.

Also the renting/lending/donating of small ruminants such as goats, pigs, rabbits, chicken is not a new concept and hence it still comes with all the known side-effects such as giving away the donated animal(s) to reimburse old debts or selling the animal(s) to get needed cash for other household necessities. Household stratification is complex and difficult but necessary to know who can afford to rise and reproduce animals and who cannot.

Conclusion

A major constraint of this project to become a success story is its funding timeline, which is definitely too short to be able to consolidate and to reach outcome level. This is however a general problem of ALL the visited projects: The project phases are too short. Hence, at closing and phasing out stage, the project will not be able to show any outcomes. The project implementers will rather have to content themselves with producing some interesting case studies that show the potential of the project with a projection into the future and for eventually other donors that might step in to consolidate project activities.

One-UN Nutrition project

The project is a direct reaction and example of implementing the international calls summed up in the 2010 Scale Up Nutrition (SUN) Framework for Action for repositioning nutrition toward the center of social and economic development and scaling up effective interventions. The SUN Framework for Action calls for national leadership and advocacy, multi-sector nutrition planning and community based programs at the decentralized level. There is a strong partnership between the UN agencies (WHO, UNICEF, FAO, WFP), the Governments and NGOs in nutrition, food security and health in supporting the implementation of the multi-sectoral approaches and the scaling-up.

The project, coordinated by the four UN agencies and focusing on 'Deliver as One', follows coordinated actions combining resources to avoid overlap and duplication, and therefore maximizing the impact. It offers the UN agencies to bring their expertise together within a common geographic focus through better planning, prioritization and targeting same households. The activities take place in two districts of Rwanda (Nyamagabe and Rutsiro) and one province of Burundi (Ngozi) where incidences of chronic malnutrition and poverty are at highest level and synergies with other SDC activities are given. The facilitation and support through the coordinated UN mechanism include capacity building that allows the governments to adopt good practices and scaling up. SDC uses the UN coordination mechanism to pilot the implementation of the approach at local level.

Having launched the program in both Burundi and Rwanda, opened up space of experience and learning exchanges, and added to the regional development of SDC programs in the Great Lakes region.

The program interventions are community based. Hence, all communities or villages within the program area are benefitting directly or indirectly. In this sense, the program benefits a combined population of about 1.4 million or 280'000 households. The direct beneficiaries however are children under five, pregnant and lactating women and health providers.

More information

[Bureau de coopération suisse au Rwanda](#)

[DEZA - Grosse Seen \(Ruanda, Burundi, Kongo\)](#)

[SDC project description](#)

[FAO Rwanda](#)

[WFP Rwanda](#)

[UNICEF Ruanda](#)

[UNICEF: Community-based nutrition programs in Rwanda](#)

[REACH \(Accelerating the Scale-Up of Food & Nutrition Actions\)](#)

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