

Children and Malnutrition in Tanzania

By Kulthum Ally

“Children suffering from the problem of malnutrition have weakened immune systems; as a result they become vulnerable to different infections and diseases. When such children lack immediate health care, they die,” reveals Ms Catherine Kimalando – an officer from the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC).



She was speaking at the NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue in Tanzania, in May 2013, adding that malnutrition is among the major health challenges facing Tanzania, whereas children under the age of five years suffer the most, while malnourished adults suffer from complications such as diabetes, heart problems and the like.

Ms Kimalando says further that it is important that mothers eat healthy food, especially during pregnancy in order to help the fetuses to develop well before birth.

She is of the opinion that awareness must be created in communities, drawing from 2010 statistics that show that there is a baby dying of malnutrition after every few seconds – as in that year alone over 40,000 toddlers died of the same cause.

Scientists consider malnutrition as being very much responsible for the stunting problem, particularly if the mother, during pregnancy did not eat balanced diet. They argue that human

brain starts growing from conception, and this growth develops fast until the age of two. This is a very crucial moment in a child's life for developing a well-balanced health.

Ms Kimalando argues that proper feeding, particularly of fortified foods, from an early age can cut the problem of stunting in adults by up to 20 per cent.

Speaking on behalf of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives during the opening of a CAADP Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue in Tanzania, the Ministry's Unit and Development Aid Chief Economist Margaret Ndaba says that the deliberations at the meeting were very important for the government. This is because they highlighted key factors that can be taken on board as strategies for improving agriculture and food security.

"The agricultural sector is the source of livelihoods for over 75 per cent of the country's population; it contributes more than 40 per cent of export earnings and earns the country about 60 per cent of foreign exchange. Because of the importance of the sector, and the nature of on-going national policies and strategies, Tanzania will continue to emphasize its reliance on active involvement of Non State Actors (NSA) like farmers' organisations, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media," Ndaba reveals.

Just like many of its counterparts in Africa, Tanzania's agriculture is yet to be run in an effective manner as production is still low and it is not done in a competitive manner. The challenges that the sector faces, inter alia, are over-reliance on erratic rainfall, use of out-dated farming methods and tools, limited use of fertiliser and improved seeds, post-harvest losses, and poor access to input and output markets, as well as lack or low extension and financial services.

Ms Ndaba says that the sector offers immense opportunities that Tanzanians have not been quick and creative enough to grab. These include plenty of quality arable land, plenty of

manpower that is not put to use properly and lack of engaging value addition to crops harvested.

“Agriculture can only become the engine for national economic growth and the source for food and nutrition security if we are able to adequately address these challenges, and harness the available opportunities,” she argues.

According to this statement, CAADP is one among several continent-wide programmes that encourage and guide country efforts to promote rural development and agricultural productivity. CAADP was endorsed by the African Union Assembly in July 2003, whereas it receives the full support of national governments and regional bodies like the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (Comesa) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

Under this framework, keen interest to invest in agricultural development has also been noted from international development partners.

This growth-oriented agricultural development agenda seeks to increase national agricultural growth rates to 6 per cent per year through the commitment of governments to allocate at least 10 per cent of their national budgets in agriculture.

Successful implementation of the CAADP agenda requires regional economic communities (RECs), national governments and NSAs to work together very closely.

“I am happy to report that, to show its commitment to the CAADP agenda, the government of Tanzania has increased investment in agriculture through the national budget from 3 per cent to the current 9 per cent over the past few years. We aim to increase even further!” Ndaba says.

She says that the government is aware that Tanzania has been losing a staggering amount of over Sh650 billion annually, about 2.65 per cent, of its national income.

This, she says, cannot be allowed to continue, as agriculture loses over Sh400 billion annually.

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