

# **NATIONAL AGRICULTURE RESEARCH EFFORTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO NUTRITION AND HEALTH OUTCOMES**

PRACTICAL EVIDENCE FROM NATIONAL RESEARCH EFFORTS,  
Francis Maideni, Department of Agriculture Research, MoAIWD

Agriculture is the single most important sector of Malawi economy as it employs about 80 percent of the workforce, and contributes over 80 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. Above all it also contributes significantly to national and household food security. Agriculture is the primary producer of food, which determines nutrition and health status of individuals in communities.

Agricultural Research has resulted in release and use of technologies that are intended to improve availability and access of nutritious food. Investment in research has produced technologies that have relied mostly on improved crop varieties in terms of production and quality. Increases in production have resulted in reduced food prices, thereby increasing access to food.

## **Policies that support A-N-H linkages**

There are policies in each of the sectors of Agriculture, Nutrition and Health that guide the operation and deliverables. These are reflected in the country overarching strategy, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS 2006-2011). The MGDS is centered on achieving strong and sustainable economic growth, building a healthy and educated human resource base, and protecting and empowering the vulnerable. The MGDS is based on six thematic areas namely; sustainable economic growth; social protection; social development; management and prevention of nutrition disorders and HIV and AIDS; infrastructure development; and improved governance. There is need to have policies that speak directly to integration of A-N-H.

## **Nutritional objectives**

The nutritional objectives relate to access and intake in terms of quantity and quality. Objectives include issues of breast feeding, per capita intake of dietary fibre, and essential nutrients like folate, calcium, sodium, iodine and fluoride. The objectives also relate to total fat, total carbohydrate, cholesterol, and fruit and vegetable access and consumption and physical activity.

National Research efforts (interventions)

The National Research efforts are addressing these objectives by;

1. Breeding crops for better nutrition. The quantity is addressed by producing crops with higher yields; hybrids which produces increased food quantities per unit area; i.e. better

return per investment. Plant Breeding can improve micronutrient content of staple foods like maize (quality protein maize) with higher lysine and tryptophan levels than conventional maize, orange fleshed sweet potato and cassava.

2. Biofortification, Iron enriched rice.
3. Scaling up integrated agricultural interventions with nutritional behavioral change, and support household food production culminating in evident diversity in food.
4. Support to urban agriculture, which contribute significantly to diet of millions of people (milk, animal protein; beef, poultry and eggs).

### **Health aspects**

Health aspects/objectives relate to malnutrition, including “hidden” malnutrition, stuntedness, and prevalence of agriculture associated diseases.

The national Research efforts can formulate rations that will promote growth in pre-school going children and create awareness on malnutrition and its causes. Research creates practical interventions to control and mitigate agriculture-associated diseases (including food safety, water-related diseases, zoonotic diseases, and occupational health) in order to enhance environmental sustainability, reduce poverty, increase food security, and contribute to the health of poor communities.

### **Integrating policy, and decision making in agriculture, health, and nutrition programs**

There is need to accelerate progress in improving health and nutrition by exploiting the synergies between agriculture, health and nutrition in development programs implemented at the community, district and national levels.

Research scientists, Policy makers and technical experts are expected to synthesize and prioritize knowledge, evidence, and approaches to support better cross-sectoral policy and decision making and leverage synergies between agriculture, health and nutrition. There is need therefore to comprehensively identify and fully exploit synergies and break intersectoral divides. This can be achieved in part by addressing institutional and governance issues that have prevented integration.

---

Dr. Francis Maideni, A Short note prepared for the panel discussion at a conference “Unleashing Agriculture’s potential for Improved Nutrition and Health in Malawi”, Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe, Malawi. 26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.