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DISCUSSION OF A FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY FOR KENYA (PAPER
PREPARED FOR THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE - ROME,
5 - 16 NOVEMBER, 1974; KENYA DELEGATION: ITEM 9 (B));

by
H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo and
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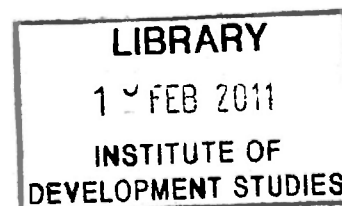
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ABSTRACT

The paper was produced on request of the Head of the Kenya Delegation to the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome. It reflects the authors views on basic policies to improve the nutritional status of vulnerable groups in Kenya.

The authors state that vulnerable groups in Kenya are the mothers and pre-school children of the low income groups in society.

These can be found especially among "less progressive" small-holding farmers, further in communities living in semiarid and arid rural areas and among the urban unemployed or underemployed.

The authors have reservation on feeding programs. They stress preventive measures which centre around a certain extent of self reliance in food production and most of all on income generating projects for the endangered groups. "Less progressive" oriented agricultural extension and appropriate technology are two measures considered important among others discussed. Programmes such as nutrition education, population planning and health are considered to assist in eliminating malnutrition. A priority system of policies related to nutrition (chart) is given as a short summary of the paper's suggested approach to eradicate malnutrition.

ITEM 9 (B): "POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR IMPROVING CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN ALL COUNTRIES, AND AIMING AT ENSURING ADEQUATE AVAILABILITY OF FOOD IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY TO VULNERABLE GROUPS"

Definition of the problem

(1) By 'vulnerable groups', we mean those parts of the population who are especially likely to be affected by malnutrition. This includes lactating and pregnant mothers, infants and young children. But this definition is too wide since malnutrition usually is a danger for certain sections of the population only. These are mothers and children of the low income groups in society.

(2) In Kenya there are three categories of what we consider as vulnerable groups.

(a) The masses of "less progressive" smallholding farmers in the high and medium potential rural areas.

This group seems to be by far the largest one. By "less progressive" farmers we mean those smallholders who do not or only marginally participate in ongoing income generating agricultural innovation process.

(b) Communities living in semiarid and arid rural areas.

This second group is considerably smaller. But it is endangered nearly as a whole due to income dependency from marginal climatic and soil conditions which often create a large income failure for all.

(c) The urban unemployed or underemployed.

This third group is rather small in Kenya compared with many other countries. It is also small in relation to the total population. But since people of this group are concentrated in a few cities they are a major factor of the urban areas.

Patterns of Food Consumption

(3) Patterns of food consumption usually depend on a number of factors; these include:

- (a) Effective demand for food. This in turn depends on
 - (i) the income generating capacity of the economy
 - (ii) patterns of non consumption of food by households.In Kenya for example a rapidly increasing part of the low income groups are beginning to spend a large share of its cash income for the education of children (especially for self-help efforts to construct and maintain school buildings for proper clothing of school children etc.) rather than on food. Less available cash for food will adversely affect the food intake of the vulnerable groups considerably. (iii) Cash investments in agriculture. During the process of agricultural development there is a tendency as well to increase the cash investments. This again means less cash available for food.
 - (b) Availability of food and the food price structure;
 - (c) Nutrition knowledge, attitudes towards food, taste, customs, etc.
- (4) The low income smallholders do not have many leeways out of this pressure for cash and food. Particularly in the light of rapid population growth and serious land shortages in some areas.
- (a) Some keep cash inputs for farming extremely low;
 - (b) others expand cash earning crops or activities reducing activities for subsistence crops;
 - (c) most of them are forced to exploit their soil by neglecting proper crop rotation, soil fertility improvement measures and soil conservation;
 - (d) most of them tend to purchase or use cheaper and less diversified food which usually means less calories, less protein, less vitamins and finally more malnutrition.

Availability of Food in Kenya

- (5) The availability of food in Kenya (calories and protein per capita) seems to be no major problem at present. But we are of the opinion that potential cheaper resources of certain foods are not yet exploited sufficiently.

E.G. there is a high potential for producing cheap protein through local beans and soya beans. Recent changes in bean prices as well as the introduction of soya bean cultivation is an initial step in the utilization of this cheap protein potential.

- (6) Although Kenya produces sufficient food, this is not matched by an efficient distribution system such that certain regions experience very severe shortages. In addition, very high seasonal price peaks can be observed in many regions.
- (7) No doubt, these two problems would be considerably reduced by a more vigorous price policy to counteract black marketeering and better central marketing, transportation and supply of the major food crops through the Maize and Produce Board.

Nonetheless there still seems to be a big scope for the trade business to counteract these problems also.

By this we do not mean the local informal trading sector (e.g. women transporting crop with donkeys to different local markets utilizing the price differences). This sector is labour intensive, creates income to low income groups and has positive functions in reducing local shortage. In other words it is reacting on differences only and is not creating them.

Methods of improving nutrition status of vulnerable groups

- (8) There are various suggestions on how to improve the nutrition status of the vulnerable groups in developing countries.

One argument - commonly based on values of human dignity and justice - says that the malnourished in developing countries should be provided with food by their national Governments and/or by international aid.

In this context feeding programs are considered a major instrument in relieving malnutrition. We have strong reservations about feeding programmes as a basic policy for relieving malnutrition.

They ease nutrition problems temporarily at the cost of a permanent solution and in the long run aggravate the problem.

Furthermore feeding programmes divert resources from potentially more efficient approaches towards improving the nutrition status of people.

- (9) Extensive feeding programmes to vulnerable groups as a sole measure to protect them would probably have the effect of making children and mothers healthier, more disease resistant, and also of decreasing the rate of mortality.

Families whose economic basis for existence is marginal might be encouraged to remain under these conditions.

The economic costs of having a large number of children will be reduced. Population control measures will have little rationale since having less children will not affect the economic situation of the families much.

As a result of this the number of children to be fed will increase steadily and the feeding programme has to be expanded correspondingly.

But what happens with the increasing number of young people above the feeding age? They have to eat what the people gained by being released from feeding their children. Later their growing number will demand more food and the nutrition situation of the population will deteriorate.

Lastly if the feeding programme has to be stopped due to unforeseen reasons, the disaster for the children and their families could be imagined.

- (10) We consider feeding programmes only as assisting or complementary to alternative programmes for improving the effective food demand of the vulnerable groups. In other words feeding programmes are useful if they are functional for income generation of the poorer masses-- except perhaps in extraordinary emergency situations.
- The purpose could be to protect vulnerable groups during limited periods when the benefits of income generation programmes have not yet reached them. Also an important economic or social development programme could be supported

for the period of structural changes in the economic pattern of an area in which income and food deficiencies may occur caused by economic adjustment difficulties. The function of feeding programmes would be to preserve or prepare the human resources for activities aiming at overcoming their own income and food problems.

(11) The alternative programmes we are thinking of must involve first and foremost creating a sense of self reliance in food production among the poorer sections of the people.

This self reliance should be promoted by all means - nationally and internationally. Although Kenya invests a major part of its development resources on projects directed towards self-reliance in the smallholding areas, we still would like to make two recommendations which in our opinion could considerably assist these efforts particularly in relation to those strata of the rural population to which the most vulnerable groups belong.

One recommendation focuses on extension which is less progressive oriented, the other considers a more appropriate agricultural technology for the low income smallholders.

(a) Less progressive oriented extension: It is well known that in no country are all farmers reached by the extension service directly. Therefore the extension service has the function of introducing innovations which can then reach most of the farmers by a diffusion process which has to occur rather independently of the extension service. Usually the extension service introduces innovations through the most progressive farmers. Often a very slow or no diffusion process occurs due to various reasons: (I) the generally variable technology of the innovations often is adjusted for most progressives only; (II) most progressives are usually individualistic and sometimes even actively prevent the diffusion and (III) the less progressive often do not consider the economic activities of the most progressive elite as a relevant to them.

The introduction of innovation through less progressive would change this situation. But, of course, it is more difficult to get less progressive persons to become first adopters of an innovation. This needs specific extension methods.

In Kenya the Ministry of Agriculture and the Institute for Development Studies have carried out joint ventures developing extension prototypes which are less progressive oriented. The results of these experiments are very encouraging. Less progressive oriented extension could now be carried out nationwide.

Finally, extension which is less progressive oriented has also to consider regional imbalances of income development since progressiveness appears not only among individuals within regions but also between the populations of different regions.

- (b) More appropriate agricultural technology for the low income smallholders seems to be a crucial bottleneck in Kenya.

We have pointed out that the low income groups among the smallholders are characterized by

- a) extreme cash shortage for inputs;
- b) exploitation of soils, neglecting soil fertility improvement and soil conservation.

Very often the extension service has no other advise to these farmers but to use fertilizers for improvement.

But these farmers do not have sufficient cash to use fertilizers. Now prices for fertilizers have tripled and often they are not even available. Furthermore, fertilizers applied according to standardized recommendations show rather low effects in exhausted soils.

Therefore agricultural innovation for the less progressive has to be appropriate to their specific situation.

E.G. the standard of the soil should be improved by

utilizing existing means first which do not involve cash (cattle manuring, green manuring, composting, crop rotation, soil conservation, better ploughing).

Further, under the typical less progressive smallholder conditions the most profitable agricultural activities are different compared for instance with conditions of progressive medium scale farmers.

E.G. crops with low inputs, easy husbandry and disease resistance but moderate returns might be more profitable than potentially high income yielding cash crops with high inputs and sophisticated husbandry (with a high chance of failure for less progressive).

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Finally if one considers the vast semi-arid areas of Kenya a more appropriate technology for semi-arid conditions could improve and stabilize the income situation of the population living there.

(12) A second set of programmes must involve a policy of income redistribution from the higher income groups to the lower ones. The various direct and indirect methods of doing this have been discussed elsewhere.

We are of the opinion, however, that this method is efficient for the large number of the poor under certain conditions only. One important condition is that improved income of the poor will enable them to improve their primary income sources e.g. their agricultural production. Otherwise income redistribution would probably create only temporary relief and would not solve the roots of the income problems.

In Kenya the problem of income redistribution may also involve extensive land redistribution. By and large we believe the ILO team was right in arguing that "much land on larger farms is being underutilized, and that output, incomes and employment would all be raised by the subdivision of farms in cases in which output per hectare is lower than might be expected from small holdings in a similar locality." (Employment, Incomes and Equality, ILO, Geneva 1972, p. 17).

(13) A third set of programmes would involve food price policy.

There is a very wide scope for influencing food prices for nutritional benefit of the poorer sections. But generally the food price policy in the long run is very ambiguous in Kenya, since most of the food consumers are food producers, also. Higher food producer prices could mean an indirect income redistribution from the people earning income outside agriculture to the agriculturalists. But this sectoral redistribution could adversely affect low income groups depending on what their sources of income outside food production is.

Increases in food producer prices for low income groups therefore must be complemented by the involvements of incomes from resources other than food production.

This is subject to the caution that a food price policy in favour of the producers complemented with income increases for other low income groups may promote inflation.

Subsidized prices - another commonly discussed policy - might be useful for temporary adjustments. Alternatively we believe that spending the money on income generating projects among the poor, is a much more effective way of dealing with the situation.

SUMMARY

(14) Figure: Priority system of policies promoting improved Nutrition for vulnerable groups

