

Without Preparing the Ground, Investments in Agriculture will not contribute to Ending Malnutrition

Myanmar, Niger and ECOWAS are making progress in developing an enabling environment for ensuring that efforts towards Zero Hunger achieve impact

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Big investments in the rice sector can boost rice production and exports, but do not guarantee that people's food security and nutrition improve. Just as a region's fishing potential is not necessarily equal to better diets or higher incomes for small-scale fishing communities. Nor does mobilizing financial resources for ambitious programmes ensure that they actually reach the most vulnerable.

"In order to accelerate towards ending hunger and malnutrition, more investments are needed", said Karel Callens, deputy leader of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Strategic Programme. But investments will not necessarily contribute to solve the problem, "unless an enabling environment provides the right conditions for them to produce real impact on improving food security and nutrition for all", Callens added on Thursday at a side event during the Global Event on Accelerating the End of Hunger and Malnutrition taking place in Bangkok (Thailand).

"Securing land tenure is critical, but also allowing farmers to use their land to cultivate diverse crops and not just rice", said Kyaw SweLin, Director General of the Department of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation from Myanmar. The Burmese government has recently passed a new land-use law that encourages farmers and other investors to put resources into the production of diversified and high-value crops. It is a way to increase the availability of, and access to, varied, fresh and nutritious foods in the country and ensure that investments in sustainable agriculture really lead to better nutrition.

In this innovative approach of linking land tenure and nutrition, the FIRST Programme (a strategic partnership between the European Union and FAO) supported Myanmar in formulating and implementing the necessary legislative and policy changes and strengthening coordination among different Governmental actors.

"In West Africa, we often see that food security and nutrition are not mainstreamed in the fisheries sector", maintained Sidibe Aboubacar, a FIRST Policy Officer working with the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS). In West Africa, almost 60 percent of the households depend on fisheries for their animal protein needs. However, the mean consumption in the area (in countries like Liberia, for example, it lies under 5 kg per capita per year) is far away from the global average (20.2 kg per capita per year). To unlock the full potential of fisheries and aquaculture, the ECOWAS has reviewed its policies and programmes and defined the key areas and priorities for investments in fisheries and aquaculture to achieve impact on food security and nutrition.

In the case of Niger, the main issue was precisely to identify the resource needs and priorities, in order to mobilize the funds and budget the programs and plans. "It was important to align the priorities and budgets of the all the ministries and sectors that

can contribute to end malnutrition”, explained Mr Ali Bety, Minister and High Commissioner of the 3N Initiative in Niger.

Through its network of policy experts embedded in different ministries and institutions, FIRST is currently working hand in hand with Governments in over 30 countries from Latin America, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Asia and the Pacific. The program adds value to investments by preparing the ground for greater effectiveness and it also acts as a broker between the real game-changers –the Governments–, development partners like the EU and technical agencies like FAO. “FIRST policy officers facilitate coordination among all stakeholders”, from Government to civil society, international partners or private sector, to pull resources throughout the country and contribute to the political commitment to end hunger, explained Sokunthea By, from the European Union Delegation in Cambodia.

“This particular initiative brings expertise in the countries where the focus is on food security and sustainable agriculture”, said Madeleine Onclin, Team Leader and Head of Section Nutrition in the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development at the European Commission. “We have seen that it adds value in different countries and different sectors, so that we get the best results from our investments”, added Ms. Onclin.