

THE NEXUS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH CONCERN WORLDWIDE PROGRAMMES, JANUARY 2009

Concern Worldwide's Agriculture Programme:

In agriculture, Concern works in 28 countries with the aim of increasing food security and economic advancement for marginal and small farmers. Within Agriculture specifically, Concern focuses on Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Livestock Management, Peri-Urban/Urban Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security. The majority of projects include interventions such as crop production, animal husbandry, crop protection, horticulture, post harvest food processing, poultry, extension services support, irrigation, and agroforestry. Concern targets marginal farmers, small farmers and rural landless. We are engaged in organic agriculture (land husbandry techniques and biological and manual methods instead of chemical inputs) in several countries (e.g. Tanzania, DRC, South Sudan).

Concern Worldwide's Health Programme:

The Concern Worldwide Health Programme includes water/sanitation in 9 countries, Maternal and child health programmes (community-based support for malaria, ARI, diarrhoea control, immunization and family planning) in 10 countries and prevention and treatment of malnutrition in 15 countries. Concern works with the Ministries of Health, national NGOs, the local health department, CBOs and international organisations.

Agriculture and Nutrition Nexus:

Concern has been promoting family/kitchen gardens, poultry and small animal husbandry over the years to improve production and consumption of micronutrient rich foods. We have 11 kitchen garden projects, 16 small animal husbandry activities and 10 in poultry (e.g., Afghanistan, Zambia, DRC). We are operating and currently starting urban agriculture and nutrition/health programmes in Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya.

Since the development of Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition, there have been plans for starting local production (i.e., using local crops and engaging local farmers) of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF). New recipes have been developed over the past year. Several countries are exploring how to engage local farmers and local indigenous crops for RUTF and ready to-use supplementary foods.

Social Protection and Nutrition Nexus:

Recognising that agricultural markets play a growing role in determining food availability and access, Concern is also working in interaction with markets to increase economic empowerment. A recent evaluation of the cash transfer programme in Malawi included measuring the impact on household nutrition outcomes.

Agriculture and HIV Nexus:

Concern Worldwide is exploring the role of gardening in improving nutrition and well-being of those affected with HIV/ AIDS in a joint project with IFPRI in Zambia. We also have partnerships with several organisations whose programmes include improving access to food for HIV affected and infected individuals and households, particularly vulnerable people (elderly, child headed households).

Agriculture and Infectious Disease Nexus

We are engaged in research in Tanzania looking at local indigenous plants as mosquito repellents (use of Moringa). Concern is also working on acute respiratory infection and environmental issues in several countries.

Potential Opportunities:

- Improve the design and measurement of nutrition and health outcomes of ongoing horticulture, small animal husbandry and other food production and social protection programmes.
- We are supporting para-vet style animal health activities in several countries and should make the link with zoonosis risks. We could be looking at: Rift Valley Fever, anthrax, rabies, Japanese encephalitis, tryps, helminths, Fasciolosis, brucellosis, + diseases spread through contaminated milk, like TB. And we should be looking at meat inspection and slaughter hygiene as part of our work.
- We also have a number of opportunities to address linkages between agricultural water resource development (irrigation) and disease. Expand vector control (mosquito, etc.) as part of existing agriculture and wat/san programmes. Malaria and schistosomiasis can be incorporated into DRR and environmental impact assessments for projects as a start. Also, need to strengthen the environmental health aspects of our health programme and link this more concretely to agriculture activities.
- Explore the severity of aflatoxins in maize and groundnuts in countries where we are supporting their production and determine the critical control points for aflatoxin contamination and control/intervention.
- We could also explore the potential role of bio-fortified crops in Concern's Livelihoods and Nutrition Programmes, including quality protein maize, iron content in beans, vitamin A enhanced sweet potatoes and golden rice
- We could also explore addressing occupational health hazards of agricultural work, particularly for reducing the use of pesticides by poor farmers who do not own protective equipment, and even when farmers/workers are provided with protective equipment they rarely use it.
- We could introduce food safety issues into our home level food processing.