

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTOR IN STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND HEALTH (A-N-H)

(Policy and Programmes)

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1.0 Introduction:

Agriculture is the back bone of most of the developing nations including Malawi for income, growth, food, fuel and medicine. It impacts on health and nutrition on the other hand, health and nutrition impacts on agricultural production and productivity. This is a clear indication that agriculture, health and nutrition are interlinked and sectors involved in these three areas need take into account his relationship from policy to implementation.

2.0 The Role of Private Sector in Agriculture:

The private sector plays different roles from production, processing, marketing and consumption. In production, private sector is involved in research and development of different inputs required for production, such as seed, fertilizers, farming technologies, contract farming, extension services, information, and communication technologies (ICT) and transportation. The sector has a critical role in marketing and post harvest management, processing, value addition to the products, marketing based on research, distribution based on need and demand. The sector is also directly involved with consumers of agricultural products, process and package products based on consumers preferences and needs, follow global and national food standards and resolutions such as on infant feeding affecting milks and complementary foods, ICT on availability of agricultural products and services that support agriculture, healthier diets and life styles. Private sector is also strong in capacity building in all areas of agriculture, linking farmers (producers) to retailers or processors to consumers and vice versa

3.0 Private Sector's Support For Agriculture Nutrition and Health

The private sector translates global and national policies into action for marketing purposes and deliberate move to deal with a health and nutrition problem. For example, biotechnology biofortification, food fortification, and general food processing for different target groups, the sector is contributing to solutions for availability and access to diversified food products and macro and micronutrient deficiencies and access to medicines for prevention and treatment of health problems. The sector is committed to implement global, regional and national policies and strategies if made aware such as the Code of marketing breastmilk substitutes and subsequent resolutions, the WHO global strategy on diet, physical activity and health, Codex alimentarius, agriculture, nutrition and health policies and regulations. In the processing industry, occupational health regulations and procedures are implemented for the health considerations of the staff and products. The sector has the capacity to inform and educate the public on this linkage. However effective promotion and implementation of interventions towards this linkage depends on policies and standards prevailing in each country and monitoring mechanisms however there are challenges in monitoring and reinforcement of these policies and programmes.

4.0 Private sector Nutrition and Health objectives

Most of the times the private sector involved in this linkage have a nutrition and or health objective to be achieved although in other cases it may be secondary, the primary objective might be value addition to increase demand for the product. For example **Valid Nutrition (VN)**:

4.1 Objectives: To make highly nutritious “ready-to-use food” products for prevention and treatment of malnutrition more accessible and affordable for those that need them most. To prevent contagious diseases from agricultural products and people visiting and working within the factory.

4.2 Strategies: Use of current nutritional needs and requirements- started with severe acute malnutrition(SAM) greatest need, currently working on moderate acute and chronic malnutrition using global and national policies and standards, Research and development on use of locally available and acceptable foods (development of recipes, acceptability trials and efficacy trials) before release, of the formulation.

Ingredients for RUTF are peanut paste or chick pea/ sesame and soon Malawi will start using Soybean, maize sorghum combination, milk, sugar, cooking oil, vitamins and minerals. Sourcing of these ingredients can be a challenge- interms of availability and quality. VN works directly with organized farmers groups such as NASFAM and Exagris to ensure the right paste and quality is procured at the same producers get information and surety on market and prices of their products. Partners with the public sector to ensure that distribution, access and utilization is based on needs.

VN working with NASFAM and Exagris and processors of peanut paste is helping to have peanuts and its paste with acceptable levels of aflatoxin, there is testing of paste before and after production for aflatoxin, strict routine biochemical and microbial testing, implementation of personal hygiene and occupational health regulations to prevent contamination and transfer of infections

Policies and Programmes

Overall the private sector complies with policies and regulations of the country. They have their own sometimes which if they have evidence that they work, they market them to the public sector. Policies and programmes linked A_N_H needs to be participatory involving concerned stakeholders and based on evidence. In this business, it is better to have “carrot and a stick” for the private sector. There has to be incentives for the private sector to strengthen this linkage, favourable policies in production, marketing, processing and education/creation of awareness through appropriate extension services that are market focussed.

Recommendations for discussion

The private sector has a role in strengthening the ANH linkages at each stage from production through marketing to consumption and there is need for appropriate policies and programmes based on evidence.

- What is the impact of the current policies and programmes on the private's sectors role in strengthening role in A-N-H?
- Extension services and consumer education for improved quality and quantity of desired products leading to markets, more money, diversity of foods and products for AHN objectives
- What about policies and programmes conducive for development of local production and markets? Taxes, can they be a carrot for this link? Licensing, import regulations, bureaucracy in export process, etc is there something that can be done to improve?
- Sectors working in these areas, need to be linked share visions, problems/challenges and plan way forward including reviews to date. Building capacities of structures such as accredited laboratories for monitoring.