

DISCUSSION: DRAWING LESSONS FROM FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND INFORMATION FOR IMPROVED DECISION MAKING AND RESPONSE

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Duration:	16.10 - 16.11.07
Facilitator:	Mr. Mark Smulders, FIVIMS Coordinator
Number of participants:	22
Number of Contributions:	32

II. DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

First Week (16 – 22.10.07)

QUESTION 1: In conducting research or analysis, or in generating information on FSN, please (i) specify a particular PURPOSE and (ii) list KEY INDICATORS you used.

Please also provide a short account of your SUCCESS FACTORS or the FAILURES/KNOWLEDGE GAPS which need to be addressed.

Second week (23 – 29.10.07)

QUESTION 2: How you have been successful in (iii) COMMUNICATING your findings or information? Please explain (a) to WHOM and (b) HOW did you communicate with your audience. Again, kindly point out success factors and failures or knowledge gaps in communicating FSN research findings, analysis and/or information based on your own experiences.

Third and Fourth weeks (30.10- 16.11.07)

QUESTION 3: Please explain whether (iv) your work was in response to an EXPRESSED NEED for information (by whom and for what purpose) and (v) whether you are aware of the knowledge generated resulted in CONCRETE ACTION. If yes, please describe this action/impact. Kindly also point out failures or gaps in making FSN information demand-driven according to your experiences.

DISCUSSION PROCEEDINGS

First Week Discussion - List of Contributions

Opening message from Forum Facilitator, Mark Smulders, FIVIMS Coordinator

Dear FSN Forum members,

Welcome to this forum! As FIVIMS Coordinator, my task is to work with practitioners in the food security and nutrition domain to come to a better understanding of why so many people around the world remain food insecure and vulnerable - and what the underlying causes are. The FAO-led FIVIMS program also advocates to identify who these people are, where and how many - and based on an in-depth analysis - argue for targeted policies and programs that will address the plight of the millions of people who still suffer from hunger on a daily basis.

Based on the above principles, FAO provides guidance and support under various projects and programs in strengthening in-country and regional capacities to conduct food security and vulnerability analysis and to produce information for improved decision-making in policy formulation and programming to achieve food security and nutrition (FSN) objectives.

As FSN Forum members, you represent a broad community of researchers, analysts and practitioners, and many of you have hands-on experience at country level in analyzing and communicating information on food insecure and vulnerable population groups, or in advising key decision-makers concerned with policies and programs for poverty and hunger reduction.

As highlighted by Kostas Stamoulis, one key objective of this Forum is to generate and share knowledge on FSN issues. Our expectation is that knowledge shared among all will equip us better to inform policy formulation and targeted action for improved food security and nutrition.

SETTING THE STAGE: My job today is to take a step back and to seek your input on how your own research, analysis and information on FSN issues can contribute to knowledge generation. As you provide feedback during the discussion, please consider the following:

(i) **PURPOSE:** no matter whether you are conducting research, analyzing a particular food security and nutrition situation, or advising key decision-makers, in order to have an impact, one must be clear about the ultimate purpose - or objective - for which the research, analysis or information is generated. One such purpose could be 'disaster preparedness', or 'effective early warning', a 'food security baseline assessment', 'policy formulation', or 'monitoring and evaluation'. Another purpose could be working towards the progressive realization of the "Right to Food", the theme of today's World Food Day.

(ii) **INDICATORS:** Many of you have expressed an interest to discuss food security and nutrition indicators. The right choice of indicators is indeed critical for research and analysis, information and advocacy. A proposed list of key indicators for food security, nutrition and vulnerability analysis prepared by the Inter-Agency Working Group on FIVIMS is a useful reference that we have included among the resources on the FSN website.

(iii) **COMMUNICATION:** No matter how solid any research, analysis or information on food security and nutrition issues is, it will not translate into knowledge and informed policy formulation and action, if the results of the work carried out it is not well communicated.

(iv) INFORMATION NEEDS and (v) ACTION: In many cases, unless your research work or the analysis you conduct is in response to an expressed need for information or for a specific research gap, your efforts may not result in desired policy change or specific action.

OUR DISCUSSION TOPIC:

Seeing the importance of the above factors, we are looking for success stories in knowledge generation in the FSN domain that has resulted in concrete action along the 5 points outlined above. Please do also point out failures or knowledge gaps in research, analysis and information, as others on this Global Forum might provide you with answers or guidance.

* Concretely, please provide the FSN Forum with a short account of how you have been successful in conducting research or analysis, or have generated information in:

- (i) specifying a particular PURPOSE;
- (ii) clarifying which INDICATORS you used;
- (iii) stating how you COMMUNICATED your findings;
- (iv) explaining whether your work was in response to an EXPRESSED NEED for information (by whom and for what purpose); and
- (v) stating whether (or not) the knowledge generated resulted in CONCRETE ACTION.

For all points above, please also explain what your SUCCESS FACTORS have been and whether you find that you are still facing a KNOWLEDGE GAP (or a constraint) related to this topic.

At the end of this discussion, we will compile a selection of success stories in a lessons learned paper, which will be used as a reference document for future FSN research and analysis. This paper will be shared with you and non-members for future use.

DISCUSSION SCHEDULE:

For a well-structured discussion, we will focus on different sub-sets of the 5 points listed above in a 3-week schedule (one question per week). Please read Huyen's message entitled "Discussion schedule and guidelines". For this first week, we invite you to concentrate on the first two points only

(Question1):

QUESTION 1: In conducting research or analysis, or in generating information on FSN, please (i) specify a particular PURPOSE and (ii) list KEY INDICATORS you used.

Please also provide a short account of your success factors or the failures or knowledge gaps in research, analysis and information, which according to your experience, must be addressed.

I'm looking forward to a lively discussion!

Message from Forum Moderator, Huyen Tran

Dear all,

My name is Huyen and I am the moderator of the FSN Forum. For our first discussion, we propose a schedule as follows:

First week (16th - 22nd October 2007)

We concentrate on addressing the first set of points outlined by Mark:

QUESTION 1: In conducting research or analysis, or in generating information on FSN, please (i) specify a particular PURPOSE and (ii) list KEY INDICATORS you used.

Please also provide a short account of your SUCCESS FACTORS or the FAILURES/KNOWLEDGE GAPS which need to be addressed.

Second week (23rd - 29th October 2007)

We move the focus to the second set of questions (feel free to continue with the first set of questions as you wish):

QUESTION 2: How you have been successful in (iii) COMMUNICATING your findings or information? Please explain (a) to WHOM and (b) HOW did you communicate with your audience. Again, kindly point out success factors and failures or knowledge gaps in communicating FSN research findings, analysis and/or information based on your own experiences.

Third week (30th Oct-5th November 2007)

During the last week we focus on the last two points (feel free to continue with the first and second set of discussion topics as you wish).

QUESTION 3: Please explain whether (iv) your work was in response to an EXPRESSED NEED for information (by whom and for what purpose) and (v) whether you are aware of the knowledge generated resulted in CONCRETE ACTION. If yes, please describe this action/impact. Kindly also point out failures or gaps in making FSN information demand-driven according to your experiences.

During the last week we can also identify and address new relevant questions arising during the discussion. If the timeframe doesn't allow we can extend the discussion or address those questions during another discussion.

This is a PROPOSED SCHEDULE. We DO NOT DISCOURAGE members to answer DIFFERENT sets of questions at the same time.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: please find the background papers in English, French and Spanish at http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/selecting_indicators.html

GUIDELINES FOR THIS DISCUSSION

* Where to post: Please post your contributions on the web-base forum in the conference "First week topic" or "Second week topic" or "Third week topic" depending on the questions you respond. Alternatively, you may send your message to FSNforum-L@mailserv.fao.org or fsn-moderator@org, we will post your contribution to the web-based forum as appropriate.

* Supporting document(s): If your supporting document(s) has been stored on the Web, please provide the link in your message. If not, kindly add your supporting document(s) under the "Resources" section of the FSN Forum using the tool on the Contribute Resources page or send us by email at fsn-moderator@fao.org. In any case, please specify to which message/contribution this document is supposed to support.

* Language: Messages should be in English. Members who wish to have assistance with English can contact us at fsn-moderator@fao.org. Supporting documents can be in any language as available.

* User help: If you encounter problems in using the Forum platform please refer first to the "How to use the Forum"

(http://km.fao.org/fsn/user_guidelines/use_the_forum.html) and/or post your technical questions in the "User help" conference on the Web-based forum, or send us directly at fsn-moderator@fao.org.

* Forum etiquette: please refer to the Forum Guidelines

(http://km.fao.org/fsn/user_guidelines/forum_guidelines.html)

NOTICES:

* We will be using the mailing list to report contributions of each day. Be sure that even if you can't access the web-based forum you can still be fully informed about forum's activity. The mailing list is moderated and we will send maximum 3 messages per day so as not to flood your mailbox.

* We will provide a summary of the week's discussion after each week. The overall summary and the lesson learned paper produced will be stored in the Resource section of the website for public use.

We are excited to begin the discussion. Please remember your participation is the key to making this discussion a success!

Contribution by Charles Teller, Visiting Scholar, Population Reference Bureau, USA

I am pleased to make a brief input in outline form to this Forum on some 15 years of research, M&E, training and capacity-building with Federal and Sub-national Ethiopian institutions on Vulnerability Profiles and Actions at sub-national level in Food/Nutrition Security and Epidemic Disease.

1- PURPOSE

a) assess the root causes of vulnerability, as well as local resilience, in most drought-prone areas of country b) accurate/reliable/credible baselines of chronic vulnerability to strengthen the on-going Early Warning System and local targeting;

c) build local analytical capacity for disaster prevention;

d) policy and program designs and response packages;

e) strengthen analytical capacity to continue assessing and evaluating the evolving situation with rigorous methods, tools and monitoring systems;

2- APPROACHES, METHODS & INDICATORS:

a) Conceptual framework developed with stakeholders and policy-makers for identification of indicators for the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data

b) Content areas defined for standardized indicator construction and operational definition: Demographic and Social; Health, Nutrition and Epidemic; Economic, Land and Food Security; Vulnerability/resilience processes and intuitional/program response modeling

- c) National Vulnerability Guidelines developed with multi-sectorial and sub-national/local participation
- d) Data collection and processing tools developed for available secondary and GIS data and for generating needed primary data, both quantitative and qualitative
- e) Baseline and in-depth studies carried out in 1999-2001 in 4 major regions, 16 drought-prone districts, 93 communities and 10,000 households; additional problem-solving research for disaster prevention carried out by government and universities
- f) Subsequent analysis of major surveys, including of national and regional/district demographic, health, nutrition, agricultural, environmental, social services, infrastructural, institutional, etc.
- g) M&E of policies and programs that address the root causes identified in the 2000-2001 baseline, to learn about outcomes and impacts

3- COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION NEEDS AND ACTIONS

- a) Results analyzed and presented by teams of government, university, NGO and private sector experts
- b) Stakeholder consultations on-going and interactive, with proposals funded for further support
- c) Local Response Packages, Program/Projects and related planning informed and promoted based on reliable and trustworthy information
- d) Relevant data converted into useful information and "best practices" for intersectorial policies and strategies (e. g., population, nutrition, food security, disaster prevention)
- e) Monitoring and Evaluation of the food, nutrition, morbidity and mortality status and related indicators communicated; capacity built within country for training in program and project M&E in population, health and nutrition
- f) Local, Regional, National and International papers and publications delivered at policy and program-related conferences and workshops
- g) One major international donor changed its long-term country program strategy to that of prevention of hunger and mitigation of food insecurity, and with impact monitored by declines young child nutrition status

Contribution by Mark Smulders

Hello Charles,

You have provided an interesting list of objectives (purposes), activities and results of your work. Is this drawn from your experience in Ethiopia mainly or also from elsewhere? We would be interested to receive copies of the "Vulnerability Profiles" you mention in your message to share with Forum members. Can they be found on a website? Also, would you have examples of the "Local Response Packages" based on the research and analysis conducted?

Contribution by Charles Teller

Dear Mark and Forum colleagues,

Here are some short answers on my input on Ethiopian Vulnerability Research, Profiles and Action, I can respond in more detail later on today:

1- Obviously, this does not reflect just my Ethiopia experience since 1992 (as Addis Ababa University Professor, UNFPA capacity-building advisor at Addis Ababa University, USAID Vulnerability Project Director seconded to the government, and Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor to USAID and other international agencies) but also work I've done in many of the most food insecure and malnourished countries, in the areas of food, nutrition and health assessments, surveillance and early warning systems, and in program/project design, monitoring and evaluation. That includes work in the 70's at WHO/PAHO Nutrition Institute (INCAP) in Central America, and in the 80s in South and Southeast Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa. What was unique about this so-called SERA (Strengthening Emergency Response and Action) in Ethiopia, housed at the Research Unit of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC- now called DPPA) in Addis and in the 4 major regions, was the Federal, Regional and District government commitment to addressing chronic vulnerability to food insecurity. This multisectorial and decentralized undertaking, supported by donors (USAID the main donor, along on-going collaboration from food security-related donors and UN agencies) to focus on local area Vulnerability Profiles and Vulnerability Working Groups, in a capacity-building mode, as useful assessment strategies and tools to stimulate local action and prompt more responsive and effective early warning systems.

2- Papers, theses and publications have been produced, but most of the work has stayed at national and local levels (as planned). The proceedings of the SERA project presented in February, 2002 may be on the DPPA website. I believe that only hard copies of the 16 District VPs are available. There has been numerous university theses (by graduate students working on the project) and scientific and policy papers presented, mostly in the grey literature. A research paper, "The Demography of Hunger in Ethiopia", that my Ethiopian colleagues and I presented at the large International Union for the Scientific Study of Population Conference in Tours, France in July, 2005, and pending for journal publication. A book with that title is now being written.

3- Examples of local Response Packages and "shelf projects" in the 16 districts, 8 zones and 4 regions where the Vulnerability Project has continued since 2002 are many, and now in collaboration with the new Food Security Program. When I return to Ethiopia in November-December, I can attempt to gather the many examples. However, I understand that the Federal government has finally (after 15 years of drafts) approved a National Nutrition Strategy to complement it's National Food Security Strategy; and that donors have used the profiles and proposed RPs to fund actions (e. g., the Productive Safety Net), such as the EU, Canadian CIDA, UNICEF, World Food Program, World Bank, and USAID. Other research organizations in the US and Europe have continued to focus on multi-sectorial and multilevel vulnerability and resilience assessments and analysis. The fact that young child chronic malnutrition (stunting) has declined in the last 15 years, in the face of frequent famine, war and instability, from a high level of 64% in the national nutrition survey of 1992 to 47% in the 2005 national demographic and health survey, is amazing. This decline needs to be evaluated to see what has worked, and how to further accelerate the decline.

I would be pleased to respond to more inquiries, and would invite my Ethiopian colleagues to join in on this discussion.

Contribution by El Fadil, Ahmed Ismail, Food Security Analyst, FAO-Sudan SIFSIA-Northern States

Dear all,

My name is El Fadil, Ahmed Ismail. Currently, I am an associate professor in Food Research Centre in Khartoum North, Sudan. My entrance to food security issues and research is very recent compared to the experience of old Charles. However, we are at the beginning of the tunnel to advocate the problems of food security.

Indeed, the people working in food security converge from various different disciplines ranging from agriculture, vets, engineering, to geography and remote sensing. Each comes with his own perspective, view and cultural background that are shaped by his own specialization. Thank God that there are common definitions, concepts and approaches that we all share but still the perception of the problem and the handling is different. For instance, I graduated from Hohenheim University (Germany)

majoring in agricultural economics and marketing since 1996, having worked in food res Centre for almost a decade but I never came to grasp the food security issue till 2005, just by accident in an assignment with FAO about The Existing Food Security Information Systems in the Sudan and Institutional Capacities of System Providers and Users, 2005. I am quite sure that the report made to FAO country level might have been circulated within a narrower limit if not over sighted. My point is vertical and horizontal communication with information users and providers is blocked either by inefficiency in communication or lack of focal points to distribute information among concerned persons; the initiative of this forum. second point that donors sometimes impose their won recommendations other than those emerged by the research studies in such a way that resources are going just to cover salaries and traveling expenses of experts where few goes directly to tackle the problems.

These are few hints before coming back to the subject matter. As currently been in Hohenheim doing a post Doc. research I may contribute later disclosing findings of these research assignments

Contribution from Kizza Charles Luswata, Technologist, Department of Soil Science, Makerere University

Dear all,

I would like to commend the moderator for raising these pertinent issues of concern in regard to food security for our people. I may not directly address the topical issues of this week but allow me to express my view as follows:

In many cases, the issue of food security has been mixed up to mean people to till land and grow crops especially the rural poor. Many researches have been geared towing this line. One can be food secure if he/she has money in the pocket to purchase the needs. Humanitarian assistance is good but should not be a permanent system. People should be empowered for self reliance because that is what is sustainable.

In some communities where humanitarian assistance has been provided, they have misinterpreted it and are now too lazy to do anything but to just wait for hand outs. Research and assistance in future should aim at empowerment for self reliance. This could be achieved through establishment of projects that enhance household incomes, improvement of markets and market access, moving from produce to products and many other ways.

Moderator comment

Thank you, Kizza, for raising a very important issue. Reaching a common (and correct) understanding on food security and nutrition is a prerequisite for any effective action.

Seeing the important of this subject, we would prefer to address it in a separate discussion, which will follow the on-going dialogue. Member(s) who wish to facilitate this discussion topic are invited to contact me at huyen.tran@fao.org.

Contribution by Alemu Asfaw, Food Security Analyst, FAO Sudan

Dear all,

I am not going to have any technical output, but wanted to share some info to the group as colleagues inquired about the vulnerability profiles....

My name is Alemu Asfaw, currently working as food security analyst at FAO-Sudan. I used to work at FEWS NET in Ethiopia up until April 2007 and I am familiar with the outputs that Dr. Charles Teller

mentioned. In quickly following up, after the SERA project, the USAID and Eth Govt run another project, called EPSP (Emergency Preparedness and Strengthening Program) and that project funded another livelihood work in Ethiopia, which was implemented by FEWS NET.

FEWS NET in collaboration with the FEG consultants started a very intensive livelihood work in one region (SNNPR) and that same activity is being expanded into other regions, already Tigray and Amhara have been finished. Currently you can find the detailed findings of the SNNPR livelihood study at the DPPC Web site: www.dppc.gov.et <<http://www.dppc.gov.et>> at a section called Livelihood. One interesting output of this activity that we produced is 'a livelihood portrait' of the region - you can get that at the same web site in a Livelihood section - Slide show of introduction to Livelihoods analysis in SNNPR

https://sdmail.fao.org/webmail/Alemu.Asfaw/Drafts/RE:%20%5BFSN%20Forum%5D%20Re:%20Drawing%20lessons%20from%20FSN%20research,%20analysis%20and%20information%20for%20improved%20decision%20making%20and%20response%20_xF8FF_%2016th%20Oct-5th%20Nov.EML/1_text.htm#

[FSN Moderator Note: If you don't have access to the above link, you can request this paper directly from Mr Alemu Asfaw at: alemu.asfaw@fao.org]

Similar activity and documentation have also been done in other two pastoral regions - Somali and Afar - all properly documented in the web site.

Whoever is interested in the details of this activity or any detailed data or documentation, you can contact me at my fao address: alemu.asfaw@fao.org <<mailto:alemu.asfaw@fao.org>>

Contribution by Manuel Veiga, Joint Research Center, EC, Italy

Dear all,

I work at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the EC. My interest is focused on food security indicators and their use in the measurement of food insecurity in different contexts for the purpose of policy making and program/project design, as well as in the measurement of impact/effect on food security of program / projects funded by the EC.

I am currently reviewing a number of indicators typically used when analyzing food insecurity. This review should serve as a basis for a discussion on what are the most suitable indicators to use in the management of operations aimed at improving food security. These indicators along with the methodologies employed for its measurement are listed below.

I'd be glad to hear your EXPERIENCES in the USE of these or other indicators.

- Global Hunger Index (Icpri)
- Average per person dietary energy/food supply (Food balance sheets)
- Proportion of population below 1\$ (PPP) per day (World Bank)
- Prevalence of population below the national poverty line (Household surveys)
- Gini coefficient (WB and FAO)
- Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (FANTA)
- Price of the staple food.
- Prevalence of household that are food energy deficient (Household expenditure surveys)
- Prevalence of undernourishment in total population (Individual Food Intake Survey)

- Dietary diversity (FANTA)
- Anthropometry indicators: underweight, stunting, wasting and body mass index (Anthropometric surveys)
- Coping Strategies Index (Maxwell et al. 1999)
- Food share (Household Expenditure Survey)

As for sharing my experience with indicators, I have posted what I can share since my work is not yet completed.

As for the resources of the JRC, I have posted the link to our web page where it is possible to obtain many remote sensing data.

Contribution by Amélie Solal-Céligny, FAO Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division

Dear FSN members and colleagues,

My name is Amélie Solal-Céligny, and I work for FAO in the Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, together with Marie Claude Dop, Terri Ballard and Gina Kennedy. As mentioned by Mark Smulders in a previous message, our team has been involved since 2005 in the identification and use of simple indicators that bridge nutrition and food security. This work is done within the EC/FAO Program "Food Security: Information for Action", in close collaboration with FANTA, and we have activities in six countries (Mozambique, Malawi, Somalia, Kenya, Burkina Faso, and West Bank & Gaza Strip). Our focus is mainly on two indicators: Dietary Diversity and the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (FANTA). The focus on these tools comes from the observation that there is currently a lack of indicators of food security at household level. Also, these tools are more specific and more sensitive to changes in the food situation than child anthropometry, which is often used as a measure of nutrition and food security situation. There are easy to analyze and can therefore be used at decentralized level.

We have adapted and field tested these tools in three countries (Mozambique, Kenya, Malawi). Following this exercise, adapted versions of the questionnaire in the national language were made available to the main food security and nutrition national stakeholders. The indicators were also used in national surveys in Mozambique, Malawi, Burkina Faso and WBGS, and discussions are ongoing for their integration into national food security information systems.

An international workshop entitled simple tools for measuring household access to food and dietary diversity was held in Nairobi in March 2007, with experts on food security and nutrition from governments, universities, and international agencies from six countries. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the utility of these tools and to identify the potential for their integration into food security information systems at central and decentralized levels.

Following this workshop, an online forum (Indicators Bridging Food Security and Nutrition) was created, in which members are invited to share their experiences with the use of the indicators and also to debate on technical issues such as adaptation process, cut-points for analysis and sample sizes. Some FSN members may have already joined this forum, others are invited to do so, especially those who have experience in using dietary diversity and/or HFIAS, or who would like to know more about these indicators. You can join by going to this link:

http://www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/indicfsnut/index.cfm?op=dsp_info.

More recently, we have also been studying the use of MUAC and women's BMI in early warning systems.

Lastly, we would like to clarify that undernourishment data are based on food balance sheets and not on individual food intake surveys as said in a previous message.

We hope that the discussions in the FSN forum will complement our forum on indicators by linking the dimensions of information and policy decisions & strategies, and therefore contribute to more timely and appropriate interventions in food security and nutrition.

Contribution by Charles Lagu

Dear Forum Members

Thank you very much for the contributions and all appreciation goes to Huyen Tran for her innovative skills for creating the existence of this on line forum interactions.

The first week of the interaction addressing the concerns raised by Mark Smulders has good aspects food security and nutrition and also some of the concerns raised by Kiza Charles Luswata and Manuel Veiga not ignoring the speech of Kosta Stamoulis;

My personal opinion is that we have a lot of information that has been generated ranging from food sources, food products, nutritional parameters, measures and food security related literature and dietary diversity and policy concerns.

A lot of this good generated information are shared between technical personal in the discipline (namely researcher's, academics, Development practitioners' from CSO, NFO's and international agencies and donors, planners, policy makers and implementers hence a limitation to other users (rural communities). How can we ensure that all this important information is made available and accessible and user-friendly to the majority especially in the rural areas? Simple packaging of this information without losing content for all stakeholders shall be vital in up scaling and mainstreaming FSN in the policy stream.

The concerns raised by Kiza Charles Luswata are good and yet we have continued existence of food insecurity in the area.

Policy guides decision making process and is vital for legal functions. Policy making process undergoes through; problem identification, agenda setting, agenda debate, policy decisions, Implementation, monitoring and evaluation. all these stages should involve stakeholders; Do we actually follow these policy processes? What are the implications of not following this policy processes to the benefit of food security and nutrition in national countries?

Contribution by Alejandro Acosta, APO Agricultural Economist/Food Security, FAO Mozambique

Dear All,

My name is Alejandro Acosta, and I work for FAO in Mozambique supporting the FAO-Netherlands Partnership Program FNPP.

The FNPP in Mozambique has an analytical component which aim is to strengthen the analytical capacity of key stakeholders on the analysis of food security issues. This is an ongoing process where the main challenge have been to support the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition (SETSAN) with analytical inputs and policy recommendations oriented to improve the formulation, design and implementation of the food security strategy; This is been accomplished in close partnership with local academic institutions.

In regard to the current question: It is interesting to notice that while several research articles addressing the food insecurity problem are found in referee journals, most of the key answers remain undocumented with technicians, experts and practitioners in the field, and are not reaching the audience that they should. In this regards, I am glad to see that this forum will give voice to those in the front line to share their experiences.

Second Week Discussion – List of Contributions

Contribution by Jorge Ortega, Food System Economist, FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

Dear All,

My name is Jorge Ortega. I'm from Guatemala and working as Food System Economist at FAO-RLC. My expectation is to learn and share with you on the measurement and use of indicators in the diagnosis, design and evaluation of programs and policies of food security and nutrition.

Let me share my recent experience in selecting and measuring indicators of food security as a part of designing and executing an impact evaluation for the "Micro-Huertas Polulares" Project in Bolivia. The project that started in 2004 and will end in December 2007, essentially involves the promotion of both production and consumption of vegetables on a small scale (at the household level).

At this point, there is a huge interest from the donor (Belgian Cooperation) and the national counterpart to expand the project to other cities in highlands of Bolivia (La Paz, Oruru and Potosi).

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this measuring is to evaluate the project's impact on beneficiary families. For this we have selected a random sample of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and applied an instrument with some impact indicators and control variables. The impact indicators were selected analyzing the project's logical framework. Specifically we analyze the goal and purpose of the project.

-GOAL: to contribute to poverty alleviation by increasing the availability of food and facilitating access to food.

-PURPOSE: Both to promote production techniques and the consumption of vegetables of high nutritional value along with institutionalize the Urban and Periurban Horticulture.

In summary, the causal chain of the project is: availability and stability access --> consumption and use --> nutritional status improvements and poverty alleviation.

INDICATORS:

Based on the foregoing, the main project's impact indicator at the household level is the consumption of vegetables. Then we propose measuring three (per capita) INDICATORS:

-Total household expenditure (in nominal local currency)

-Total food consumption (expenditure and in kind)

-Consumption of vegetables (in kilograms)

Additionally we include two indicators for measuring quality of food security at the household level: Dietary Diversity and the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (FANTA).

We also attempted to include anthropometry indicators for children, although finally it was rejected by the project administration arguing that vegetables provides only some part of people's daily nutritional requirements (vitamins, minerals and fiber) and thus these indicators would be insensitive to the potential impacts and in consequence a might lead to wrong conclusions.

Summary of the first week of discussion by the Moderator

Dear all,

During the second week (24th - 30th October 2007) we focus on the second set of questions. However, please free to continue with the first set of questions as you wish.

Question 2: How have you been successful in (iii) COMMUNICATING your findings or information? Please explain (a) to WHOM and (b) HOW you communicated with your audience.

Kindly point out success factors and/or failures or knowledge gaps in communicating FSN research findings, analysis and/or information based on your own experiences.

Some members have already addressed this question. I have compiled those contributions on communicating FSN information into a multiple contribution below.

A summary of the first week discussion will be made available shortly.

MULTIPLE CONTRIBUTIONS ON COMMUNICATING FSN INFORMATION

Charles Teller (Visiting Scholar, PRB, Washington, DC, and Adjunct Professor of Population and Development, Population Research and Studies Center, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa) wrote:

"Communication":

- a) Results analyzed and presented by teams of government, university, NGO and private sector experts
- b) Stakeholder consultations on-going and interactive, with proposals funded for further support
- c) Local Response Packages, Program/Projects and related planning informed and promoted based on reliable and trustworthy information
- d) Relevant data converted into useful information and "best practices" for intersectorial policies and strategies (e. g., population, nutrition, food security, disaster prevention)
- e) Monitoring and Evaluation of the food, nutrition, morbidity and mortality status and related indicators communicated; capacity built within country for training in program and project M&E in population, health and nutrition
- f) Local, Regional, National and International papers and publications delivered at policy and program-related conferences and workshops

Papers, theses and publications have been produced, but most of the work has stayed at national and local levels (as planned). The proceedings of the SERA project presented in February, 2002 may be on the DPPA website. I believe that only hard copies of the 16 District VPs are available. There has been numerous university theses (by graduate students working on the project) and scientific and policy papers presented, mostly in the grey literature. A research paper, "The Demography of Hunger in Ethiopia", that my Ethiopian colleagues and I presented at the large International Union for the Scientific Study of Population Conference in Tours, France in July, 2005, and pending for journal publication. A book with that title is now being written.

Examples of local Response Packages and "shelf projects" in the 16 districts, 8 zones and 4 regions where the Vulnerability Project has continued since 2002 are many, and now in collaboration with the new Food Security Program. When I return to Ethiopia in November-December, I can attempt to gather the many examples. However, I understand that the Federal government has finally (after 15 years of drafts) approved a National Nutrition Strategy to complement it's Natinal Food Security Strategy; and that donors have used the profiles and proposed RPs to fund actions (e. g., the

Productive Safety Net), such as the EU, Canadian CIDA, UNICEF, World Food Program, World Bank, and USAID. Other research organizations in the US and Europe have continued to focus on multi-sectorial and multilevel vulnerability and resilience assessments and analysis. The fact that young child chronic malnutrition (stunting) has declined in the last 15 years, in the face of frequent famine, war and instability, from a high level of 64% in the national nutrition survey of 1992 to 47% in the 2005 national demographic and health survey, is amazing. This decline needs to be evaluated to see what has worked, and how to further accelerate the decline"

El Fadil, Ahmed Ismail (associate professor in Food Research Centre in Khartoum North, Sudan) wrote:

"For instance, I graduated from Hohenheim University (Germany) majoring in agricultural economics and marketing since 1996, having worked in food research centres for almost a decade but I never came to grasp the food security issue till 2005, just by accident in an assignment with FAO about The Existing Food Security Information Systems in the Sudan and Institutional Capacities of System Providers and Users, 2005. I am quite sure that the report made to FAO country level might have been circulated within a narrower limit if not over sighted. My point is vertical and horizontal communication with information users and providers is blocked either by inefficiency in communication or lack of focal points to distribute information among concerned persons."

Amélie Solal-Céligny (FAO Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, Italy) wrote:

« An international workshop entitled simple tools for measuring household access to food and dietary diversity was held in Nairobi in March 2007, with experts on food security and nutrition from governments, universities, and international agencies from six countries. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the utility of these tools and to identify the potential for their integration into food security information systems at central and decentralized levels.

Following this workshop, an online forum (Indicators Bridging Food Security and Nutrition) was created, in which members are invited to share their experiences with the use of the indicators and also to debate on technical issues such as adaptation process, cut-points for analysis and sample sizes. Some FSN members may have already joined this forum, others are invited to do so, especially those who have experience in using dietary diversity and/or HFIAS, or who would like to know more about these indicators. You can join by going to this link:

http://www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/indicfsnut/index.cfm?op=dsp_info."

Charles Lagu (Research Scientist Livestock production, National Agricultural Research Organization, Uganda) wrote:

"My personal opinion is that we have a lot of information that has been generated ranging from food sources, food products, nutritional parameters, measures and food security related literature and dietary diversity and policy concerns.

A lot of this good generated information are shared between technical personal in the discipline (namely researcher's, academics, Development practitioners' from CSO, NGO's and international agencies and donors, planners, policy makers and implementers hence a limitation to other users (rural communities). How can we ensure that all this important information are made available and accessible and user-friendly to the majority especially in the rural areas? Simple packaging of this information without losing content for all stakeholders shall be vital in up scaling and mainstreaming FSN in the policy stream.

Policy guides decision making process and is vital for legal functions. Policy making process undergoes through; problem identification, agenda setting, agenda debate, policy decisions,

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation. all these stages should involve stakeholders; Do we actually follow these policy processes? What are the implications of not following this policy processes to the benefit of food security and nutrition in national countries?"

Alejandro Acosta (APO Agricultural Economist/Food Security, FAO, Mozambique) wrote:

"It is interesting to notice that while several research articles addressing the food insecurity problem are found in referee journals, most of the key answers remain undocumented with technicians, experts and practitioners in the field, and are not reaching the audience that they should. In this regards, I am glad to see that this forum will give voice to those in the front line to share their experiences"

Let's discuss the points raised by our Forum colleagues. Please remember that best practices as well as gaps/failures/lessons are relevant.

Contribution by El Fadil Ahmed Ismail, FRC- Khartoum, Sudan

Dear all,

Enclosed are some 'chosen phrases' lying on part of my assignments with FAO & EC regarding information and communication in food security domains.

- * food security units (FSU) in relevant federal institutions and also at the states level are organizationally unclear with no regular line of communication.

- * the poor communication (vertically and horizontally) between the centre and state levels, among states and localities, beside the diminishing scale in knowledge and experience among new generations has aggravated, and abruptly, the information problem.

- * for instance, radio-communication equipments installed at the states' level to ease communication in early 90's are now non-functioning.

- * due to lack of communication infrastructure, the Department of Nutrition in the Ministry of Health shifted its primary focus to reachable areas (assessing limited indicators which are cost effective within their limited budget) and the running programs focus on disease recover rather than on direct food security tasks.

- * when the existing information system is not 'systematic' and 'ill-organized', flow of information would be impeded. Politicians instead of improving the information system, they tend to create new parallel and temporary organs to play the role of the 'absent' system, which in turn seeks information mostly from within the same 'fragile system' and end up into same non-reliable information with fatal decision costs.

- * information from all sources are subjective to delay and inadequacy (reasons are lack of financial resources, capacity building, etc). Despite the positive, constructive, and active motives (preparedness and willingness) to contribute effectively in food security information, yet, the inconsistent information inputs received from the main partners are reflected negatively in the reliability and credibility of information output.

- * Government rely sometimes on information from some NGOs which are potentially well-equipped with sufficient personal computers (PC) and communication radios in areas of unrest and vulnerability particularly, Darfur, and some pockets in greater Kordofan.

Contribution by Susanne Boetekees, Food Security Economist, FAO Tanzania

Hello everybody and greetings from Dar es Salaam,

My name is Susanne Boetekees. I am from the Netherlands and working as a Food Security Economist at FAO-Tanzania.

FAO Tanzania is actively involved in a number of interesting programs/ activities in the area of FSN. Following the inclusion of broad food security and nutrition concerns as well as linkages between food security and nutrition and poverty reduction in the Zanzibar PRSP, we are currently supporting the FAO Netherlands Partnership Program (FNPP) in providing technical support to the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar in formulating a multi-sectorial food security and nutrition policy and program. This parallel and interactive process of formulating a FSN policy and program should help to ensure action oriented policy recommendations. Strengthening capacity at (sub)national levels should also lead to successful policy and program implementation.

Both the Zanzibar PRSP and the draft policy and program documents have been aided very much by the development of the Zanzibar Food Security and Nutrition Situational Analysis (FSNSA). This analytical report produced by a team of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance and FAO (produced and published in June 2006) (i) presents a situational and causal analysis of existing food insecurity and nutrition problems in Zanzibar, (ii) identifies and characterizes population groups vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, and (iii) provides guidance to future action by highlighting areas for interventions. The analysis covers a range of agricultural, environmental, socio-economic, and health related issues, as they have a mutually interactive relationship with food security and uses the usual distinction between food availability, food access, and food utilization. The paper also discusses food security issues from an institutional perspective, including the role of a rights based approach and issues of institutional coordination.

Just to highlight a number of challenges in the undertaking of this FSNSA: these have included the sources of information (primary versus secondary data) as well as availability of information (e.g. production /import/export figures to determine national food availability; logistical problems with delays in forthcoming data, etc.). Consistency and reliability of data posed another challenge (think for example of different formats used in different studies; representative sampling; different analytical packages used; outdated data etc.). Nevertheless, the quality of recommendations in FSNSA can be viewed as adequate, as they focus on drawing broad policy conclusions, which have been the result of specific knowledge and expertise of the staff of ministries involved, assumptions made on basis of history, sectorial policies, consultations as well as generic technical knowledge & experience and validation of findings with other Government and non-Government organizations.

As for Tanzania Mainland, I'd like to highlight the Food Security Information Team in which FAO-TZ is represented. This body consists of different agencies including Government departments, NGO's and UN agencies and is responsible for collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination of food security information to help in targeting, mitigating and responding to food insecurity in Tanzania. This is currently done on an ad-hoc basis, mainly through Rapid Vulnerability Assessments (RVAs). In recent years much discussion within FSIT has been focusing on the need to strengthen national capacity to conduct RVAs, with increasing responsibility of the Local Government Authorities (LGAs). The need for improving methodologies for assessment as well as widening the range of stakeholders to reflect the need for multi-sector approaches in addressing food security and nutrition issues has also been highlighted multiple times.

Following FSIT recommendations, in March this year, the Ministry of Agriculture Food Security and Cooperatives (MAFC) in partnership with FAO, WFP, UNICEF and FEWSNET organized a two-day Stakeholders Workshop on "Strengthening a Livelihood Based Food Security and Nutrition Information System (LFSNIS)", with the aim to create a common understanding among a wide range of stakeholders on current trends and past practices in food security and nutrition (FSN) and livelihood analysis, and on the best and most appropriate course of action to take to establish a more coordinated analysis system in Tanzania. An important step that is currently being taken is a review of the RVA methodology to include a more livelihoods approach and a comprehensive set of indicators to estimate household food and nutrition security levels and conditions.

Interesting to note is that Tanzania is among the 8 pilot countries of implementing the One UN Joint Program. FAO together with the other UN agencies in Tanzania has made good progress in including Food Security in the One UN Joint Program; the strengthening of a Livelihoods based Food Security and Nutrition Information System is part of cluster one of this JP, with cluster one focusing on wealth creation (increased access to sustainable income opportunities, productive employment and food security in rural and urban areas).

As you can see, Tanzania is facing a lot of interesting challenges in the area of Food Security and Nutrition and I am expecting a lot from this network in terms of pooling relevant in-country knowledge as well as from learning by sharing.

Contribution by Denise Melvin, Communication Officer of the EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Program

Hi everybody,

I am interested in communication as a participatory process and breaking the usual vertical flow of information. New technologies, such as the one running the forum we are currently using, create tremendous opportunities for people from all over the globe to exchange ideas and knowledge. They also flatten many of the usual barriers related to gender, rank, etc...

At the recent Web 2 for development conference, there were examples of how blogs and mobile phones, especially in Africa, are at the cutting edge in delivering all sorts of information.

For anyone who has not yet seen it, I recommend Ethan Zuckerman's video from the conference held in FAO: <http://wurtv.wur.nl/wurtv/viewer.html?path=Web2ForDev/2007/09/27/1/>

(it takes a while to download but is well worth it)

The EC-FAO Food Security Program, where I work, is also using both online and offline technology to deliver food security e-learning courses. You can take them online at <http://www.foodsec.org/dl> . They are also available on CD-Rom by writing to information-for-action@fao.org .

Contribution by Huyen Tran, FAO, Italy

Dear all,

As we are discussing Communication of FSN information, allow me to contribute as a member and not a moderator of this Forum.

I'm talking about the FSN Forum as an example of HOW we communicate/exchange FSN information among DIFFERENT ACTORS IN FSN (researchers and academics; practitioners from civil society organizations, from NGOs and international agencies; donors, planners, policy-makers and implementers at all levels).

The Forum is:

- PARTICIPATORY: members exchange ideas/experiences, resources and find collective solutions.
- COLLABORATIVE: the management and facilitation of the Forum is based on active involvement of different FAO country offices, FAO units, and resource people coming from different organizations.
- DEMAND-DRIVEN: the conception of the Forum is based on several need assessments of the targeted audiences. Members raise discussion topics and a Group of core members will be formed to decide the direction/orientation of the Forum.

The FSN Forum is based on:

- An active FACILITATION/MODERATION: people are the centre of any process, and facilitation is crucial to a good interaction among people who are geographically dispersed.

- TECHNOLOGIES: the forum combines a web-based forum and an e-mail list, so as to avoid email overload and allow participation of people having poor internet access. The web-site is interactive, DYNAMIC and can ARCHIVE a comprehensive database of resources/information.

The Forum is supposed to break the usual vertical flow of information and connect people for solutions and actions. Its philosophy is "Your participation is the key to the success of the Forum". It has been a great start. The number of members has more than doubled (from 190 to 412) within 3 weeks since the launch of the Website on 9th October. We have been having a lively discussion so far.

I believe that we are going in the right direction, and if something goes wrong, I hope that you will always suggest ways to improve it because this is OUR forum. Each of us is a part of it, and we all are in a way responsible for its failure and/or its success.

Contribution by Cristina Lopriore, EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action, FAO, Italy

Dear all,

Communication and dissemination of findings stemming from research studies, assessments and analyses in food security and nutrition (FSN) is usually done through materials such as publications, reports, briefs, bulletins, newsletters, websites, press releases etc. Collectively these may be called "food security information products". Their objective is to support of decision making, including the design, planning, implementation and targeting of food security policies and interventions.

The main problems that commonly affecting the use and impact of FSN information and analysis in program and policy making processes may be grouped in three main categories.

Main problems affecting the impact of food security information on decision-making:

1. The POOR RELEVANCE to decision- making processes
2. LOW CREDIBILITY commonly due to insufficient communication and coordination between decision- makers and food security analysts
3. INADEQUATE ACCESS to target groups

It is worth noting that the first two categories can be directly attributed to weaknesses or constraints in communication and the "process of Production" (including: dialogue between food security analysts and decision-makers, coordination and dissemination activities).

Using the above broad categories, I have organized below some of these common problems as well as the solutions or best practices that some of our participants have identified in countries and shared with us so far in this forum discussion:

Country examples of problems in the use of food security information in decision-making(identified by the participants in the forum discussion):

POOR RELEVANCE:

- * Information provided (a) not matching actual needs for decision-making, (b) insufficiently action-oriented, merely descriptive, (c) too little updated;

- (d) covering only one sector (agriculture, health) (EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action).

LOW CREDIBILITY:

- * Inconsistent information inputs (including delays and inadequacy) received from the main partners are reflected negatively in the reliability and credibility of information outputs (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)
- * Lack of organizational clarity in line of communication (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)
- * Poor communication (vertically and horizontally) between the centre and state levels (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)
- * Methods used are not transparent, not understood, not validated with users; information provided inconsistent with other information sources or previous recommendations; data/information not (considered) reliable (EC/FAO Program Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)
- * Insufficient coordination and dialogue between users and producers of information resulting among others in lack of common understanding of food security problems and decision-making agenda not aligned with country priorities (EC/FAO Program Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)

INADEQUATE ACCESS:

- * lack of communication infrastructure and low performance of existing information systems (E.F.A Ismail, Sudan)
- * most key answers remain undocumented with technicians, experts and practitioners in the field, and are not reaching the audience that they should (Acosta, Mozambique)
- * target audience preferences/needs not taken into account in terms of timeliness, format, dissemination channel etc. (EC/FAO Program Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)

Country examples of solutions and best practices identified by the participants in the forum discussion:

POOR RELEVANCE:

- * Multi-stakeholders Workshop with the aim to create a common understanding on strengthening food security and nutrition and livelihood analysis to reflect the need for multi-sector approaches in addressing food security and nutrition (Boetekees, Tanzania) - valid also for Credibility issue
- * Training of FS analysts in improving reporting and communication skills with active participation of decision-makers (EC/FAO Programme. Countries: Mozambique, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Burkina Faso)
- * Following every stages of the policy making processes (problem identification, agenda setting, agenda debate, policy decisions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and involving wide range of stakeholders (Lagu)
- * build local capacity to generate more information and data on these lower [sub-national] levels for the decentralized decision-making and local ownership of response packages that vulnerable communities and households are demanding (Teller)
- * develop local area Vulnerability Profiles and Vulnerability Working Groups, in a capacity-building mode, as useful assessment strategies and tools to stimulate local action and prompt more responsive and effective early warning systems (Teller, Ethiopia)
- * undertake Users (or decision-making) Needs Assessments to identify requirements in FS information e.g. by carrying out a stakeholder analyses to analyze the different decision-making levels: who they are (power/influence), where (or at which level) they operate (central vs decentralized), what type of

decisions they face, how they take them - including: extent of participation, (incl. what, why and how they use information (if at all) in these decisions (i.e. Who needs what information and why?) - (EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)

* getting an understanding of policy agenda and ensuring FSN are among policy priorities of decision-makers e.g. by support streamlining of FSN into the country reference policy frameworks, support advocacy activities, making explicit the relationships between FSN and country priority objectives, demonstrate the importance of hunger reduction for poverty alleviation and economic growth - (EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action)

LOW CREDIBILITY:

* Information is most likely to be trusted if the decision makers have a stake in the system and really understand it. An important way to achieve this is through collaboration in data collection, analysis and reporting. The shift towards collaboration and networking has improved consensus over the conclusions and increased the likelihood of action in response to the reports. (Lesson 2 of EC/FAO e-learning course Reporting for Results).

Two examples are:

- o Joint collaboration between several Ministries and partners on the development of FSN analytical report (Boetekees, Tanzania)
- o Another example of building joint ownership are the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) in southern Africa: the VAC analysis has been extremely influential on food security programming. Several evaluation exercises have consistently attributed this, at least in part, to extensive participation and broad membership

* Some good practices to help enhance the credibility of FS information products are (EC/FAO Programme Training on Producing Food Security Information Products that Result in Action):

- Supporting mechanisms for involving stakeholders in the collection and analysis of FSN information
- Documenting the methods used to collect and analyse information and validate them during technical meetings with stakeholders
- Coordinating with other FS analysts, avoiding (apparent) inconsistencies

Best,

Cristina

Third & Fourth weeks' discussion – List of contributions

Introduction to the last weeks' topic by the Forum Facilitator

Dear Forum members,

We are now in the last week of the first e-discussion and have had wonderful contributions. I'm pleased to introduce hereby the main topic of this week.

Talking about INFORMATION NEEDS and ACTION, I feel the need to repeat the reason behind this discussion topic. We do research/analysis or generate information for a particular purpose, which should always be for a positive change in benefit of a certain audience, i.e. policy changes or actions. In many cases, unless your research work or the analysis you conduct is in response to an expressed need for information or for a specific research gap, your efforts may not result in desired policy change or specific action.

Charles Teller has addressed this subject in his first contribution. We would like to hear more from all of you on this very important issue:

QUESTION 3: Please explain whether (iv) your work was in response to an EXPRESSED NEED for information (by whom and for what purpose) and (v) whether you are aware of the knowledge generated resulted in CONCRETE ACTION. If yes, please describe this action/impact.

Kindly also point out failures or gaps in making FSN information demand-driven according to your experiences.

We are going to prepare a lessons learned paper with the contributions of this e-discussion. I have high hope that this paper will capture your knowledge and experiences and will be useful for future research/analysis/actions in FSN.

Thanks for your active participation so far and I look forward to hearing more from you.

Contribution by Charles Teller

Hello again,

I will summarize responses to the QUESTION 3, in terms of our work on food and nutrition security in Ethiopia since 1992:

iv: EXPRESSED NEED:

a) For different types of FSN information (by whom and for what purpose)

1- What are the main root causes of the chronic and high vulnerability to food insecurity (4-7 million/yr) and high child malnutrition (64% were -2sd stunted in 1992), who/where/when are they most vulnerable, and how do they become more resilient?

2- What are valid and reliable indicators for routinely assessing the chronic situation (as opposed to the transitory/acute indicators), and what can be done about it in a decentralized and participatory manner and on a sustainable basis? Requested by a large consensus of nationally representative participants in the 1997 National Conference on vulnerability; requests by the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC/DPPB) which has been working on Early Warning Systems since the mid-1970s, Food Security Offices and Ministries of Planning and Economic Development in the major drought-prone Regions and international donors. The donors wanted to help reduce the emergency relief actions taken on a more chronic, food insecure and vulnerable population, and thus how to more effectively support the DPPC, FSOs, and related Ministries and NGOs, expressed in meetings and formal requests in consultations with these partners in 1998 and 1999.

3) In-depth research by government agencies and universities into the causes of vulnerability to various types of disasters, such as climate change, flooding, and epidemics, and how to build their own capacity for disaster prevention.

v: KNOWLEDGE TO CONCRETE ACTION:

1) A National Guidelines on Vulnerability Profiles developed, published and accepted by the government and supported by donors, and widely used for vulnerability assessments and annual reports.

2) New indicators of chronic vulnerability utilized for bi-annual field assessment, monitoring, Annual Appeals for Food/health aid, and by Early Warning Systems, FEWS, EWS, FIVINS, MDGs, etc.

3) Coordination of rapid collection of mortality and nutrition data by government and NGOs for famine of 2002-03 and subsequent food shortages in specific regions.

4) Capacity-building at regional, zonal and district levels of government, public and private research centers and NGO personal.

- 5) Results and action packages developed at decentralized levels and carried out when funded (too many to enumerate).
- 6) New follow-up studies and assessments carried out by universities, banks, donors and NGOs to fill research and knowledge gaps and update information.
- 7) Ethiopian human capacity for vulnerability assessments and analysis increased, including GIS, epidemiological and demographic statistical packages and qualitative agro-ecological methods.
- 8) National and sub-national policies and strategies use these data, especially in the health, food security, poverty reduction, economic and social planning, environmental, water and disaster prevention sectors.
- 9) National (AAU/Addis) University capacity to provide short-term, mid and high level training in monitoring and evaluation of Health/population/nutrition programs yearly from Anglo-phone Africa.
- 10) National graduate theses and national and international research papers presented and published for the wider FSN and development audience.

We should be able to give a more concrete update in two months time.

Contribution by by El Fadil A. Ismail

Dear all,

In fact I have two queries

1. Sometimes one makes an assignment to FAO, or UNIDO or any other NGOs. We tend to structure the assignment in form of a scientific writing that may suite, a paper, a publication, or a note. After they make use of it, TO WHOM does the authorization to release the document for review or publication belongs?
2. Do organizations (such as FAO, UNIDO or NGOs) usually provide themes for independent research in FSN domain? If yes on what basis?

Thanks a lot for answering the questions or give your opinions on these issues.

Contribution by El Fadil A. Ismail

Dear all,

A month passed and we are still on the circumference of the problem, and not reached the middle of it yet! , nonetheless, the milestone walk starts always by a one step forward.

We always say, nothing can be solved by a click of a mouse, but rather it is an issue that requires intensive and continuous work till we bridge the vicious circle of poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy.

As research scientists we usually respond to assignments apparently made by UN organizations be it FAO, UNIDO, WFP or any other NGO but the objectives are already set by 'donors' be it EC, USAID, or NGO and restricted by a limited budget and specific time-frame, and hidden agenda.

Therefore, the EXPRESSED NEED for information, in my opinion, is to fill in information gaps at higher echelon level at the end of donors rather than a direct need requested by local government in terms of priority settings (however, the reverse might also be true). For instance, one of project document to handle food security and vulnerability was ready since 2005 for execution but suspended for 2 years and has just launched in mid April 2007 due to political constraints at the end of donors.

Nevertheless, it is a macro policy frame that necessitates a policy dialogue to settle down the question of priorities and goal trade-offs among "donors" who have the funds and would like to spend it according to their interest which is often bounded with political agenda and "national governments" which also have its peculiar agenda that might even contradict with 'donors' interest regarding the problems under focus! Just for the sake of poor vulnerable groups!

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Failure or success depends on funds availability to maintain the system viable. Many initiatives were launched but run short due to poor financing and inadequate training. Despite the policy analysis issue, yet, the lack of information and poor database are the main obstacles that hinder any improvement in decision-making process.
- The weakest point in our food security decision-making process remains on the part of policy analyses and the evaluation phase of the cycle to make future plans. However, even when data is adequate, it remained unanalyzed and unused or under-used.

Contribution by Denise Melvin, Communication officer, EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Program

Dear all,

I have been reading an interesting paper on linking research to policy making from IIED called: "Policy Research and the Policy Process: Do the Twain Ever Meet"?

<http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdf/full/6138IIED.pdf>

The paper shows that "research information provides a diffuse enlightenment function." It seldom enters the policy making process in a linear way, but works more in the sense of changing perceptions of the policy issue at hand and what possible solutions might be.

The paper also says that policy makers found research most useful when it:

1. Actually suggested a particular course of action; and
2. Challenged existing assumptions or institutional arrangements

The paper is full of useful tips on having a bigger impact on policy making. For example, it may be useful to target as your primary audience the research analyst policy makers work with, rather than the busy decision makers themselves. It may be useful to present your findings in different ways: a report, a policy brief, through a workshop or presentation, or even a video.

I'd like to hear what people think about this paper and the fact that research can have a "DIFFUSE" effect. One implication of this is certainly the need for greater outreach to media and presenting research findings in a way that can be understood by the general public.

Contribution by Farhad Mirzaei, Animal Science Research Institute of Iran

Greetings,

First of all, I have to express my pleasure to participate on this global forum. Everyone in the world who has a beating heart, desires that adequate food should be accessible to the whole of the world's population, which is not actually happening at the moment.

Unfortunately, we are hearing and watching doleful news about poverty and hunger. All of you know better than me that there is no food deficiency in our planet, but it is not righteously distributed.

Another thing to consider is the policy-making of developing countries, which should choose their priorities maximizing internal and external investment, training of manpower and infrastructure facilities.

The definition of Agriculture is different in developed countries and developing countries, so poor countries look to agriculture in their GDP (nowadays it is declining year by year) as well as socio, cultural and economic base in their politic programs, but this sector is as an industry in industrial countries, so they consider comparative advantages as well as competitive ones on this sector. For this reason, we are hearing those countries throw out their agricultural products in order to regulate market prices.

There are so many tragic paradoxes in poor countries on food security, like high waste of agricultural products and low productivity because of religious dependence of some agricultural products.

Another aspect to consider are environmental changes, which cause the loss of natural nutrients, and poor people can not secure a sufficient intake of essential nutrients in their food rations.

Most of the researchers in developing counties are unsatisfied with the farmers' approach and poor acceptance of their research findings, because they don't feel its effects even on poverty alleviation.

I think, these things should be considered, rather than research findings on mistaken assumptions, and this way the trust and capacity of the research will increase.

Contribution by Mark Smulders

Dear Farhad Mirzaei,

Thank you for your contribution. I am just back from a mission to Iran, working with the Agricultural Planning and Economic Research Institute (APERI) and several other ministries and institutions on food insecurity and vulnerability issues. I learned that in Iran, environmental degradation is an issue that requires further research in terms of its potential impact on future food insecurity in pastoral areas.

Could you inform us of a particularly successful research activity conducted by the Animal Science Research Institute of Iran that has had an impact on government policy (e.g. in relation to environmental degradation faced by animal herders)? We would appreciate it, if you could inform us of the key factors (or indicators) used in such research, what analysis was conducted (for which purpose) and how the research was communicated and used for policy making.

Looking forward to your feedback on the above.

Contribution by Huyen Tran

Dear all,

Once again I'd like to take off the moderator hat and participate as a member in this discussion. Actually I'm inspired by the recent post by Denise on linking research to policy making (see below).

Last year I participated in a FAO's lesson learning exercise in the provision of country level policy assistance under the FNPP Program (see more at http://km.fao.org/fsn/fsn_home/about_fnpp.html). The main aim of this exercise was to improve the EFFECTIVENESS of policy assistance, meaning policy assistance activities which lead to ACTIONS. This endeavour has three main lines of activities:

- * Literature Review

- * Institution's surveys: multilateral and bilateral

* 13 case studies of selected country level policy assistance projects undertaken by FAO in the recent past

The synthesis of the information gathered and lessons learned has been discussed in an International workshop of practitioners held in FAO, Rome on 19-20 April, 2007.

I'm sure that other Forum's members who participated in this activity, like Coumba Dieng and Jean Balie, will share the main lessons drawn on HOW to make policy assistance EFFECTIVE. As I did the literature review, I want to stress some (of several) points that I personally found very relevant but are often neglected:

* More attention to COMMUNICATION (including repackaging), advocacy and awareness-raising on policy issues

* Better design policy assistance project: better state how the intervention was expected to fit into the policy process continuum and what was expected in terms of policy results or development of strategies

* Recommendations regarding policy ADOPTION/IMPLEMENTATION (in addition to recommendations for policy decisions) can also be made to help the government overcome constraints through capacity building, training, awareness campaigns, and ensuring finances for implementation

* More attention to capacity building (knowledge sharing)

All of these are very in line with what Denise said in her post.

I have added the literature review on Policy Assistant to the Website at

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=266&nocache=

1. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

Contribution by Florence Imaikorit-Oumo, Uganda National Agricultural Research Organization

Dear all,

My name is Florence Imaikorit-Oumo. I worked as an extension worker from 1977 to 2000. I then joined the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) as Senior Research Officer, responsible for Technology Dissemination. It was at this time that I realized a big information gap that existed between us the extension workers together with farmers.

I realized that communications objectives have to be specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic and time bound. Just as communication must command attention, the message passed should be able catch the receivers' attention (appropriate), clear message, communicate benefit, create trust, call for action and be consistent. The issue of feed-back was not very clear.

I tried to come up with the following in an attempt to bridge the information gap:

1. Developing a communication strategy for the project I was work on
2. Developing technology Inventory for the Organization
3. Guidelines for developing communication strategy
4. Guidelines for developing communication materials for natural resources projects

5. Guidelines for packages (fact sheets) of research outputs
6. Trained scientists and service providers to repackage information from fact sheets
7. Initiated 'Information Resource Centre' at the institute I working to act as one stop centre for information for the beneficiaries

INDICATORS USED:

1. Level of awareness of the available NARO technologies by the beneficiaries (needed a survey before and after the distribution of materials)
2. Level of utilization and impact of the disseminated technologies (needed impact studies)
3. Level of institutionalization of the communication strategy and the use of the fact sheets guidelines
4. Number of scientists and service providers repacking information materials for farmers
5. Quality of the information materials developed (as far as the format of presentation, simplicity of language used).

HOW I COMMUNICATED MY RESULTS:

1. I shared some of experiences in a few fora to which I was invited by a few people who tried to follow what I was doing
2. I circulated a few copies of my publications, but could not meet the demand because of the lack of resources

IN RESPONSE TO AN EXPRESSED NEED:

I believe so, because much demand of some of the publications was from both service providers as teaching materials and farmers.

KNOWLEDGE GENERATED: The knowledge I generated is still with me. I have got much chance to use it.

SUCCESS FACTORS: I worked as communication officer in the DFID project which funded most of my activities.

KNOWLEDGE GAPS: I feel I could be of more use if I could help my fellow scientists to UNDERSTAND the BENEFIT of communication.

CONSTRAINTS:

1. I feel I don't have enough support from my organization because not much funds are allocated to communication.
2. Still the issue of feed back from beneficiaries of research results is neither still nor very clear.
3. Linkages between the demand and supplier of research outputs are not sustainable.

Contribution by Eliza, Save the Children UK Bangladesh

I am Eliza working with Save the Children UK Bangladesh program as a "Program Manager" of Household Economic Security Program. I am really proud of being a member of this FSN forum, which

I think a wonderful initiative of sharing knowledge and thus improving impact of Food and nutrition security programs and policies.

I read the note of Mr. Farhad Mirzaei, Researcher, Animal Science Research Institute of Iran. Thanks a lot Mr. Farhad for this thoughtful sharing. I found one point in your note which I didn't really understand clearly, you mentioned about "Religious Dependency" on some agriculture product as one of the barriers of food security in some developing countries. It would be highly appreciated if you can elaborate the point a bit more or giving an example for my clarity.

Contribution by Alemu Asfaw

To respond to some of the inquiries that Dr Elfadel raised, I can say that SIFSIA (the project to which El fadel refer) is making some progress in the overall improvement of food security information system. However, I would like to emphasize that improving these systems, other than pushing our activities in a more sustainable manner requires serious government commitments. Unless the government puts its resources in the right place, activities may collapse albeit good intention of technical experts collaborating in the area.

High turnover is also a critical issue to be raised, despite intensive 'on-job' training components of SIFSIA, the UN community, donors, NGOs, and other relatively well-paying institutions will continue to snatch qualified experts from the government office. The best strategy that we will be following is to train as many people as possible for the same kind of activity that we envisaged to implement so as to make some kind of redundancy and replaceable of qualified experts in doing the same job.

Let me elaborate some of the points that SIFSIA is currently doing.

To start with I share Elfadil's concern of data or information generated for gratifying immediate interests of humanitarian actors. SIFSIA being a government led program, we are struggling to fight against the idea of status-quo - where many of the current food security information system led by agencies (E.g. xxx) are geared towards feeding into their immediate information needs. SIFSIA's idea is building the government information system while gratifying the immediate needs of humanitarian actors - so we support both though we give heavy weight for establishing a sustainable food security information system.

Regarding the analysis part of food security information - analyses are being done at various levels and we are also contributing to that pull of analyses. However, the most important challenge that goes beyond establishing a sustainable data generation and analysis would be advocacy - or making that same analysis first palatable to decision makers and second how can we find the necessary gate through which we can disseminate that information to the critical decision making body.

While setting up this bigger institutional framework, there are many ongoing activities that will in the end fit into the bigger platform. So, allow me to quickly demonstrate one of the important activities that we are currently guiding - the government led the Food and Agricultural Market Information System (FAMIS). This, I hope, will help in answering some of the questions raised.

In establishing the market information system, we first engaged technical experts working on the area to discuss FAMIS' relevance and its core elements at the federal level, in which Dr. El Fadil was both important facilitator and also the one who helped us in consolidating the outputs of that forum. Then we call all State representatives to provide their inputs into the system and that was just finished last week. The outputs of both these forums will fit into the final design of a web-based market information system. This system is not going to reinvent the wheel, it will build up on the existing system. The government is committed in doing this activity or they have been doing it, but we need to put it into a more digital world - strong database, in-built analysis, and dissemination tool.

The most important by-product of this system is that we will use the same platform in sharing other FS information from the States to the Federal level or vice versa. It will also be a good tool in sharing FS related information - nutrition, agricultural inputs, water related issues, weather, etc. It should be

noted that once the system is established, information dissemination will not confine to the web as many of information users do not have easy access to it - other means will be used.

Some policy dialogue in marketing may include issue of subsidizing wheat production; roles and responsibilities of strategic reserves; local purchase of food aid vs importing it; issue of self-sufficiency (still in the agenda), some of critical livelihood related issues, etc. We hope that this will be a good entry point to engage some decision makers on the area as we will be able to supply this information at their door steps.

This is one of the important activities of SIFSIA-Northern States of Sudan and if interested in more elaboration for our other activities, and/or some of the issues above.

Contribution by Resurrection Lao, Executive Director, ESCR-Asia

ESCR-Asia is glad to be part of this forum. As a Philippine-based institution, we are currently implementing a FAO-supported project which hopes to develop a right to food toolkit for policy-makers. We are currently completing a video documentary called THE JUSTICE OF EATING: Stories and Images of Philippine Realities on Food.

I take note of the message from Ms. Eliza about religious dependency of agricultural products. In the conduct of our documentary and when shoot Sulu, a southern part of my country where armed conflict is going on, CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY OF FOOD RELIEF is indeed significant. While almost all of the evacuees are Muslims, some relief or donor agencies provide pork canned goods. While insensitivity is unintentional, the FAO-right to food guidelines can help both government and civil society stakeholders in implementing food relief.

Contribution by Jose Luis Vivero Pol, from the Regional Initiative Hunger-Free Latina America

Dear Huyen,

Regarding different approaches to exert influence in political decisions based on food security research and analysis, I would like to contribute with some insights from our experience with the Regional Initiative Hunger-Free Latina America and the Caribbean (www.rlc.fao.org/iniciativa).

1. Politicians and decision makers get influenced by different channels: direct interviews with peers, reading conclusive policy briefs (really to the point and extremely brief), reading newspapers and listening radio and TV, being forced by demonstrations and civil society lobbies, being ordered by superiors, being lectured by reputed academicians, and being assessed by international institutions.

2. That implies that if one wants to position food security in national agendas, one should convey similar messages (i.e. links between hunger and democracy, or high cost of living with hunger vs the budget needed to eradicate it) to different stakeholders (NGOS, Ministries, Universities, public media, internet, scientific papers), so as the ideas to reach the politicians by several means.

3. Within the Initiative we are supporting three components:

A.- Awareness-raising to position hunger in national and regional agendas

B.- Strengthening national capacities, through technical training, policy backstopping, and promotion of right to food and legal frameworks.

C.- Applied research, systematization and Food Security Observatory

4.- Finally, another key element that is often downplayed is the need to find, nurture and promote national leaders, champions who are really committed with Hunger eradication, political or civil society leaders who are capable of speaking to large audiences, write to the public, mobilize masses,

influence politicians. National Leaders in the fight against hunger and poverty such as Lula da Silva, Correa or the National Secretary of Food Security in Guatemala, Botrán.

Without those leaders' support, our FAO approach will be limited to bureaucratic and technical recipes, with not that much receptive audience in national governments.

Contribution by Jose Luis Vivero Pol

Dear Denise,

I cannot be more in agreement with main findings of this rather relevant paper. In a global world where all of us are overwhelmed with information and bulky papers, being able to convey concise, scientifically-based recommendations and concrete courses of action seems more relevant than ever.

We, at FAO as a policy-support institution, should pay more attention to the way we present our papers, reports and supportive information.

As a suggestion, we could establish a publication series with POLICY BRIEFS, well-written summaries where FAO presents (really to the point) main conclusions of the countless papers and reports we produce every year.

Contribution by Farhad Mirzaei

Dear Mark,

You can see some examples below. If you need more details, you should give me more times, because I have to translate them into English.

EFFECTIVENESS of research findings by ASRI on policy making in animal husbandry sub-sector in Iran:

- 1- Usage of tomato by-products on livestock and poultry nutrition preventing of environmental contamination
- 2- Rule of Sanan goat on milk and meat production.
- 3- Survey on first mating age of Sistani calves increasing of farmers' income
- 4- Usage of Zeololite on laying hens nutrition increasing of qualitative and quantitative production
- 5- Decreasing of weaning time in native Golpaygani calves enhancing of farmers' income and milk production
- 6- Usage of rice straw on animal nutrition decreasing of feeding cost and preventing of environmental contamination
- 7- Usage of fruits waste on animal nutrition decreasing of farmer' income and preventing of environmental contamination
- 8- Usage of Whey in livestock nutrition to reduction of fed cost and prevention of environmental pollution
- 9- Nutrition of honey bee by protein supplements deduction colonies' mortality during of winter.

Mark Smulders wrote:

"... I learned that in Iran, environmental degradation is an issue that requires further research in terms of its potential impact on future food insecurity in pastoral areas. Could you inform us of a particularly successful research activity conducted by the Animal Science Research Institute of Iran that has had an impact on government policy (e.g. in relation to environmental degradation faced by animal herders)? We would appreciate it, if you could inform us of the key factors (or indicators) used in such research, what analysis was conducted (for which purpose) and how the research was communicated and used for policy making".

Contribution by Farhad Mirzaei

Dear Eliza,

Thank you so much to read my point carefully and your valuable time.

As you know, every nation has some negative and positive orders in its religion and custom, which is based on its religious leaders and ancestors' domestic knowledge.

After the arrival of industrialization and modernization systems, unfortunately (or fortunately), people couldn't go through new technologies as much as growth of them, but governments and particular inexperienced scientists and researchers under pressure of some companies, are changing livelihood systems.

This problem is revealed more and more in poor areas because of the absence of infrastructure systems.

As an example, you can see in Hindu's custom, people don't eat meat, but you see many eatable animals surrounding them, which are injured and unusable to some purposes.

For this reason, even, these people are losing their own income because of unknowing of their products' actual value, so what is happening, they even can not provide their usual foods, because urbanization is occupying agricultural lands fast.

Another example is organic farming, which changed organic farming to industrialized farming, nowadays how we can manage organic farming after losing underground water and uncontaminated and fertilized soil?

I think, at this stage it is enough if you need more details, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Eliza wrote:

"I found one point in your note which I didn't really understand clearly, you mentioned about "Religious Dependency" on some agriculture product as one of the barriers of food security in some developing countries. It would be highly appreciated if you can elaborate the point a bit more or giving an example for my clarity".

Contribution by Eltighani Elamin, Agricultural Economics & Policy Research Center, Sudan

Hi guys,

I was not intended to share my views with you very soon, even, though I am among the first 10 members who registered in this very important knowledge sharing initiative and of course following up

on your very fascinating and informative message. However, I was pushed by the reply of Mr. Alemu Asfaw.

Asfaw, I'm not convinced that SFSIA will add much value to the global food security, at least not for Sudan. The problem of SIFSIA is a structured one, in the sense that the FAO missed the right professional persons who could genuinely and professionally contribute to this project. May, the FAO was forced by political issues not recruit competitive scholars for this project. May, another reason is weak position of the EC in terms of monitoring its fund.

Anyway, we hope that we should not look for satisfying our emissions and hopes when contributing to this knowledge sharing entitlements, let's be accountable and transparent to our global food security endeavor.

Contribution by Forum Moderator on the After Action Review

Hi everybody,

The first discussion has not finished yet, and I want to thank you all for your wonderful participation and interest.

The discussion has been very good, but it can certainly be better. In order to constantly improve Forum activities, I would like to ask you (quite early) to give your comments and suggestions during an After Action Review, which is very important for the very first activity of our community.

Kindly give your feedbacks and suggestions on:

- DISCUSSION TOPIC: relevance, length, etc.
- MODERATION, FACILITATION and ORGANIZATION OF DISCUSSIONS in general
- OTHER ISSUES

I know it is almost impossible to find a solution which pleases everybody, but we wish to find a way which serves well the majority of members.

The After Action Review will be on from today until 30th November 2007. A conference "After Action Review of the first discussion" has been opened on the Web-based forum for this purpose.

You are welcome to drop me a line any time at huyen.tran@fao.org or in the conference "Your comments and suggestions about the Forum".