

NOTES TECHNIQUES

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Food and Nutritional Strategies

Statement of the Seminar of the 3 November 1986, held at the Borschette Centre, organized by the CTA Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation (ACP-EEC) and the Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences - A.R.S.O.M.

1. Necessity for a better co-ordination of different interventions in food and nutritional strategies

The different programmes and projects of food and nutritional strategy carried out in developing countries are characterised by a lack of co-ordination at several levels:

- a) at the level of the different institutions involved in the country itself;
- b) at the level of the different donors intervening in the same country or region.

The seminar has thus recommended that particular attention be paid to the problem of co-ordination from the conception of food and nutritional strategies by putting into place the necessary tools to ensure the integration and harmonization of the different interventions.

In another connection, means should be envisaged to encourage the exchange of experiences between countries.

2. Nutritional research and monitoring

Considering the importance of a good knowledge of the basic data, every food and nutritional strategy should rest firmly on research including an analysis of demographic structure, inquiries into food consumption, the determination of the nutritional value of foodstuffs, based on the analysis of local produce and the determination of the nutritional condition of the population. To this end, the creation of institutions of nutritional monitoring, staffed by national personnel, using inexpensive methods and working in close collaboration with the public bodies concerned, is highly recommended.

3. Statistics

A food strategy presupposes the coherent use of an information system which permits to conceive, follow observe, and measure the different components and mechanisms of the food system. The access to reliable statistical data, available in due time, conditions as much the definition of policies as the following up of their execution. But traditional statistical investigations are expensive and take up profes-

sional capacities rare in most countries. It is recommended to conceive small investigations which correspond to the different levels of necessary information, to avoid duplication, and to utilize fully all the information existing in the country.

It is equally recommended to prepare investigations thoroughly, including the computer analysis, to ensure a rapid treatment of the collected information, and to take care that the results should be widely spread.

4. Food aid

Food aid has four big disadvantages: changes of consumer habits, postponement of policy changes, competition with local agricultural production, even its discouragement, and finally the fact that food aid does not always reach the population aimed at. But urgent food aid is necessary in the case of catastrophes and must be used first of all to cover the food needs of vulnerable groups. Concerning structural food aid, this must above all be used to bridge the gap between the conception of a strategy of self-sufficiency in food and the outcome of its effects. The counterpart funds created by food aid must be used for specific actions within the limits of the strategy.

5. Profitability applied to programmes of alimentary strategy

The carrying out of projects in a food strategy is a long-term action implying a profound change in the peasant mentality; the effects of these interventions in a rural environment can only be perceived in the long term, and any calculation of the profitability of such interventions can only be carried out when the project is at its cruising speed, i.e. once all the elements of the operation are stabilized. It is recommended, at the planning stage of projects destined to be part of a food strategy, to bear in mind that as the rate of financial profitability is always marginal, other elements such as survival, the improvement of living conditions or the social situation of the rural world, should be taken into account for the decisions on financing.

6. Relations between extension staffing and the guided population

The experience and the aspirations of village producers have not always been taken into consideration by the structures of extension staffing. The interventions of the latter are often characterized by an excessive use of direction and an under-estimation of the interest of traditional systems. It is recommended that a permanent dialogue be established between the popularizers and the agricultural producers. The desires and suggestions of the latter could thus be passed on the research institutions and to those responsible for food strategy.

7. Rural development and non-agricultural activities

In order to stimulate the farmers to increase their food production, it is necessary that the excedents remaining after self-consumption could be sold at good prices, which presupposes the existence of a solvable demand and thus of incomes. It is recommended that any strategy implying a considerable increase in the production should be accompanied by measures favouring the creation of productive non-agricultural employment, as well in the rural areas as in the regional towns.

8. Agronomic research

Demographic pressure implies profound changes in cultivation systems, changes in which research has an important place to play.

In the regions of Africa where rainfall is a limiting factor, research must put the accent on rusticity, on the varieties cultivated rather than on the yield. In regions where the environment is favourable and which represent the majority of cultivated land, research must permit plants to express all their potentialities.

There is thus a way to encourage research carried out locally and the adaptation of proven techniques in comparable ecological conditions. Research must take more into account the needs expressed by the producers. Finally, the links between research and popularization must be reinforced.

9. Taking into account the role of women in food and nutritional strategies

In the majority of developing countries women play an important part in carrying out food and nutritional strategies as much by their activity in the areas of production, transformation and the commercialization as by their household activity.

It must be admitted, however, that in spite of all the declarations of principle, the necessary arrangements to lighten their task are rarely taken.

In consequence, the Seminar recommends that the programmes for food and nutritional strategies recognize effectively and explicitly the role of women in rural life in providing for effective measures to improve their working conditions.

10. Development and environment

As food and nutritional strategies may have negative ecological effects, environmental factors must be taken into consideration in the elaboration and execution of strategy programmes.

11. Wood resources

A policy of conservation of wood resources is recommended, including, according to local conditions, a supervised cutting rotation, encouragements to plant village groves, a plan for replanting woods near to the places where it is used, as well as the promotion of the most effective cooking methods. Such a policy will have an important effect in conservation not only of the forest resources, but also of soils, water, and in general the regional environment.