

# “All measures must bring tangible benefits for smallholder farmers”

How is German development cooperation implementing the concept of nutrition-sensitive agriculture? Stefan Schmitz, Deputy Director-General at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and Commissioner for the One World – No Hunger initiative on awareness raising, food taboos and the challenge of cross-sectoral cooperation.



Photo: BMZ

**Rural 21: Mr Schmitz, what role does nutrition play in the One World – No Hunger initiative?**

**Stefan Schmitz:** The importance of nutrition as a topic on the international agenda has increased considerably in recent years. Nowadays, food security and nutrition are often mentioned in the same breath and there is a growing awareness, throughout the world, not only of the negative impacts of malnutrition but also of the development potential afforded by a well-nourished population and a balanced diet. The new Sustainable Development Goals set forth in Agenda 2030 include ending not only extreme undernourishment and chronic hunger but poor nutrition as well.

With its Special Initiative, the BMZ aims to make a substantial contribution to combating hunger worldwide and has therefore begun to focus more strongly on the issue of nutrition. We are working on this topic both at the international level, for example through the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, and at country level, where we are integrating nutrition-specific or nutrition-sensitive elements into our programmes and projects.

## The “One World – No Hunger” Special Initiative

The One World – No Hunger Special Initiative was launched in 2014 with the aim of ending hunger and malnutrition. It works to establish the conditions necessary to ensure that sufficient food is available for future generations. The Special Initiative is implemented through official and non-governmental development cooperation and involves multilateral partners. It centres on three flagship programmes: **Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience** (overall term: 2014–2021; budget (German contribution): 146 million euros; priority regions: sub-Saharan Africa and Asia); **Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector** (overall term: 2015–2019; budget: 138 million euros; 12 centres in Africa, one in India) and **Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security** (overall term: 2015–2017; budget: 70 million euros; countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, India; objective: rehabilitation of more than 140,000 hectares of land).

*Let’s take the “Global Programme on Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience”. It says that poor households should have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food at all times. Which measures are being deployed to achieve this goal?*

The programme implements measures to improve the nutritional status of women and children in eleven countries of the world. There are many causes of hunger and malnutrition, so we are pursuing an integrated multi-sectoral approach across key fields of action, including health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and agriculture. Providing advice on agricultural diversification, increasing awareness of a balanced diet and hygiene, improving health services and mainstreaming best practices in national strategies and policies are just some of our activities. Our goal is to improve the nutritional status of around two million people and boost their resilience to future hunger crises.

*How is the success of these actions measured?*

We have selected a set of indicators, in line with internationally recognised standards, to measure the diversity and frequency of food intake. They include the Women’s Dietary Diversity Score, which specifically assesses the quality of women’s diets. The indicators were standardised during comprehensive baseline data-gathering in all eleven countries and provide us with reliable information about target group outcomes during and after programme implementation.

*What role does nutrition education play in the programme?*

Nutrition education plays a key role in the programme. When combating hunger and malnutrition, it is important not only to supply food in sufficient quantities but also to

raise public awareness of the best methods of growing, storing, processing and consuming food. This information is rarely available to people in the partner countries, and there are also few opportunities to put this knowledge into practice. This applies particularly to the specific dietary needs of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and infants. Our training sessions, workshops and advice services equip people with knowledge and build their skills, with a strong focus on practical relevance based on local conditions and options.

### ***How is nutritional diversity being addressed?***

Nutritional diversity is a key element of the programme. Diversification has many potential entry points: for example, it can start with farming by introducing new varieties, identifying suitable crop rotations, and establishing home and school gardens. Changing consumer behaviour, with a focus on food choices, is also important. Ultimately, this is about changing longstanding dietary habits and sometimes even tackling taboos.

### ***What kind of taboos do you mean?***

In many instances, food taboos do have the functional aspect of conserving scarce resources or preventing disease. They are often an element of religious practices. However, many taboos also go hand in hand with the social exclusion of women and girls, thus exacerbating their malnutrition. In some West African countries, for instance, women and girls are not allowed to consume certain products such as milk or eggs.

### ***The "Global Programme on Green Innovation Centres" aims to boost the incomes of smallholders, create more employment opportunities and increase regional food supplies in the project's rural target areas. How do nutrition and nutritional diversity feature in this programme?***

One of the aims of the Green Innovation Centres is to achieve sustainable improvements in rural communities' food security by promoting appropriate innovations. This does not just mean increasing the quantity of food available – it means achieving a high-quality food supply which meets people's dietary needs. So we are promoting designated value chains that support nutritional diversity in our partner countries. One example is the support for smallholders in Ethiopia, which enables them to introduce innovative production processes for wheat and broad beans. A similar approach is being adopted for orange-fleshed sweet potato growing in Kenya.



*Part of training in nutrition education in Ethiopia: Raising awareness on the best ways to prepare and consume food.  
Photo: SEWOH/BMZ*

### ***In Ethiopia, the programme also aims to provide smallholders with better-quality seed. Does 'better' in this instance mean higher yields, or are better-quality nutrients also important?***

Our project in Ethiopia pursues both goals simultaneously. On the one hand, it provides high-quality seed for households with very limited or no financial resources. The increased yields produce crop surpluses which can be sold, enabling farmers to reinvest the revenue in diversifying their diets and improving their families' health. On the other hand, we ensure that the seed itself contains high-grade nutrients so that its consumption has a direct and positive effect on families' nutritional status.

### ***One aim of the Green Innovation Centres is to build knowledge networks. To what extent is local indigenous knowledge being integrated in this context?***

Knowledge of local conditions and social relations is an important starting point for our work. Mainstreaming this knowledge is a key success factor, not least because it encourages the active involvement of local communities. So we provide targeted support for local NGOs which gather traditional agricultural knowledge and feed it into knowledge networks. This approach enables us to successfully integrate locally developed and adapted innovations into farming systems.

### ***How important is agrobiodiversity in the Global Programmes?***

In our Global Programme on Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security, integrated soil fertility management

is a priority. We field-test and disseminate innovative best practices for improving agrobiodiversity and climate resilience. We have also embedded the topic of biodiversity more generally in capacity building and extension services.

***Agricultural research – especially plant breeding research – has a key role to play in improving food and nutrition security, particularly in the context of climate change. Do the Global Programmes promote plant breeding research in the partner countries themselves?***

No, that's not a feature of the Global Programmes. However, the Special Initiative provides funding for international agricultural institutes engaged in relevant research in the partner countries. One example is the AVRDC – the World Vegetable Center in India, where we are supporting an integrated pest control project focusing on begomovirus-resistant tomatoes, peppers and mung bean varieties.

***How are research and practice linked together?***

In general, international agricultural research adheres to the 'research for development' principle. This means that it has strong practical relevance, with an emphasis on the future application of the findings. This is made possible, for example, through cooperation between BMZ-funded agricultural and nutrition research projects and the Special Initiative's bilateral or non-governmental partners. In Ethiopia, for instance, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) is currently trialling user-friendly software, developed by the University of Hohenheim, to collect data on the nutritional status of target groups in rural regions.

***How do the Global Programmes reach out to women, who after all play an important role in food and nutrition security?***

Women bear the main responsibility for childcare as well as for food preparation in rural households, so they have a key role to play. It's important to emphasise that under no circumstances should their own human right to nutritious and sufficient food be ignored in this context. We focus especially on women of childbearing age, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, as this lays the foundations for healthy foetal development. We involve women in various training schemes, ensuring at the same time that this does not create additional burdens for the women in their daily routines. We are increasingly involving men in awareness-raising projects as well, as they are usually the decision-makers in rural households. Some of these approaches have already proved successful, but we recognise the need to give greater weight to the gender perspective. Joined-up thinking on food and nutrition security and gender equality is essential.

***How much awareness of the importance of nutrition-sensitive agriculture exists in the partner countries? Do you see any obstacles?***

We see a steadily growing awareness of this topic among partner governments. Many governments have come to recognise the costs and impacts of a failure to invest in nutrition. That's why many national food security strategies nowadays expressly aim to improve nutritional status. In-

deed, in some cases, national nutrition programmes are being set up. Very often, however, the lead department for nutrition within the partner governments is the Ministry of Health, which makes it more difficult to exert influence on other sectors, such as agriculture.

Other challenges include the lack of experience in coordinating multi-sectoral processes, poor stakeholder consultation, and the absence of structures for effective knowledge management and hence for the sharing of lessons learned and best practice.

***Non-governmental organisations are highly critical of the SEWOH projects in some cases. One point of criticism is that the projects promote market-oriented cultures and neglect or fail to take adequate account of people's nutritional situation. Do you see any conflict between encouraging people to market their goods for livelihood security, on the one hand, and improving the nutritional status of farming families, on the other?***

From the BMZ's perspective, the main challenge is to see the concept of nutrition-sensitive agriculture as an opportunity to increase food and nutrition security and promote development. It should not be seen as a rival approach that simply aims to boost production in local agriculture or reinforce its export orientation. The two dimensions should complement each other – and achieving that requires political commitment and openness to new approaches, especially in the partner countries.

***A further point of criticism is the programmes' close cooperation with the private sector, particularly multinationals. And in relation to the Green Innovation Centres, you are accused of failing to put farmers at the heart of the projects. Is this criticism justified?***

We can only master the challenge of feeding a growing world population if we involve all stakeholders – and that must include the private sector. Sustainable, future-proof agriculture needs massive investment – far more than can be mobilised from public funds alone. That's why the BMZ is also using its resources to leverage private investment. The precondition in every case is that the measures contribute to the development policy goal of ending hunger and bring tangible benefits for smallholder farmers.

*Stefan Schmitz was interviewed by Silvia Richter.*



*Training in nutrition education by a local Ethiopian NGO.  
Photo: SEWOH/BMZ*