EU-FAO partnership to help governments achieve zero hunger, improve nutrition and increase resilience in crisis-prone countries

FIRST - Food and nutrition security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation programme

FIRST programme brings governments, regional organisations and donors together to develop effective policies in the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition and to promote resilience.

FAO-FIRST Programme has responded promptly to our request to support policy dialogue, benchmarking or diagnostic studies as part of the effort to develop capacity and formulate an evidence-based Agricultural Sector Growth and Transformation Strategy. The study tour to Latin America and Asia contributed to building the human capacity of the Ministry and to improving coordination mechanisms.

Ms. A. Onyango, Agriculture Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

Context

There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone, yet 815 million people still go hungry every day. Moreover, global population is projected to rise to around 10 billion by 2050. In order to fight hunger and feed an extra two billion people in 2050, food production will need to increase by 50 percent. In a context where famine caused by conflicts and climate shocks has increased, the commitment of states to tackle these challenges has become all the more urgent. Governments' human and institutional capacities must improve to drive effective and equitable food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture policies.

Objectives

- FIRST represents a strategic partnership between the EU and the FAO whereby the FAO is providing support to ensure that EU investments in food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture (FNS&SA) are transformed by partner countries into effective policies and programmes. Such support should then contribute to increasing agricultural growth, enhancing nutrition and food security and to boosting people’s resilience to withstand food crises.
- Through this support, the EU and FAO are providing assistance to countries in driving their own policies and agendas, where they commit to explicitly incorporate FNS&SA objectives into their national frameworks and budgets, focusing in particular on the improvement of diets and levels of nutrition and on ameliorating the status of women, children, and most vulnerable population groups.
- The FIRST programme contributes to this by providing policy assistance to partner governments through a network of FNS&SA experts, hosted by partner ministries and/or by regional organisations that have requested the FAO’s support. These experts work directly with country partners to:
  - improve the capacities of national and regional actors in terms of awareness and understanding of critical FNS&SA issues, and in terms of skills to design, review and/or implement FNS&SA actions;
  - facilitate inclusive policy dialogue and coordination among diverse actors around FNS&SA, including through the formation of alliances and partnership;
  - advocate an increase in resource allocation in line with the priorities spelled out in the national policies.
urgent assistance.

The global community has committed to end hunger and to achieve food security and improved nutrition as well as to end poverty in all its forms by 2030 (SDGs 1 and 2).

The European Commission is investing nearly EUR 8 billion in over 60 countries during the 2014–2020 period in order to improve FNS&SA.

With current funding, FIRST provides added value to ongoing EU support to FNS&SA to the tune of EUR 4 billion in 33 out of the 60 EU target countries.

Impact

Since the start, more than 49 countries and two sub-regional organisations have formally expressed interest in policy support from the EU-FAO. The FIRST programme is currently active in 32 of these countries, in one territory (the West Bank and Gaza) and a sub-regional organization (ECOWAS), and the plan is to expand the list of countries over time.

To date, 33 policy officers or technical experts have been recruited and trained on issues such as policy dialogue, policy influence and policy investment linkages, with a focus on topics such as agriculture, nutrition, crops, fisheries, rural development, land and livestock.

20 countries are receiving technical assistance in sharpening the focus of sector-specific policies on food security and nutrition. For example, in Pakistan, thanks to the collaboration between the government, the FAO and the World Bank, the Sindh Agriculture Policy now includes nutrition and gender considerations and anchors these in a comprehensive set of future activities.

In 8 countries, FIRST has begun supporting governments in formulating their own national food security and nutrition policies, e.g. the Estrategia de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional (ESAN III) in Mozambique, the Política de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (PSAN) in Honduras and the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (NSFSN) in Cambodia.

In several countries, FIRST assists governments in leveraging investments for FNS&SA by supporting the formulation of investment plans, the budgeting of action plans for food security and nutrition and by organising round tables for resource mobilisation.

For example, in Ethiopia, a nutrition-sensitive agriculture component was integrated in the EU’s EUR 5 million Agricultural Growth Programme 2 (AGP2) in collaboration with the World Bank.

The FIRST Policy Officers’ network is constantly gathering to discuss and share experiences, by organising study tours by policy officers and/or regional/national workshops to share best practices regarding support to FNS&SA.

Testimony

A testimony from the FIRST programme in Kenya - Mulat Demeke, FIRST Senior Policy Officer, FAO.

“As a FIRST policy officer, I focused my efforts on supporting the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MoAI) for analysis and evidence generation on different aspects of the agricultural process so that strategic areas could be better identified and receive deserved attention within the Agriculture Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASGTS) and the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP).

For example, I partnered with the Joint Research Council (EU) and MAFAP (FAO) researchers who carried out an economy-wide modelling analysis and showed that irrigation has the greatest impact on poverty reduction. Building on these results, I am contributing to identify best practices in financing small-holder irrigation in order to support the ongoing smallholder irrigation programme of the Ministry that has a goal of reaching 30,000 families by the end of 2018.

The FIRST programme also contributed to the review of food loss and waste in agriculture and it supported diagnostic
studies on value chains of selected commercial crops and food safety in Kenya. I was personally able to witness the benefits of value addition and processing from the achievements of an FAO Youth Programme (2015-2017) which supported a group of 26 women producing mango in the West Pokot county. Mango is identified in the ASGTS as one of the key transformative crops but the sector suffers from one of the highest level of food losses. In quality of FIRST senior policy expert, I have advocated for greater attention in the national policy framework to reducing food loss and waste and improving food safety.

Beyond the analytical works, the FIRST programme has provided learning opportunities to several officers and experts by organizing a study tour to Latin America (i.e. Peru and Ecuador) and Asian countries (i.e. Indonesia and Malaysia) to share experiences and to “import” good practices in the development of agricultural strategies/programmes.

The FIRST programme is also a powerful way to build coordination mechanisms that are vital to guarantee the efficient development of the agricultural sector. To that end, I collaborated with several partners that led to the establishment of the Joint Agriculture Sector Consultation and Cooperation Mechanism (JASCCM) and the Joint Agriculture Secretariat (JAS) in early 2017 and of the Food and Nutrition Security Council (FNSC), approved in early 2018."