

Development Strategies and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa: An Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Numerous strategies, policies, and programs intended to assist Africa's development have been conceived and implemented by international bodies, regional and subregional groups, and national institutions. On average, a typical developing country in Africa is assisted by about 30 aid institutions to implement these strategies, yet Africa is still far from achieving food and nutrition security. This paper examines whether those strategies and policies fit the goal of achieving food and nutrition security, how they were implemented, and why the results have been so variable and often lacking. Further, this paper considers the lessons of these projects in terms of strategy formulation and implementation, and how they can be used to effectively and sustainably reduce hunger and malnutrition.

The implementation of a strategy requires its clear formulation, a conducive policy and institutional environment, a widely shared consensus about the strategy and its measures, the human capacity for implementation, and sufficient financial resources. In order to evaluate a strategy in detail, it is necessary to address the following issues:

- Have key issues been clearly identified, properly analyzed, and located within their political, economic, and sociocultural contexts?
- Are objectives clearly defined, internally consistent, and formulated realistically, and have possible conflicts between the objectives been identified and trade-offs between them been addressed?
- Are policies and programs for achieving these objectives appropriate to, congruent with, and supportive of, the strategy?
- Is the capacity to implement the strategy available—that is, are there sufficient financial resources, the necessary human capacity, the requisite institutional framework, and adequate infrastructure?
- Has the time required for implementation been estimated realistically, taking into account the demands of institution building, education, and training?
- Have all stakeholders been included in the process of strategy development, and, in particular, have they been involved in identifying priorities, defining objectives, and in planning and implementing the strategy?
- Have the lessons of past experiences of development strategy implementation been taken into account?

In the two decades after most African countries became independent in the early 1960s there were high hopes for rapid development, and much was achieved. The overall economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa averaged 3.4 percent per year between 1961 and 1980. Agricultural development contributed enormously to overall growth and was crucial to the gains achieved in food and nutrition security. But by the end of the 1970s, the major social and economic indicators for African countries began to decline. Agricultural production dropped, resulting in massive food imports. The output of both industry and manufacturing also declined. Adverse terms of trade, the oil crisis, and the slump in the world economy exacerbated these negative trends in African

economies. At the same time, domestic problems threatened the stability of many African state institutions and even the existence of some states. There were widespread coups d'état, civil strife, and ethnic violence.

Two early responses to these African socioeconomic development crises were the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN). These started from the premise that, given the limited size and capacity of the private sector, the states had to take on the dominant role in development. Thus governments drew up comprehensive five-year plans, invested in large state-run basic industries and market structures, and enacted pervasive regulations to control prices, restrict trade, and allocate credit and foreign exchange, all generally carried out with full donor support. Publicly funded programs in support of agricultural research and extension, fertilizer supply, export production and marketing, and food distribution were the essential components of this approach.

When by 1980 it had become apparent that Africa's crisis was deepening, the World Bank and IMF argued that a fundamental shift in approach was needed to stabilize African economies, increase efficiency of investment, and reinvigorate growth. Their new concept of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) implied a move away from state-dominated development to reliance on the private sector. Food and nutrition security were addressed only indirectly in these programs through the aims of improved economic stability and higher economic growth.

In response to concerns about the deleterious impact of SAPs on health services, education, infrastructure, rural support institutions, and employment, all of which had particularly affected Africa's poor, the approach of the World Bank and donor community shifted, returning to a more balanced treatment of state and private sector functions in development, while at the same time maintaining the emphasis on efficiency in resource allocation. The Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) both emphasized the need to integrate cultural, social, political, and environmental considerations into development strategies, and to apply these considerations to reducing poverty and creating a framework for pro-poor growth. Each process was intended to be led by the countries concerned, and to be based on the partnership and participation of all stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels. The emphasis on poverty in the CDF/PRSP concept implies that agricultural and rural development were envisioned as playing vitally important roles.

Building on the CDF/PRSP process, African leaders at the turn of the century developed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This approach intended to combine African initiatives and ownership of the development process with neoliberal concepts. NEPAD supports liberalization and globalization but emphasizes that these processes need to be fair and accompanied by a leveling of the playing field for international trade. By accepting NEPAD's policy framework, African leaders jointly took responsibility for eradicating poverty and placing their countries, both individually and collectively, on the path of sustainable development and growth. Furthermore, they committed their countries to people-centered participatory development processes. The NEPAD strategy seeks to produce agriculture-led development that eliminates hunger and reduces poverty as well as food insecurity.

SAPs and PRSPs have shaped regional approaches and country policies and their implementation throughout Africa. A significant number of African countries have carried out successful programs of macroeconomic stabilization and structural reform. Reforms and retrenchment of the public sector have been carried out in numerous countries, although often at the costs of increasing unemployment—and thus vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity—and a decline in public services, even in essential areas such as health, education, and research and extension. International trade has been liberalized in many countries, and parastatal

marketing boards no longer enjoy market monopolies. A major issue in most African countries remains the failure of the weak private sector in taking up the functions once performed by government marketing monopolies. A further key problem is the unevenness of the playing field in international trade, with the EU, Japan, and United States continuing to protect their markets against imports from developing countries, including those in Africa.

Many countries have formulated poverty reduction policies, with an increased emphasis on agricultural development. More progress is needed in key areas, however, such as in reducing social and economic discrimination against women, particularly in improving their access to land, credit, and input and output markets, and in fostering the education of girls. Similarly, in areas such as employment creation, natural resource protection, and governance reform, some countries have initiated encouraging measures, but much more progress is needed. The most successful reformers have been countries without war or civil unrest, and with reform processes characterized by strong political leadership and a commitment to reforms with wide domestic participation and ownership. This review makes it clear that peace and security are prerequisites for development and thus for poverty reduction. In countries that have been plagued by conflict and war, development has been pushed back by years, if not decades.

Political will and the commitment to reform within a framework of good governance are crucial features of successful reform and development. Experience has also shown that reform processes are most successful with the wide involvement and participation of people at all levels of society and across different organizations and social groups. For poverty reduction in particular, civil society and private sector groups representing the poor need to be included in the consultation, decisionmaking, and implementation process.

Capacity building must be a high priority. The very recent and still patchy experience of African countries with PRSP implementation demonstrates that capacity building requires more attention and more resources. Capacity and competence are required at all levels of African administration.

Agriculture should be returned to the top of the development agenda. The priority given to agriculture and water in NEPAD and the Maputo 2003 Declaration of the Heads of States of the African Union is encouraging in this respect. It is essential for the World Bank and bilateral donors to follow the lead of African states and support agricultural development. Prioritizing agriculture cannot be achieved without making additional resources available to these programs. Countries must act on the Maputo Declaration's target of allocating 10 percent of each country's budget to agriculture.

Governments and donors face a joint challenge to achieve greater cohesion in their approaches to the various strategies promoted by, and the requirements of, the international community. For example, monitoring poverty reduction in a given country is important within the PRSP process, but care needs to be taken not to overburden that country's capacity and institutions. Too often, donors have instituted reporting and monitoring requirements that place their internal institutional needs ahead of the needs of the recipient country. Donors need to agree on a coordinated and unified monitoring and evaluation system that serves primarily to improve policy implementation in recipient countries.

Adequate attention must be devoted to micro-level activities. The project approach dominated the development scene in Africa until the 1980s, but its limitations in nonconductive policy environments soon became obvious. Deficiencies in project environments resulted in a 180-degree shift in approach toward lending for policy programs, as opposed to extending loans for projects. This forced the private sectors of the targeted countries to take up microlevel activities

Correcting policy environments and strengthening institutional frameworks were necessary aims and remain a high priority, but development only occurs if investment, innovation, and action are carried out on farms, in households, and in villages. This means that development strategists must reaffirm the value of the project approach.

Finally, the design and implementation of good policies, as emphasized repeatedly in this review, are dependent on clear, relevant, and consistent policy objectives, financial resource availability, and human and institutional capacity. Even under these ideal circumstances, these processes often involve risks to the political and social stability of targeted countries. The speed of reform and the implementation of policies and programs must be appropriate to each country's political and social absorptive capacity.

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