



NATIONAL STRATEGIC REVIEW " ZERO HUNGER" IN BENIN TO 2030

Executive Summary

September 2018

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The Heads of States and Governments have made hunger elimination one of the objectives of the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2. Therefore, each country was invited to adopt specific policies and strategies for achieving this goal by 2030. Under this context, the present national zero hunger strategic review was initiated conjointly by the World Food Program (WFP) and the Government of Benin.

The main objective of this strategic review is to facilitate implementation and progress towards achieving SDG 2 for hunger elimination and nutrition promotion in Benin. Specifically, this process was independent and inclusive and consisted to: (i) conduct a joint, holistic and in-depth analysis of the state of food security and the nutrition situation in Benin; (ii) analyze progress in policies, programs, institutional capacities and resources for improving food security and nutrition in Benin; (iii) identify priority areas for action on food and nutrition security in Benin, as well as the conditions for their implementation.

The first step of the methodology for the strategic review involved defining sectorial themes. For this purpose, five central themes related to food and nutrition security were identified as main structure for the diagnosis of the context and actions aimed at food and nutrition security in Benin. Five thematic working groups were then created and were composed of representatives of stakeholder institutions and experts in charge of the strategic review. Data related to the central themes, the programmatic framework and food and nutrition security interventions in Benin were collected mainly from a literature search through Internet, documents and reports from various institutions. Moreover, interviews were conducted with resource persons from national and international institutions that produce data or implement food and nutrition security actions in Benin. The collected data were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed at national level and disaggregated by region and district. In addition, several workshops and other forms of consultations with actors in the North and the South of the country have been organized.

The diagnosis showed a high level of food availability. According to 2015 National Human Development Report, Benin was globally self-sufficient for food over the 2004-2013 decade at 91.7%. Production levels of cereals, roots and tubers, and legumes grew by 6.5%, 3.8% and 4.0% respectively, compared to the population growth rate of 3.5% between 2003 and 2013. Animal production (milk, meat, eggs and fish) remained relatively low. Benin remains dependent on imports to meet the domestic demand for rice. However, the food energy supply was greater than the population needs in the last two decades.

Physical accessibility of households to the markets is satisfactory much of the year. In 2017, the main market was a 15-minute walk from households and the second and third markets are about 30 minutes walk away. At regional level, physical accessibility of urban households to

markets is relatively easier. Analysis of the National Food Price Index has shown the general level of food prices has maintained an upward trend since the 2008 crisis. This increase is a limit to the most vulnerable households' economic access to food. Actions have been implemented over time by the Government of Benin to control the effects of rising prices on households, especially through the pilot program of social safety nets under the Community-led Decentralized Services Project.

Despite the constant increase in food availability at national level, there are regional disparities in food security. In 2017, less than half of households (47.5%) are food secure, 42.9% are at risk of food insecurity and 9.6% are food insecure (moderately 8.9% and severely 0.7%). The situation is particularly critical in the Atacora, Couffo, Collines and Zou regions, with respectively 23.6%, 16.2%, 15.3% and 11.7% of food insecure households.

Regarding the nutritional situation, the review reported that the prevalence of acute malnutrition is fortunately decreasing at national level, from 8.4% in children under five years in 2006 to 4.5% in 2014. However, the Alibori region is in a situation of high public health concern with a high prevalence (10%), whereas the situation in Atacora, Borgou and Mono must be monitored (prevalence between 5 and 7%). In addition, at national level, 34% of children under five suffer from stunting in 2014, showing some improvement over 2006 (43.1%). Borgou and Alibori remain strongly affected with prevalence higher than 40%.

The Food and Nutrition Council (CAN) plays an important role in Benin's institutional framework for food and nutrition security. It is an interministerial, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordinating body for nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive actions. In addition to the CAN, several institutions, ministries, the agricultural research system, local authorities, civil society and technical and financial partners are involved in the implementation of food and nutrition security programs in Benin.

Regarding food and nutrition security policies and strategies, Benin's agricultural policy has taken a new turn since 2007 with the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Revival of the Agricultural Sector which aims at improving the performance of agriculture by 2015 to make it able to ensure sustainable food sovereignty of the population and contribute to the economic and social development of the country. It will take several years to know the real impact of this Plan on agricultural growth and food and nutrition security. Over the 2016-2025 period, the Government of Benin's orientations carry a development vision focused on promoting the agricultural economy through more productive and profitable value chain approaches. To this end, the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (PSDSA 2017-2025) and the National Plan for Agricultural Investments and Food and Nutrition Security (PNIASAN 2017-2021) have been adopted. The development process of PSDSA and PNIASAN is based on the Regional Agricultural Policy of the Economic Community of West African States which focuses on food and nutrition security, competitiveness, modernization

and adaptability of production systems, development of intra-community and international markets, and increased investments for the agricultural sector. Several food and nutrition security policies have been adopted in the health and social affairs sectors.

A Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition Development was elaborated in 2009 and is consistent with policy documents of nutrition-related sectors (health, agriculture, social affairs and education). A broader longer-term policy document, the Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policy, is being developed.

Many food and nutrition security programs and projects are implemented in Benin. Funds for these are provided by public and private institutions. Public funds are resources from the national budget and external resources set up with the support of Technical and Financial Partners. Private funds are investments directly made by or through non-state actors such as Professional Agricultural Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Private Sector.

The review of food and nutrition security interventions in Benin identified several shortcomings:

- a lack of cohesion, coordination and communication between stakeholders, resulting in duplication of actions in some localities and lack of actions in others;
- the short duration of interventions resulting in a lack of long-term prospects;
- failure to take into account the needs of communities on the ground in the design of projects and programs;
- poor understanding of CAN's organic functions by the stakeholders and its lack of visibility;
- lack of staff at CAN;
- insufficient knowledge of staff of nutrition in other sectors;
- insufficiency or even lack of quality control of food products in general, and lack of studies on the determinants of the double nutritional burden, particularly on obesity and non-communicable diseases affecting the nutritional and health status of populations;
- lack of an integrated dimension in most natural resource management programs and projects, due to the absence of a formal framework for consultation between institutions;
- weak level of valorization of non-timber forest products for better food and nutrition security of populations;
- the lack of up-to-date information on the state of natural resources to guide decisions for their efficient management.

There are several challenges to food and nutrition security in Benin:

- (i) in the socio-economic and cultural framework, challenges are difficulties of access to land for farmers, difficulties of access to the market for small producers, difficulties of access to financing in the agricultural sector, lack of access to health services, low

- level of education of household heads and issues related to women's empowerment and youth employment;
- (ii) in the management of natural resources, climate change, the low resilience of vulnerable populations to the impacts of climate change, loss of biodiversity, land and vegetation degradation and pollution of ecological systems are challenges to food sovereignty in Benin;
 - (iii) in terms of agricultural production, the challenges identified relate to the small size of farms, low adoption of available technologies, low agricultural productivity, and high dependence on food imports;
 - (iv) concerning the management of agricultural production and post-harvest activities, the high level of post-harvest losses, difficulties in supplying quality raw materials and agricultural inputs that meet standards, and unmet needs in training and successful technologies for the market are among the challenges identified;
 - (v) with regards to the nutrition and population health, challenges relate to inadequate diets and improper feeding and food preparation practices, poor hygiene and sanitation practices and inadequate access to water and health services.

Opportunities exist to address these challenges and contribute sustainably to achieving food and nutrition security. These include: the Government's willingness to invest in human capital development; the willingness of TFPs, UN agencies and NGOs to support the Government; recognition of the WFP for its expertise in the management of school feeding programs; existence of an adequate institutional framework (including CAN); the gradual relocation of interventions at the decentralized level; existence of the Government's Action Program (PAG) and the second-generation National Agricultural Investment Program; valorization of the potential of non-timber forest products; and past experiences that can serve as a compass for future decision-making.

At the end of the review, 11 strategic axes were identified to guide the priority actions likely to contribute to the achievement of SDG 2 by 2030 in Benin:

- increased production and agricultural productivity;
- strengthening the resilience of populations to risks/shocks making them vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity;
- integrated school feeding and promotion of local development;
- development and promotion of appropriate and efficient storage/ preservation and/or food processing technologies;
- strengthening nutrition specific interventions;
- promotion of nutrition sensitive interventions;
- strengthening of the quality control and food safety system;
- social protection and gender mainstreaming in interventions;

- improvement of governance and coordination at all levels in the implementation of all projects and programs;
- strengthening communication and advocacy for good nutrition;
- the legislative framework for achieving and maintaining food and nutrition security in Benin.

Globally, the "Zero Hunger" National Strategic Review allowed to point out the current situation of Nutrition and Food Security in Benin, to bring to the fore the constraints to be raised and propose solutions to meet the challenge by 2030.

The issues are of highly importance. But as in other countries, Benin can overcome hunger and improve nutrition. For that, he must resolutely bring action against their causes.

Hunger and malnutrition is not only a social issue but it is also economic, security and environmental. This is an essential parameter for Benin to win the challenge of human development.

According to PNIASAN projection in 4 years, each franc invested in vegetable and animal production could generated about 5 francs.

According to a study performed by MasterCard and WFP in 2018, the added value for every franc invested in school canteens in Benin is near 5.2 francs.

Moreover, it is now universally accepted that every franc invested in the fight against malnutrition allows a productivity gain of 16 francs.

Overall, a hungry man can't work to contribute to the development of his country. In contrast, he is a potential threat, not only to the security of its neighbour but also to the natural resources preservation.

This cardinal truth should heavily lead to the decision-making in favour of the human, material and financial engagement that should be sustainable for food security and nutrition.

Sustainable adjustment of food security and nutrition is therefore not optional but imperative.

With regard to these issues, it is important for Benin to respond to the rendezvous of SDG 2 "Zero Hunger" by 2030 ... already so close!