

ORIE Research Summary

Nutrition Research in Northern Nigeria

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Nutrition Commitment Audit for Nigeria

A Nutrition Commitment Audit (NCA) assesses national and state-level efforts and political will to reduce levels of undernutrition. A NCA facilitates the identification of areas where commitment and capacity to accelerate the reduction of undernutrition are strong or weak. In the longer run it can also be used as an advocacy tool for strengthening commitment and elevating nutrition in political agendas.

This summary highlights key findings from an NCA designed and applied in Nigeria in 2012 in order to examine national and sub-national level factors influencing the country's commitment to addressing undernutrition.

Approach

This NCA used information from three sources: (1) the UN's Standing Committee on Nutrition Landscape Study (2008/09); (2) a framework proposed by the researchers as a basis to mine the existing available information; (3) expert opinion from Nigerian participants in stakeholder workshops in Abuja in June 2012 and Nigerian short course participants at IDS in July 2012. The findings are limited by the decision not to travel to Nigeria and access to data in the five WINNN states.

The questions asked by the NCA were:

1. Public expenditures:

- Are there any budget lines for nutrition?
- Are there any identified, costed programmes designed to support nutrition?
- Is it possible to identify any agriculture or health programmes that have an impact on nutrition, from which a budget line might be available?

2. Policies and programmes:

- Which freestanding programmes address nutrition at the immediate levels?
- How far are actions to address undernutrition mainstreamed into national development programmes?
- How far do programmes in agriculture, health and social security address nutrition concerns?

d. Is there regular nutrition monitoring and surveillance?

e. Is there a functioning nutrition coordinating mechanism to guide programmes at the five states level?

3. Legal frameworks:

- Is there a legal basis for the improvement of nutrition, enshrined in any government legislation?
- To what extent are international agreements (e.g. human rights covenants) raised by campaigning groups in Nigeria, and followed up and enforced by the courts and national government?

Key Findings

1. Public expenditures

There is no available information on public expenditure on nutrition. At federal level, any budget for nutrition is subsumed within the Ministry of Health's (FMoH) Department of Family Health (DFH) budget, making it hard to identify and utilise.

Once the FMoH's budget is approved, there are typically long delays before it is finally released to its departments and even longer to divisions. This leaves little room for manoeuvre for any efforts to plan and implement nutrition-related activities within a short period of time. This is a cyclical challenge.

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There is a marked disconnect between federal and state levels: state levels receive an allocation of federal funds but the decision to spend is made entirely at state level.

Overall state level budgets are agreed between the Federal Ministry of Finance and State Governors. Once money reaches the State Governor's office it is they who decide on budgetary allocations.

Of the five WINNN states, there is some information available for Jigawa with a budget allocation for human capital development and food security, among others. There are also some varying estimated figures for the costs of school feeding programmes in Zamfara.

2. Policies and programmes

There is a plethora of policies, statements and plans, including the National Food and Nutrition Policy (2002) and a National Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (2004). The National Planning Commission through the National Committee on Food and Nutrition is mandated to coordinate all nutrition activities in the country. But government coordination and implementation are weak and nutrition policy and programming is led primarily by government partners (e.g. UNICEF, DFID) and INGOs (e.g. Save the Children, Action Against Hunger), and there is limited recognition of the links between poverty reduction, national development and nutrition.

In relation to the size of Nigeria, capacity is weak: only a small number of professionals in the FMoH are trained in nutrition. The Nutrition Division sits in the FMoH DFH. It has little independent power to set its agenda and take decisions, as this power

lies with the Director of the DFH and then further up the hierarchy with the Permanent Secretary. The current Head of the Nutrition Division is well qualified and motivated but constrained by the institutional structure. The Head is also the Nigerian Government's SUN Focal Point.

A single State Nutrition Officer in each State Ministry of Health/Primary Health Care Directorate wields little power to influence resource and policy prioritisation. Each state has a primary health care apparatus, which may be the best vehicle to deliver nutrition services.

3. Legal frameworks

References to the right to food in Nigeria have been identified from the Child Rights Act and various general statements made for broad based economic plans. Knuth and Kumar (FAO's Right to Food Studies, 2011) draw attention to the fact that Nigeria is one of 13 countries that recognise the right to food or provide state obligations related to food and nutrition security as a directive principle of state policy (art.16.2d).

Following the recommendation of the February 2012 National Nutrition Summit, the National Policy on Food and Nutrition and the National Plan of Action on Food and Nutrition are being revised. This may provide an opportunity for civil society to press for a better recognition of food and nutrition as a human right.

Conclusion

The findings of the NCA are useful for WINNN to understand where it can draw on commitment to reducing undernutrition, and where commitment and capacity need to be strengthened at state and national levels.

ORIE and WINNN

ORIE is an independent component of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) funded Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme. WINNN is working to improve the nutritional status of 6.2 million children under five years of age in five states of northern Nigeria. ORIE is carrying out research to determine the impact of WINNN and generate important research on key evidence gaps regarding solutions to undernutrition in northern Nigeria.

Credits

This ORIE Research Summary was written by Tom Barker. It is based on the Nutrition Commitment Audit report by Richard Longhurst (August 2012). Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce material from ORIE Research Summaries in their own publication. In return, ORIE requests due acknowledgement and quotes to be referenced as above.

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