

## The impact of participatory approaches on Food Security

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In 1996 the FAO defined four dimensions of food security: access, availability, stability and utilization. The concept evolved in the last two decades and the focus moved to the most vulnerable creating links, new scenarios and programs such as the Concern's Realizing Agriculture to Improve Nutrition (RAIN) program, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement or the adaptation to the Nutrition necessity of the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach.

In 2011 the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) worked on this nexus scenario of possibilities and then published a report of the Leveraging agriculture for improving nutrition and health conference held in New Delhi. At this conference the importance of linking Agriculture, Nutrition and Health was underlined (IFPRI, 2011). The prevalence of undernourishment in Sub Saharan Africa has declined from 33.3% to 23.8% between the 90's and 2014 but there are still more than 200 million people affected. The health's direct and indirect effect of malnourishment on people, especially during childhood, affects over 43% of the population. Despite the improvements, stunting, underweight and micronutrients deficiencies remains high, even where the access to food is no longer a problem (FAO, 2014). Access to health services is fundamental, particularly in the rural areas. Additionally with these initiatives it is possible to respect the idea of the right to food and not to be fed expressed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which explain that the conditions that have to be provided are related to an enabling environment where people can procure themselves adequate food for their families respecting their own dignity and not just the supplies (UN, Fact sheet 34).

Immediately after the mentioned conference several agencies working in the development field started to redesign their Agricultural programs to better address those links. Numerous partnerships were created with the new perspective on Agri-Food system research in order to look beyond food production in a more comprehensive view of the joint effort of the sectors. Strengthening human capital to focus on the poorest led to a cross-sectoral action at the community level. (IFPRI, 2011)

Essentially the initiatives started are working on four basic aims:

1. Ensure adequate food supplies in terms of quantity, quality and variety. A study carried out in Gambia showed that shortages of food usually coincide with the rainy season and have as impact an increased incidence of diarrhea, respiratory diseases and malaria.
2. Optimize stability in food supplies and in their prices because seasonal changes often place a severe stress on the ability of maintain an adequate and balanced food intake;
3. The price volatility - due to increase in biofuel production, financial activities, population and demand growth or unpredicted natural hazards - affects the adequacy, sustainability and accessibility to supplies by all who need them.

4. Secure sustainable access for all, avoiding gender, age or groups disparities promoting, where needed, home-gardening as a supplemental source of food supplies.

Of course the Farmer Field School is not the sole approach providing solutions to address those needs but has the potential to contribute improving household food security among in the most vulnerable districts (WHH, IFPRI and Concern Worldwide, 2011).

The ability to overview necessities and risks is anyway limited and to address this information problem the FAO developed the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) as a tool to fill the gap in global food security monitoring, particularly for assessing the access dimension at not national level but at the individual and household level (FAO, 2014). This deeper understanding of the individual lacks are due to the fact that the households farmers are the most in need because they often rely exclusively on their own products and to stay active and healthy to work in the fields an adequate and balanced diet is necessary (Larsen, 2014); even though it is necessary to distinguish poor farmers from resource-poor farmers (Heemskerk and Davis).

The strategies promoted by the FFS for dietary diversification and balanced nutritional intake include the promotion of mixed cropping and integrated farming systems, the promotion of home gardens and small livestock, the promotion of fishery and forestry products; additionally the strengthening of small scale food production, generating income and providing nutrition education to encourage a sustainable and adequate consumption.