



# DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & PRACTICES

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## Building sustainable links between agriculture and nutrition

TODAY, HIGH LEVEL COMMITMENTS FOR NUTRITION ARE STRONGER THAN EVER BEFORE. MANY INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENTS AND ORGANISATIONS ARE INVESTING THEMSELVES TO INCREASE THEIR EFFORTS IN FAVOUR OF BETTER NUTRITION THROUGH MULTISECTORAL DYNAMICS. YET, 821 MILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE ARE UNDERNOURISHED<sup>1</sup>. 150 MILLION CHILDREN SUFFER FROM CHRONIC MALNUTRITION AND MANY REGIONS ON THE PLANET ARE FACED WITH THE SIMULTANEOUS PRESENCE OF SEVERAL FORMS OF MALNUTRITION<sup>2</sup>. HISTORICALLY ACTIVE IN THE AREAS OF AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION<sup>3</sup>, GRET IS USING ITS REFLECTIONS AND ITS EXPERIENCE TO LINK THESE TWO ISSUES.

**A**griculture is recognised as playing a deciding role in tackling nutrition issues. For several years now, it has been the subject of political, economic and methodological investments for nutrition. Recent work<sup>4</sup> highlights the growing success and increasing quality of “nutrition-sensitive” agricultural development programmes. The factors for this success are increasingly well identified, as is progress remaining to be achieved – primarily the issue of sustainability.

### Integrating agriculture - nutrition at organisational level

Initially, GRET’s actions in the area of nutrition concerned specific food and healthcare for women and young children, in collaboration with the local private sector and healthcare systems<sup>5</sup>. Few studies had been conducted on links with food security for the families concerned. In parallel, within certain agricultural projects, farmers and local organisations expressed requests relating to the quality of family food, but these were not explicitly translated in project logic.

Consideration of nutrition as such in agricultural projects is a recent phenomenon; initially it was done from the top down, driven by new orientations in rural development policies and programmes. To integrate agriculture and nutrition, it was necessary to decompartmentalise these two sectors –

**GRET**

GRET is an international fair development NGO that has been working for more than 40 years from field level to political level to combat poverty and inequalities.

## STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION BY ENSURING CONSISTENCY OF NATIONAL PROJECTS WITHIN A REGIONAL PROGRAMME

The programme to improve food and nutrition security in West Africa (Asanao) covers five countries: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. It was initiated in 2018 by GRET, involving structures that have been long-standing partners, such as the Guinean entrepreneurs' centre (MGE) and the Federation of non-governmental organisations in Senegal. Apart from support for sectoral actions (agriculture or nutrition), transversal activities focusing on strengthening of capacities, capitalisation and exchanges enable bridges to be developed between the two dimensions through a regional dynamic. In this way, Asanao is a lever to create a sustainable connection between agriculture and nutrition in strategies, actions and contributions to public debate by GRET and its partners in the countries concerned, as well as more broadly at regional level.

differentiated as much by their purposes as by their approaches, their targets and their stakeholder networks. In order for the construction of links between agriculture and nutrition to be structural for GRET and for its local partners, it was necessary to invest in terms of internal dialogue, joint planning, and gradual integration of new skills and methods<sup>6</sup>.

### Agroecology: production systems that are particularly favourable to nutrition

Agroecology is a form of agriculture promoted by stakeholders concerned by fair and sustainable development, because it responds to major agro-environmental and socio-economic challenges, both locally and globally.

Supported in many of GRET's actions, agroecological systems, in cases where their development is based on appropriate technical and financial support schemes, are emerging as a sustainable solution to food insecurity among farming families: they make it possible to diversify food production and increase the availability of food with added nutritional value, they stabilise diversified production and income from one year to the next and strengthen resilience to shocks, in particular to climate shocks. They also make it possible to avoid contaminating the environment and populations, and are accessible to poor farming families who are likely to be most vulnerable to malnutrition.



In Myanmar and Madagascar, projects focusing on agroecology introduced discussions with families on the links between food and nutrition issues and their production practices<sup>7</sup>. This integration makes it possible to maximise the nutritional effects of agroecological systems, and to prevent any risks relating in particular to management of parents' workload between productive activities and care provided to young children.

### Enhancing the value of local products with added nutritional value

Local agrifood value chains play a particularly important role in the availability and accessibility of quality local foods. GRET is conscious of this issue and supports numerous stakeholders in these value chains so that they can become inclusive, sustainable and generate income, but also so that processed products are healthy, nutritious, appealing and affordable. Technical support for businesses and stakeholders in processing and commercialisation, in terms of both quality and marketing, is therefore central to the development of a sustainable local processed food offer with added nutritional value.

GRET and its partners also contributed to the development of value chains such as cow's milk in Senegal, a local alternative to poorer quality imported milk<sup>8</sup>; nutrient-rich parboiled rice and red palm oil in Guinea<sup>9</sup>; corn semolina in Haiti<sup>10</sup>, and thirty fortified foods intended specifically for young children and their mothers in ten countries.

To increase the nutritional effects of these approaches and make them sustainable, it is vital to have a broader analysis of eating practices and preferences specific to each context, and to facilitate improvement of food behaviour among consumers with a view to better nutrition. This is what is being implemented as part of the Nutridev programme, which

combines marketing of appealing quality foods with awareness-raising on feeding practices and health, in relation with national health policies and drawing on initial studies on families' eating habits and expectations<sup>11</sup>.

### Support systems for agriculture that include awareness-raising and support-advice on nutrition

Another major lever to sustainably increase the nutritional effects of rural development programmes – and more broadly agriculture – is the inclusion of

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advice and awareness-raising on nutrition within systems to support agriculture. Whether in farmers organisations, professional umbrella organisations or the ministry of Agriculture's technical departments, this inclusion provides significant advantages in terms of sustainability and scale. It is also an effective vector for behavioural change when inclusion of nutrition issues takes place in a participative manner adapted to suit each context and it responds to the expectations and preoccupations of the farmers concerned.

In Madagascar, facilitated meetings dedicated to family food were conducted by relay farmers among groups of farmers meeting to work on and discuss management of their farms. This initiative generated a positive dynamic, where the families present questioned the issues of their own food and reflected on choices they could make regarding management of their activity and their economy. It also opened a door to the people with the least awareness, especially fathers.

To implement these approaches, it is important to develop – together with the farmers - facilitation tools focusing on the links between agriculture and nutrition, with a view to supporting changes desired by families via a global understanding of these links, as was the case in Burkina Faso<sup>12</sup>. These tools must be sufficiently exhaustive and open, and must make it possible in particular to reflect collectively on gender issues in agriculture, as these are decisive for nutrition.

### → RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION

It is crucial to recall that to effectively fight against malnutrition, funding of nutrition-specific programmes, mainly in the health sector, must not be eroded to the benefit of nutrition-sensitive actions, whose impact on the nutritional state of individuals remains indirect. But at a time when more and more countries are developing and adopting new national multi-sectoral nutrition policies and nutrition-sensitive agricultural policy documents, the issue of translating these new strategies into a concrete reality arises. In order to effectively support these dynamics, GRET recommends the following to development project and programme initiators:

- take account of the importance of the long term, of dialogue and strengthening of capacities to help

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stakeholders, particularly those in the agricultural world, to grasp the issue of the links between agriculture and nutrition;

- conduct diagnosis making it possible to understand nutrition issues in light of existing food systems<sup>13</sup>, by including the specific situation of the various stakeholders and their capacities and interest in nutrition;
- integrate the issue of nutrition and food diversification in projects supporting agroecological transition at various levels, in particular in supporting reflections among transition stakeholders;
- support local agrifood value chains with issues around production, quality, marketing and structuring, to sustainably improve a local products offer that is favourable for nutrition;



**IN GUINEA, FACILITATED MEETINGS ON FEEDING PRACTICES OF WOMEN AND YOUNG CHILDREN WERE CONDUCTED WITHIN AGRICULTURAL GROUPS. ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS GAVE US HER FEEDBACK:**

*"Before, when we were pregnant, we worked hard right up to giving birth. Now, our husbands have understood that it is important to support us, and they help us in the fields and at home. We are also more careful about what our children eat, we pay greater attention to the food we give them."*



- facilitate complementarity between training, awareness-raising and participative advice approaches to support sustainable changes in agricultural and food practices among farming families and poor urban consumers;
- introduce issues specific to feeding practices and healthcare of women and young children in systems supporting agriculture as a complement to existing community-based healthcare systems and in relation to healthcare policies in this area;
- integrate a gender-based approach in nutrition-sensitive agriculture projects and programmes, through gender analysis in diagnosis, in the construction of approaches and monitoring of actions;
- in parallel to nutrition-sensitive agriculture, also consider links from nutrition to agriculture, in the sense that nutrition issues and systems dedicated to improving nutrition can better integrate challenges around developing production basins and supporting pro-nutrition value chains.

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- 1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, 2018.
- 2 Development Initiatives, 2018.
- 3 GRET "Agriculture: value chains and agricultural policies" and "Health: nutrition and social protection" thematic factsheets.
- 4 Ruel M. T., Quisumbing A. R., Balagamwala M., 2018.
- 5 www.nutridev.org
- 6 GRET "Agriculture and nutrition" factsheet.
- 7 Video entitled "Women in the limelight. Stories of women empowered by Management Advice to Family Farms (MAFF)".
- 8 GRET, Enda Graf, 2011.
- 9 GRET, MGE, 2018.
- 10 GRET and the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development in Haiti, 2019.
- 11 Irsat, Cirad, GRET, 2018.
- 12 GRET, 2017.
- 13 HLPE, 2017.

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