Food Systems Approaches

Discussion highlights and conclusions

**WHAT** did we learn about approaches and interventions/activities? (all speakers consolidated)

* Kitchen gardens are a key intervention to contribute to food security. They are an effective way to work at the base of food systems, to garget vulnerable households with interventions that can simultaneously improve nutrition, income social capital, maximize use of limited water supplies and ultimately resilient food security.
* There are a variety of ways to bring an integrated approach to kitchen gardens: targeting criteria based on 1000 Days, messaging on producing and consuming diverse crops, using permaculture techniques to improve soil quality and minimize water needs, incorporating small livestock (goats being an especially key asset for preventing poverty back-sliding in Nepal), coordinate with government food security initiatives, empowering women and marginalized groups.
* Food systems approaches are distinct from agricultural approaches. Implementing through food systems invites us to think about longer term food access and other aspects. Objectives that simply focus on maximized agricultural potential may use activities with good short-term impact but poor long-term consequences (such as overuse of chemical inputs) or over-emphasize cash crops at the cost of nutrition content in the local food supply.
* Government coordination initiatives down to the local level is capable of bringing the efforts of multiple institutions to bear on food security, thereby increasing impact. The documentation of best practices further enhances coordination on approaches.
* Seed supplies vulnerable to shocks, drying and storage systems vital, and availability of seed inputs.

What did we learn about **HOW** to implement and manage projects? (all speakers consolidated)

* Assessment and monitoring tools on digital platforms made for efficient monitoring and facilitating rapid analysis and frequent reflection conducive adaptive management processes. It is essential to carry out regular reflection meetings to consider what might not be working.
* Ensure that the inputs needed for kitchen gardens are available locally. Train model farmers to share expertise, set up systems for producing diverse vegetable seeds and saplings at the local level, brooding centers for small livestock.
* Use of permagarden approaches enable kitchen gardeners to use natural resources to enhance production on small plots, improve soil health and use water efficiently. Techniques include organic fertilizer, mulching, integrated pest management, double-digging, etc. Training through cascade model.
* Program teams need to work together across sector expertise to ensure that support to food systems work is well coordinated.
* Using female model farmers makes it easier to reach women farmers. This is essential to do not only to empower women but also to make sure the knowledge remains available even if men migrate and are not available to consult.
* Ensure program budgets include resources to provide sufficient numbers of personnel with a high caliber of expertise. Working at the systems level is complex, and insufficient support makes progress more difficult, if not impossible.

What do we RECOMMEND based on our learning (WHAT and HOW)? (all speakers consolidated)

* Consider making the incorporation of the essential nutrition package part of all kitchen garden approaches in Nepal, while targeting the most vulnerable to ensure food security especially at critical times of the year.
* Water and soil management practices are critical given current climate risks, and the permagarden approach has proven effective in regards to these issues.
* Revive government coordination on food security and nutrition initiatives at the local level. This used to happen and was effective before devolution, when the Districts played this important role.
* Small livestock are especially important for resilient food security among the landless, who tend to be from marginalized groups. Poultry and goat related interventions have proven successful as long as veterinary services and inputs are considered.
* Small grants can help community groups carry out small projects to encourage behavior change.

Key learnings (3-5) – *to be elicited by moderator during the last few minutes of the session*

• Homestead gardens supporting resilient food security, promoting nutritious consumption to promote human capacity, income to promote financial capacity, and connections (through food sharing) to promote social capacity.

• Homestead gardens require an integrated approach to maximize impact: 1000 Days, permaculture, nutrition messaging, nutrition specific activities (such as essential nutrition practices) and nutrition sensitive activities (such as promoting garden products and small livestock with variety of nutrition content)

• The resilience of food systems to the impact of climate change has seen some improvement through use of ecological system support (ie, permaculture approach that maximizes soil quality and efficient water use). These solid first steps should be advanced through more research on current and anticipated effects of climate change and how the agricultural base of food systems must adapt in Nepal.

