



LANSA

Leveraging Agriculture for
Nutrition in South Asia

Country Policy Landscape Analysis

A brief review of the agriculture/ nutrition
policy landscape in India

April 2014

The LANSAs Country Policy Landscape Analysis papers have been produced to provide context for LANSAs work. It should be noted these are living / evolving papers not intended for publication.

Agriculture policies and strategies

Background

In the 1950s and 1960s, the country experienced persistent food crises, compounded by drought and a population boom. In response, from 1965 to 1985, the government invested substantially in agricultural technologies, supportive policies, and rural infrastructure. This package of inputs and innovations known collectively as the Green Revolution contributed to a doubling of annual cereal production and enabled the country to build adequate grain stock to help smooth over volatility in production and consumption between years and within regions. Rural poverty levels fell from 56 percent to 39 percent between 1973-74 and 1987-88.

More Recent Developments

India has experienced high economic growth rates averaging 8 percent during the past two five-year plan periods, but agricultural growth has remained stagnant at 2-3 percent, especially since the 1990s (with much inter-regional variation). This stagnation is largely attributable to a decline in the share of public investment in agriculture and agricultural research and development. Inefficient supply chains, price volatility, weak infrastructure, postharvest waste, and a limited scope to expand agricultural areas due to land degradation and diversion of land toward non-agricultural purposes continue to hamper food availability and access. As a result, the Indian agriculture sector is one of the least productive in the world. While the share of agricultural growth in GDP has been declining, agriculture continues to be the main source of livelihood for more than half the total labour force and more than two-thirds of the rural labour force.

Food price inflation remains high in India: food prices skyrocketed in 2010 and 2011, before declining moderately in the first quarter of fiscal year 2011–12. The inflation for food items rose from around 7 percent in 2007–08 to 16 percent in 2010–11, before declining to 9 percent in the first quarter of 2011–12. The country is experiencing a shift in dietary patterns and an increasing domestic demand for high-value commodities, due to higher per capita incomes and urbanization. India's smallholder farmers have also been diversifying toward commodities with higher nutritional and monetary values, such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, poultry, and fish. Production of pulses however remains low.

The Public Distribution System, the largest distribution network of its type in the world, provides essential commodities (primarily rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene) at subsidized prices to the poor. Recent marketing policy efforts have focused on increasing the producer price and reducing the consumer price for pulses, fruits, and vegetables. Examples of such reforms include the amendment to the Agriculture Produce Market Committee Act, FDI in retail, and contract farming acts passed by some states.

The government of India has initiated other agricultural and related programmes in recent years, mostly within the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plan periods to jumpstart

agricultural growth. The National Horticulture Mission (NHM) was launched in 2005-06 to support the growth of the horticulture sector. The National Policy for Farmers was adopted in 2007 with the aim of improving the economic viability of farming. The National Food Security Mission (NFSM) was also introduced in 2007 with the goal of increasing the production and productivity of wheat, rice, and pulses on a sustainable basis. Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), a flagship government programme, was also launched in 2007 to rejuvenate agriculture. It is a bottom-up and demand-driven platform for Indian states to develop comprehensive agricultural plans that integrate livestock, poultry and fish farming with the crop sector. Other initiatives include the Rainfed Area Development Programme (a subscheme of RKVY), the Pulse Village Scheme, and the Technology Mission on Oilseeds, Pulses and Maize.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed in 2005 to provide 100 days of employment to rural workers. Starting with 200 rural districts, it was extended in 2008 to cover all the districts of the country except those with all-urban populations. Studies on the performance of NREGA have shown increases in food availability, intake and better health outcomes, along with improved wage rates, coverage of marginalized communities, women's empowerment and the reduction of distress migration. But at the same time, its implementation is reported to have raised the cost and curtailed the availability of agricultural labour, as labourers who were previously working on farms have switched to NREGA-supported work. Another challenge is the creation of productive and sustainable assets. Initiatives are being undertaken to link NREGA with agriculture and horticulture.

Evaluations have shown that although these various programmes certainly transfer resources to states, most Indian states, with the exception of Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, lack the institutional environments needed to jumpstart agricultural growth, and also encounter funding delays and poor monitoring and evaluation.

Nutrition policies and strategies

Background

One of the oldest nutrition programmes in India is the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, established four decades ago. Initially launched in 33 community blocks in India, it now reaches about 60.6 million children under 6 years of age and 13 million pregnant women and lactating mothers with an integrated package of early childhood education, health, and nutrition. Despite its successes, evaluations of the ICDS programme show a lack of linkages with health or other related sectors such as agriculture, mainly because the ministry that implements the programme has little authority over other ministries that are involved in nutrition. On the ground level, programme implementers are unable to administer public health initiatives such as vaccination, since these are under the realm of local health departments.

The National Nutrition Policy (NNP) was adopted in 1993 and has been implemented through the ICDS. The NNP treats undernutrition as a multi-sectoral issue that will require convergence among nutrition, agriculture, and health, and lists the relevant sectors and actors that will be needed for cooperation. It does not however delve into the budgetary commitments, institutional arrangements, and human resources required for effective cross-sectoral action. In 1995, the National Plan of Action on Nutrition was drafted. The subsequent Ninth Five-Year Plan (1998-2002) assessed progress in achieving the sectoral commitments to nutrition that were outlined in this National Plan.

In 1995, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (popularly known as the Mid-day Meals Scheme or MDMS) was launched. Today, it is the world's largest school feeding programme, seeking to improve the nutritional status of children in classes I-V in government, local-body and government-aided schools and provide nutritional support to children of in drought-affected areas during summer vacation.

A series of interim orders by the Supreme Court of India in the last decade in response to public-interest litigations filed by the “right to food” campaign on effective implementation of these two schemes prompted states to take responsibility for effective delivery.

More Recent Developments

Undernutrition continues to exact a heavy toll on India, costing the country as much as 3 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) per year. India's expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP, 4.1 percent, is very low compared to other emerging and developed countries, including the BRICS (Brazil and South Africa's health expenditures are 9 percent, while China and Russia's expenditures are 5 percent). Only 53.1 percent of all Indian households have access to a latrine as per the 2011 Census.

Though several programmes, including ICDS, MDMS, the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH II) programme and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) deliver direct nutrition interventions, the political will to make sufficient allocations to ensure universal coverage and effective delivery mechanisms is lacking. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) recommended setting up a National Nutrition Mission (NNM) to coordinate and monitor implementation of the National Nutrition Policy. The NNM was subsequently set up in 2003. The National Health Policy (NHP) was adopted in 2002, with an implementation plan provided through RCH II and the implementation framework of the NRHM. NHP addresses child undernutrition, and notes that nutrition must converge with other sectors, but does not take responsibility for coordinating these sectors. Furthermore, its proposed actions only focus on improving child health, rather than nutrition. The National Plan of Action for Children was issued in 2005, and contains nutrition as one area—it also talks about cross-sectoral action but does not lay out any specific goals for coordination. The Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security

in India, a civil society initiative formed in 2007, has been actively advocating for a multi-sectoral approach to sustainable nutrition security.

Integrating Agriculture and Nutrition Policies

An approach to addressing undernutrition that involves the agriculture sector is gradually gaining attention in India. The National Food Security Act talks about nutrition apart from providing rice and wheat. The Act also provides for making nutritious millets referred to as ‘coarse cereals’ available through the PDS.

The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) discussed inclusive growth, diversification, livestock, fisheries, and women in agriculture, all of which can indirectly impact nutrition. Its chapter on nutrition included some discussion of agricultural policies, analyzing agricultural price policies, such as minimum support prices and food procurement, as well as food and nutrition programmes, such as PDS and MDMS. It also called for the convergence of several departments across the national government for nutrition, including the Ministry of Agriculture. Educating people on dietary diversification was directed to be implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, by the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD), and through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Information about nutrient supplementation was outlined as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, WCD, and the Department of School Education and Literacy. Horticulture interventions, in part through home gardening, involved the Ministry of Agriculture for the supply of seeds, extension, and storage support, while public health measures were the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, WCD, and the ministries of Commerce, Rural Development, and Urban Development. Food fortification was identified as the responsibility of the Department of Health, as well as food-processing industries, the PDS, the ministries of Finance and Consumer Affairs, panchayati raj (local government), and state governments. The Plan however, made no mention of the NNP, National Plan of Action, or NNM. Under the food security strategy, where nutrition would naturally fit, only the NFSM was discussed and there was no budgetary allocation for nutrition-related issues.

Other multisectoral initiatives abound. In 2010, the MWCD and MOHFW released their first-ever joint policy document on Addressing India’s Nutrition Challenges. The strategy the policy document lays out is not yet operational. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) highlights that the production of fruits, vegetables, and protein-rich food items needs to outpace cereals in order to meet national demand. The Twelfth Five Year Plan on the Social Sector has a section entitled “Bringing Strong Nutrition Focus to Sectoral Programmes” that underlines that the Twelfth Plan sectoral strategies will prioritize nutrition in their social sector programmes, results framework documents, 5 year strategy plans, and programme implementation plan. The nutrition component of

the National Rural Health Mission Programme Implementation Plans will “especially be strengthened.”

The NRHM hosts a Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day, a monthly event organized at every village, where health and nutrition services are provided, although the emphasis is more on the provision of immunization services, care of sick children, and attention to nutritional rehabilitation for severe acute malnutrition. The Total Sanitation Campaign under the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has been revamped as the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) with the objective of working to provide access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

The government announced a nutri-farm scheme in its budget for 2013-14, allocating funds for setting up nutri-farms in districts most affected by malnutrition. The scheme proposes to organize demonstrations of bio-fortified food crops enriched with essential micronutrients in these districts. Within its first phase, the programme covers 100 high-malnutrition districts across 9 states. Rice, maize, wheat, finger millet and pearl millet are the cereal crops and sweet potato and drumstick (moringa) are the horticulture crops identified for promotion under the pilot scheme.

Many opportunities remain for convergence between nutrition and agriculture. The NRLM under the Ministry of Rural Development, for example, has great potential for linkages with the agriculture sector to empower women to improve nutrition outcomes. NRLM’s system of self-help groups can help launch interventions around homestead horticulture and poultry, micronutrient food fortification, low-cost, nutrient-dense supplementary foods, and primary food processing. Empowering women in agriculture also means ensuring women’s legal rights to land and access to inputs. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana envisages addressing food and nutrition security of women farmers and their families. There is currently dialogue around linking women in agriculture to NREGA, but this has not yet been operationalized. An initiative in Andhra Pradesh, the Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA) programme, addresses the major causes of agricultural shocks and helps farmers adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Covering about 2.7 million acres and benefitting about 1.05 million farmers, it has the potential to address nutrition in its design. Similarly, the state-led Kudumbashree initiative in Kerala has demonstrated to potential to address food and nutrition security.

Some policy options for linking the two sectors together include allocating 15 percent of programmatic budgets of RKVY, NRLM, NHM and others to districts that can demonstrate progress in relevant nutrition-security indicators; allocating resources to tracking agriculture programmes for relevant nutrition indicators and outcomes as part of more integrated data systems (including health, nutrition, economic, and livelihoods); linking district-level agricultural plans to existing programmes such as the Backward Regions Grant Fund, Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, NREGA, and Bharat Nirman, as well as crop and animal husbandry, fisheries, minor irrigation projects, rural development works, and agricultural marketing; including nutritious and diverse foods, including fortified foods, in the decentralized procurement of the PDS in order to

provide locally acceptable nutritious food to the people while mitigating the problems of storage of food commodities; and introducing nutrition-sensitive agriculture as a subject within the curricula of agriculture universities.

In 2008, the Government constituted the Prime Minister's National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges for policy direction and effective coordination between Ministries that have a sectoral responsibility to meet the challenge of malnutrition. Comprising more than 12 ministries, it has recommended the creation of new institutional arrangements that encourage different sectors to work together. Beginning in 2013-14, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has been given the responsibility to coordinate a multi-sectoral programme to address maternal and child undernutrition in 200 districts with high burdens of malnutrition. The programme identifies a number of multi-sectoral interventions aimed at children under 6 years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls in these districts. The interventions range from water and sanitation and health services to nutrition education; and household food production, and involve the MWCD and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW), among others. The ministries will set up state and district nutrition councils, which will then in turn develop multisectoral nutrition action plans that will eventually be rolled up to the national level. The National Mission Steering Group is currently running the programme, and also functions as the Executive Committee of the Prime Minister's National Council. It is part of the ICDS, and chaired by the Minister of the MWCD. The district magistrate leads the district nutrition councils and at the community level, village health, sanitation, and nutrition committees review, coordinate, and supervise the programme. A number of states have also established nutrition councils, as required under the national programme. MWCD and the MHFW typically lead the state missions and often work with the Ministry of Rural Development, which suggests links with agriculture. The initiative is covering 100 districts in the first phase.

As India moves forward, the larger challenge will be in putting these many initiatives into operation and ensuring delivery at the ground level. Building clear linkages between nutrition and agriculture at the state and district levels going down to the panchayat level will be imperative to success. This calls for a massive programme of sensitization of government functionaries and a mass campaign for nutrition awareness and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

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