

NaNA

National Nutrition Agency
Office of The Vice President

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“Working With Communities For Better Health & Nutrition”

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Community cooking
demonstration for
improved diet



Welcome to the Second Edition of the National Nutrition Agency Newsletter, 2021. I would first like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Management of the Agency to wish the entire readership of our Newsletter a happy and prosperous 2021. As we ushered in 2021, may I take a deep reflection of 2020 which has seen the world grappled and still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has brought misery and agony to nations, communities and families, and has completely changed the way we used to live and do things, thus heralding a new world order. COVID-19 has affected every nation in the world, big or small, developed and developing countries alike. As of now, it is estimated that a total of 114,106,542 million people have been infected and 2,531,612 died as a result of COVID-19 globally. In

Africa alone, there are 3,898,096 cases with 103,737 deaths, where as in The Gambia the number of cases registered was 4,691 with 148 deaths. During the course of the year, we have lost some family members, friends, colleagues and loved ones who left a vacuum that can never be replaced again. Just for a moment let's put human faces to the numbers and not just see the numbers as mere statistics.

People did not only get sick and die, but the pandemic also led to the closure of businesses or putting restrictions on opening and closing times of businesses, imposition of night curfew, getting people out of their jobs, schools closing down, lock downs imposed on people and international travel put to a halt or minimized, the wearing of face masks, handwashing and social distancing. It heralded virtual meetings and football matches and basketball games without spectators. Naming and wedding ceremonies were cancelled or postponed or where held are attended by only a few and funerals were also attended by few family members and friends. Religious congregations or gatherings in mosques and churches were not even spared. COVID-19 has brought the world to a near standstill and ushered in a new normal as things are being done differently now. In The Gambia, the Tourism sector on which many people depended on as a source of employment was seriously affected as tourists were not visiting thus making many households to be vulnerable. The year 2020 will go down in our history books and will be remembered as the year that really shook the very fabric of our societies and tested our fragile economic and health systems.

As part of efforts by the Government of The Gambia to cushion off the impact of the COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of the people, The Gambia Social Safety Net Project was restructured to make available US\$ 10million as cash transfer to approximately 80,000 households in the 30 poorest districts of The Gambia starting from July to November, a period covering the lean period in the country. This followed the Government's earlier near universal in-kind assistance of rice, sugar and oil to 80% of the population. Similar assistance were also offered through the Building Resilience through Social Transfers for Nutrition Security in The Gambia (BReST) with funding from the European Union and UNICEF.

The year 2020 also witnessed the completion of the Maternal Child Nutrition and Health Project on the 30th of June. This was a US\$ 21million Health System Project jointly implemented by the National Nutrition Agency and the Ministry of Health and the good news was that the project was rated highly satisfactory by the World Bank.

It is not all doom and gloom and on a more positive note, vaccines for COVID-19 have been discovered, are being manufactured and people are being vaccinated, though at a slow rate and an inequitable manner as there is a nationalization of the vaccines because the developed countries with the resources to manufacture and procure the vaccines are actually vaccinating their citizens first before considering the rest of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic is not all over yet, because there has been a surge in the number of cases in the country according to the Ministry of Health. The pandemic will only be considered over when there are no more infections and the last patient admitted in our health facilities has been successfully treated and discharged. Individually and collectively, together we can defeat the virus and while we wait for the arrival of the vaccines to be injected into our arms, let's continue to put on our facemasks, practice hand washing and keep the social distancing. We only hope the gains made over the last couple of years in improving the nutritional status of the women and children in the country will not be eroded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your continuous support to our Newsletter.

Modou Cheyassin Phall

Executive Director

National Nutrition Agency (NaNA)

**Musa Mbenga– Board Chairperson**

Mr Musa Mbenga is a highly qualified International Development Practitioner with over 30 years of experience in research, program design, administration, management and leadership. He served as Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources between 1994 and 1999 and as Executive Secretary of the Permanent Inter-States Committee to Control Drought in the Sahel (CILSS) between 2001 and 2007. He is the Chairperson of the NaNA Board since 2017.

Mrs Juka Fatou Jabang (ORG)

Mrs Juka Fatou is a retired Public and International Civil Servant, with a wide experience in top management positions in public administration, governance, management development, and economic and financial management at national and international levels. She worked for more than thirty years in various capacities in key Ministries of Government of The Gambia including being the Director General of the Management Development Institute (MDI) as well as in the international front. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Literature from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown. She later attained various post graduate qualifications including an Advanced Diploma in Public and Development Administration from Glasgow College of Technology (now Glasgow Caledonian University) and professional courses in Public Finance from the IMF Institute, Washington DC, and in Advanced Management from the University of Pittsburgh, USA.

Mr Dawda M. Joof

Dawda, a Veteran Public Health Officer is one of the pioneers of Primary Health Care in The Gambia and brings over 40 years' experience as a Career Public Health Professional. He holds a Master's Degree in Epidemiology and Health Planning from the University of Wales, College of Swansea, UK. He has worked in a variety of policy and leadership roles within the Ministry of Health, and specializes in project/programme management, implementation and evaluation, strategic and operational planning of health programmes, epidemiology and health systems research. He also has as a strong expertise in HIV/AIDS programming.

Mr Bakary Krubally

Mr Krubally is the current Director of Loans and Debt Management & Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. He has over twenty years' successive career and experience in both the Public and Private Sectors. Mr Krubally also lectures at the University of The Gambia School of Business. Upon acquiring MBA in Finance and MSc in Project Management, he worked with Wells Fargo Bank in the US and Standard Chartered Bank in The Gambia as well as other major Commercial Banks. Having served in numerous institutions, Mr Krubally's competency has been demonstrated by his significant contribution towards the realization of several institutions' and organizations' goals and objectives.

Mr Dawda Ceesay

Mr Ceesay holds a Master Degree in Health Management, Planning and Policy with a merit from Leeds University, United Kingdom (UK). He is a veteran Public Health Officer, who is currently serving as the Permanent Secretary for the Office of the Vice President, a position he held since 2020. He has worked in several other reputable government institutions including being Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, where he started as a junior Public Health Officer and rose through the ladder to the positions of Principal Public Health Officer and Director of Planning and Information as well. He has also served as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Youth and Sports. He is a well experienced civil servant by virtue of the institutions he has worked at and worked with.

Executive Director. NaNA

Mr Modou Cheyassin Phall graduated from the School of Public Health, Gambia College in 1983 and joined the Ministry of Health as a Public Health Officer. He was posted to the then Nutrition Unit in January 1984 and is among the founding members of NaNA. He rose through the ranks at NaNA to become the Executive Director in 2006. Mr Phall is a holder of a Bachelors and a Master's degree in Applied Human Nutrition and Public Health Nutrition from University of Cardiff Institute, Wales (UWIC) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Mr Modou Cheyassin Phall succeeded Isatou Jallow, the first Executive Director of the Agency.

Response to the COVID-19 PANDEMIC- 'Nafa QUICK'

By Ousman Dem -NaNA

The Government of The Gambia with support from the World Bank initiated The Gambia Social Safety Net Project (GSSNP) with Nafa Program as one of the components. The Nafa program, which is a cash transfer with accompanying Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC), targets 15,606 extreme poor households from the 20 poorest districts in the country. However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of The Gambia formulated and implemented stringent measures to prevent and contain the virus, as well as to mitigate its impact on food and nutrition security. As a result, the Nafa Program was restructured to contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic through a cash transfer program called 'Nafa Quick' to complement government's in-kind support.

The 'Nafa Quick' was aimed at mitigating the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the population by providing immediate universal cash transfer of **D1,500** per month within 4 months (2 transfers of D3,000) to approximately **83,000** households in the **30** districts of the project. Additionally, the 'Nafa Quick' was to help households address immediate family needs, and ensure that families are able to maintain a diversified diet.

Between July to November 2020, the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) in partnership with the Department of Community Development (DCD) and the Directorate of Social Welfare (DSW) implemented the 'Nafa Quick' Cash Transfer in the West Coast Region (Fonis), Lower River Region (LRR), North Bank East (Sabach Sanjal District), Central River Region (CRR), and the Upper River Region (URR).

The preparation and registration of beneficiaries was done by NaNA and partners. Reliance Financial Services, a Payment Service Provider was contracted to do the cash transfer. The payment was accompanied with intensive SBCC, which was implemented using various approaches that included TV and Radio panel discussions, airing of recorded spots and distribution of brochures.



Below is a summary of the beneficiary households registered and paid using an Open Data Kit (electronic capture) in each of the regions:

Table

Region	No. of Households registered and paid
West Coast Region (Fonis)	7, 454
Lower River Region (LRR)	13, 008
North Bank East (Sabach Sanjal District)	2, 764
Central River Region (CRR)	27, 821
Upper River Region (URR)	27, 312
Total	78, 359

Human Interest Stories - 'Nafa Quick' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

By Ousman Dem, Fatou Drammeh and Fatou Jankeh



Ms Penda Bah - Jakoto Village – Gissadi Payment Point

After a deep sigh of relief, Mrs. Penda Bah a 40-year-old woman from Jakoto village expressed the common hardship which most people are encountering during the state of public emergency. With a pleasant smile on her face, she stated that “the most pleasing news I received these days was that the Government of The Gambia has brought financial assistance to our door steps”. Mrs. Bah expressed her gratitude to the sponsors for the timeliness of the intervention. “The Cash transfer came at a time when we are experiencing food scarcity and there is very little money left on me to feed my family. As a result of this assistance, I will service my food loans from the village shopkeeper and then use the balance of the money to buy rice and other assorted dry foods” the 40-year-old female household head remarked. With her voucher in hand, she was seen wearing a facemask and had earlier washed her hands with soap and running water and also had her temperature taken prior to joining the beneficiary verification queue.



Mr Omar Touray - Jarumeh Kuta Village - Kayai Payment Point

A fifty-one (51) year old resident of Jarumeh Kuta village, Mr. Omar Touray, who predominantly depends on subsistence farming travelled to the Kayai payment point to receive the 'Nafa Quick' Cash Transfer. “I was very delighted to receive information from the village Alkalo that there will be support for the poor households in our district”. Being the head of a family of six (6), he described the cash transfer as a very timely intervention, since the country is currently facing the double burden of the lean season (farms are not yet due for harvest) coupled with the negative impacts of COVID-19, which the cash transfer intends to mitigate. Mr. Touray indicated that he plans to use part of the money to purchase basic household needs, such as rice, groundnut and cooking oil. In order to adopt a coping mechanism, the optimistic farmer wants to buy a small ruminant with the remaining money, thus, he appealed for more social assistance from the government.



Ms Fatoumatta Ceesay- Kayai Village - Kayai Payment Point

The thirty-three (33) year-old widow and a household head, Mrs Fatoumatta Ceesay, a resident of Niani Kuntaur was excited to receive the Nafa Cash transfer. “I have seven children to feed since their father passed away. Consequently, this money will be used to buy food rations for the family”. She further explained the timeliness of the Cash Transfer intervention since it falls within the lean period when the stores that held the harvest from the previous year are virtually empty. “Currently, I am experiencing rice shortage to feed my family, and now with this money I can buy enough rice for them”.



Ms Amie Jallow – Kerr Layen Village - Gissadi Payment Point

Amie Jallow is 31 years, resides in Kerr Layen which is located in the Central River Region- South. She travelled for an hour to Gissadi payment point and took an hour and a half to receive the cash transfer. Amie described the rainy season to be the most difficult part of the year due to very little food remaining in the food stores, which results in the reduction of food rations and the number of meals consumed per day.

“With no money, sometimes we have to resort to barter to get some of the condiments we need”, Amie explained. “However, with this cash transfer, I can buy all the food stuff I need without resorting to borrowing money, bartering or in the worst-case scenario going to bed hungry”.

Responding to the COVID - 19 Pandemic-BReST

By Baboucarr Joof - NaNA

Building Resilience through Social Transfers for Nutrition Security (BReST) COVID-19 Cash Transfer.

Based on the impressive achievements registered during the implementation of the BReST Project, the European Union in partnership with UNICEF, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, allocated 200,000 Euros to support the beneficiaries that were registered during the BReST project. The rationale for the cash transfer to the beneficiaries was to complement The Gambia Government's food relief efforts, but also help families cope with the economic challenges posed by COVID-19 at a time when the threat of food insecurity was high, especially among vulnerable households in rural Gambia. It also aimed to cushion the gains registered by the BReST Project.

The BReST COVID-19 unconditional cash transfer was implemented by the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) and the Directorate of Social Welfare in the original BReST regions. NaNA took all the necessary measures to protect the cash transfer teams and the beneficiaries from COVID-19 including mandatory wearing of face masks, handwashing with soap and running water, use of hand sanitizers and social distancing as recommended by WHO and Ministry of Health.

Cognizant of the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, NaNA assigned the 6,033 expected beneficiaries from the 10 original BReST health facilities to 29 payment sites that were carefully identified in collaboration with the Regional Nutrition Field Officers. During the payments, a lot of testimonies were received. Below is an excerpt from one of the beneficiaries who was interviewed by Mr. Alpha Mballow, the Nutrition Field Officer in the North Bank West Region: Mariama Kandeh is a 30-year-old BReST Project beneficiary.

According to Mariama, "my child and my other family members benefited a lot during the project and even after the project phased out. During the project cycle, I regularly received a monthly cash transfer of D600, which I used to purchase food items and clothes for my child. Apart from the monthly cash I received, I also gained a lot of knowledge on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, maternal health and nutrition, hygiene and sanitation". Mariama also said "I knew that the project will not last forever, therefore, I also used part of the cash and bought a female goat for my child which has now reproduced".



Mariama further stated that not only did she gain knowledge but also realized the importance of adhering to Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) schedules because her child was able to obtain a birth certificate, received the required vaccines and supplements. "Now that the project has phased out, "I still continue to use the knowledge gained in terms of the consumption of nutritious diet, hygienic practices during food preparation as well as the importance of regular clinic attendance. I also received an unexpected cash transfer during the COVID-19. These two rounds made a big impact in our lives as the support came during a crucial period when the entire world was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic".

"I would like to thank NaNA and partners for the support provided to me through the BReST Project. The project has impacted positively on our lives and livelihood. I pray for God's continuous guidance at all times".

Maternal and Child Nutrition and Health Results Project's (MCNHRP) Most Significant Change Story on the Livelihood of the People of Sami Village. By Alpha Mballow, Nutrition Field Officer - North Bank West Region

The MCNHRP was implemented in 345 communities, out of which 75 communities were within the North Bank West Region (NBWR). One of the communities that signed performance contracts and received subsidies from the project was Sami Village. In The Gambia, the MCNHRP used Results-Based Financing (RBF) mechanism to incentivise community level improvements, which is done through the signing of performance contracts with the implementing communities. Consequently, the MCNHRP signed six contracts with the Village Development Committee (VDC) of Sami, and thus received six (6) rounds of payment. The subsidies received were used to fund a multipurpose (two-in-one) milling machine as a sub-project, that was developed by the entire community through the application of participatory rapid appraisal/assessment (PRA) tools. This multi-purpose coos milling machine sub-project was singled out as one of the most successful and viable

projects ever received by this community. The total cost of the sub-project was **D135,000**. The machine was operational for a period of two complete years and generated a lot of revenue for the community. The proceeds from the multipurpose milling machine were used on the following:

Monthly payment of operator (30% of the total cash generated on a monthly basis)

Purchase of equipment and maintenance cost (D11,930.00)

Purchase of cash power meter and other accessories to switch from a generator to NAWEC electric supply (D56,000.00)

Provision of water supply system for the community (D75,000.00).

The generator was subsequently sold at a cost of D10,000.00, which was added to the cash generated by the multipurpose milling machine. Currently, a saving of D20,000.00 is in the bank and the multipurpose milling machine is still fully operational.

The availability of the sub-project served as a labour-saving device for the women of the community, which reduces their drudgery and in turn, is expected to contribute to their health and wellbeing.

Eight (8) surrounding communities have equally benefited from the services of the sub-project (Multi-purpose milling machine).

The services provided are cheaper when compared to other milling stations, since Sami is charging D2.00 per cup whilst others charge D3.00.

We can conclude that this community's sub-project has really impacted the lives of the community members and by extension the nearby communities. The beauty of this sub-project is that the community is able to sustain it knowing that it is contributing to the development of the community.



NaNA Interview with the Agency Board Chairman, Mr. Musa Mbenga

Ms Aminata: Who is Mr Mbenga?

Mbenga: I started my professional career with the Crop Protection Services of the Department of Agriculture and then switched to the Department of Agricultural Research. Before going to University, I worked in Kuntaur, Brikama and Yundum between the years 1977 and 1981. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Agronomy from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas in 1983 and a Master's Degree in Plant Breeding and Biometry from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in 1989. After my first degree, I returned to the country and was posted to Sapu where I worked between the years 1984 and 1994.

I served as a Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources between 1994 and 1999. After I quit the government, I served as The Executive Secretary of the Permanent Inter-State Committee for the Control of Drought in the Sahel (CILSS) between 2001 and 2007 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. After serving two mandatory terms at CILSS, I was recruited by The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2007 and 2009 as the Country Director. After just 18 months in Kinshasa I was transferred to Accra, Ghana where the FAO Regional Office for Africa is located. In Accra, I was Country Director to Ghana, the Sub-Regional Coordinator for West Africa and the Deputy Regional Representative for Africa. I served 4 years there before I decided to retire. I returned to the country in 2013 and joined the private sector in agriculture. Since that time and now, I managed a farm growing fruits and vegetables for the domestic market.

Besides farming, I served briefly as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Gambia Groundnut Cooperation (GGC) until 2019. Currently, I am serving as the Chairman of the Agency Board of the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) and the Foundation for the Welfare of West African Chimpanzees (FWWAC). I am also a member of the Board of Directors of the West Africa Rural Foundation (WARF) based in Dakar, Senegal.

Aminata: How long have you served on the Agency Board?

Mbenga: I was appointed in November 2017 which means at this juncture, end of 2020, I have completed 3 years as Chairman of the Board.

Aminata: What are the responsibilities of the Board?

Mbenga: The Board has three major responsibilities, namely; provision of policy guidance to the Agency, provision of oversight in the steering of the Agency and provision of managerial functions such as approving the annual budget, approving the annual financial and technical report and ensuring the Agency is audited annually.

Aminata: What are your thoughts on the work that the Agency has been doing since you joined the Board?

Mbenga: In the last three years, the Agency's accomplishments are quite remarkable. Among other things, the MCNHRP was brought to a successful conclusion, The Gambia Social Safety Net Project is off to a good start with the first round of cash transfers already completed, the 2018 Gambia Micronutrient Survey report is published and available to the public, the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study is also published and is in the public domain. These are just a few accomplishments that gives me satisfaction.

As a result of the Agency's interventions and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Community Development, Directorate of Social Welfare, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, WHO and the World Bank, the proportion of stunted and wasted of children under 5 years in the country has gone down.

Aminata: What is your primary function as the Chairman of the Board?

Mbenga: My primary function as the Chairman of the Board is to convene the Board meetings on a quarterly basis. The Board has met every 3 months since I became Chairman. Normally, I liaise with my Board member colleagues and the Agency to determine the agenda, the date and the time. Besides, the Board meetings, I sit in the National Nutrition Council and the Project Steering Committee of the erstwhile MCNHRP as an ex-officio member. Also, I would, once on a while, lead a delegation to meet authorities on some burning issues concerning the welfare of the Agency.

Aminata: What makes the vision/mission of the Agency meaningful to you?

Mbenga: It's the focus on nutrition of children under the age of five. It is the ambition to reduce stunting and wasting in this age group. It is the use of simple traditional/cultural practices that contribute to achieving the SDG targets of reducing stunting and wasting among children such as exclusive breastfeeding, promotion of micronutrient supplements and employment of nutrition sensitive techniques like water and sanitation to improve the nutritional status of our people.

Aminata: In your opinion, what challenge(s) does the Agency Board face that makes it difficult to carry out its functions?

Mbenga: I think NaNA is a well-managed and well-administered Agency. I was proud of the Agency when we met the National Assembly's Public Enterprises Committee and heard the Chair say that he wished all other Agencies were like NaNA. However, to answer your question, the Board is not constrained in any significant way that might hinder executing our functions. It is the Agency that faces a major challenge each year regarding its funding. The main challenge is the amount and timing of the disbursements from the treasury to the Agency. As you know, NaNA is a subvented Agency and it would sometimes receive less than the approved budget and at times way beyond the period it should receive these monies. This puts the smooth running of the Agency in jeopardy. As you know, the personnel emoluments of some key staff are authorized only from the government subvention.

Aminata: What are your expectations of the Agency?

Mbenga: My expectations of the Agency are that it will continue improving the nutrition and health of the Gambian people with a focus on children under 5 years. Secondly, I would like to see the Agency enlarge its partners adding, besides the UN and the World Bank, other financial and technical partners such as the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, Universities and International Nutrition Agencies.

Aminata: Finally, what are your hopes for the Agency going forward?

Mbenga: I hope it will grow to play a bigger role in reducing poverty and malnutrition in The Gambia. I hope the Government will recognize its unique role and to give it more responsibilities in the fight for the SDG and NDP goals linked to the reduction of poverty and malnutrition and subsequently give more support, sustainably. I also hope that the Agency can attract a major university with a strong programme in international nutrition. This is significant because NaNA generates a lot of data on nutrition annually but the capacity to analyze the data and feed the public decision-making is not there. However, university graduate students can use this data to write their dissertations; they would publish papers in international journals and that would put Gambia on the map of the nutrition world.

Aminata: Thank you Mr Chairperson

Mbenga: It's my pleasure, Aminata.

Climate Change, Food Systems and Food Security in The Gambia

By Dr Momodou Darboe and Mr Zakari Ali (FACE-Africa Researchers at MRC Unit the Gambia at LSHTM)

Countries strive to provide basic needs for their people and food is one such important basic need. In spite of efforts, hunger and malnutrition are widespread especially in developing countries such as The Gambia for a number of interconnected reasons such as less food production capacity, decreasing yields, growing populations and food trade policies. These eventually affect what food is available, who can afford them, what quantity and at which time of the year.

On top of these existing challenges of providing adequate food to feed everybody in a country, ongoing environmental and climate change affect food production and the processes from the farm to the dining table. In this section, we provide some of the relationships between climate change, food systems and food security in The Gambia; and the role that research and policy play in shaping what affects the food we eat. Towards the end, we have highlighted the ongoing research in this area being conducted in The Gambia at the MRC Unit The Gambia at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine – the Food System Adaptations in Changing Environments - Africa (FACE- Africa) project.

What is climate change?

The climate and climate change are a big discussion agenda these days including the potential effects on health and the food we eat. What really is the climate and climate change need a good explanation in simple language to avoid confusion with the weather. The weather refers to the condition of the atmosphere characterised by its temperature, humidity, wind, rainfall and others over a short period of time (hours, days and weeks). In contrast, the climate, is the weather patterns over a longer period - typically over three decades.

Climate change, therefore, is a change in the weather patterns, and related changes in oceans, land surfaces and ice sheets, occurring over time scales of decades or longer. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that human activities contribute hugely to climate change by contributing to concentrations of atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and others – collectively referred to as greenhouse gases. Climate change essentially affects food production through changing lengths of droughts, irregular rainfall patterns, heat spells, salt water intrusion and soil fertility.

Food system

The food system is the path food travels from the farm to your dining table, encompassing all actors and the entire value chain involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food waste. Other systems exist within and interact with the food system: farming systems, agricultural ecosystems, economic system, social system, water system, energy system, marketing system and policy systems. As climate change affects most of these systems, so does it affect our food system and food security.

What is food security?

Food security is thought to exist when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (World Food Summit definition).

This idea of food security is generally upheld and understood to incorporate three main components:

availability, access and utilisation; the fourth component, stability is a more cross cutting theme.

Food Availability - Enough quantities of food available on a consistent basis.

Food Access - Having enough resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.

Food Utilisation - Appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation.

Stability - Food availability, access and utilisation need to be enduring rather than temporary or subject to fluctuations for people to avoid malnutrition and insecurity.

Some relationships

Climate change can disrupt food availability, reduce access to food, affect food quality and nutrition outcomes. Extreme events, such as droughts and floods, are forecast to increase with climate change. The effects of these events will include changing agricultural productivity and livelihood patterns, economic losses, and effects on infrastructure, markets, food systems and diets, consequently food insecurity. However, the relationship between climate change and food systems is bidirectional since agricultural systems contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions leading to climate change and climate change also affect food systems through food production. To mitigate these impacts, food systems and food security will have to be linked to our ability to adapt agricultural systems to extreme weather and climate change. Examples of such adaptation strategies include climate “smart” agriculture. This involves the development, identification and use of plants and animals that better withstand the effects of climate change, for example, using drought and disease resistant rice and maize varieties. Climate adaptation and mitigation strategies needs scientific evidence to demonstrate that they work and can help us produce enough food in a sustainable way to feed all people at all times while minimizing effects on the environment and climate change – making research and food policy a key consideration. This is the kind of research the FACE-Africa project seeks to do together with the Gambian food system stakeholders.

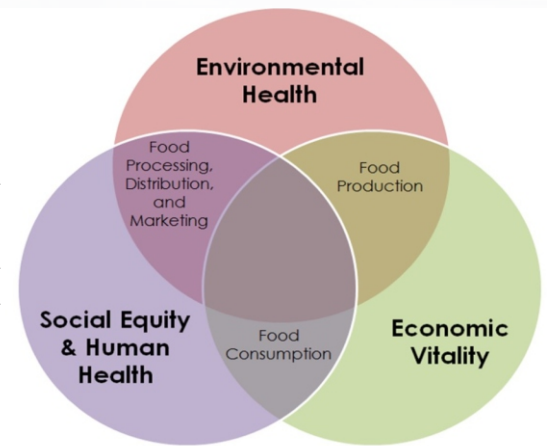


Figure 1: The pillars of Food System (Source: adapted from www.researchgate.net/figure/The-three-pillars-of-sustainability-Based-on-sustainable-development-from_fig1_280935357)

FACE - Africa, The Gambia

In many African countries, climate change will profoundly affect the ability to provide enough healthy food for their populations. Droughts, unpredictable rainfall patterns and increased heat are affecting crop yields and quality. Under the current climate change predictions, these problems will likely increase over the next decades. In addition, rapid population growth, changing diets and urbanisation will increase the demand for food in each country. If no action is taken, problems of food insecurity and associated poor health will be unavoidable. To address these problems, policy makers require country-specific information on effective strategies to adapt to climate change, and ensure sufficient production, import, manufacture and delivery of food for their populations.

The FACE-Africa project aims to co-create evidence to inform climate change adaptation strategies - working closely together with NaNA, The Gambia Government policymakers and food system stakeholders, including farmers, retailers and consumers. The project uses existing data sources, such as routinely collected environmental, agricultural, nutrition and health data, and evidence on adaptations in agriculture to estimate the ability of national food systems to deliver healthy diets now and in the future.

FACE-Africa is a new project being conducted by a group of international and local researchers based at the MRC Unit The Gambia at LSHTM; International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Research Program, West and Central Africa, Mali; MRC Cambridge, UK; and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Austria. It is a two-year Wellcome Trust, UK funded project which uses The Gambia situation as a case country for other West African nations and was launched in January 2020 in The Gambia.



Figure 3. Face - Africa project team at a Gambian poultry farm in January 2020 during the launching

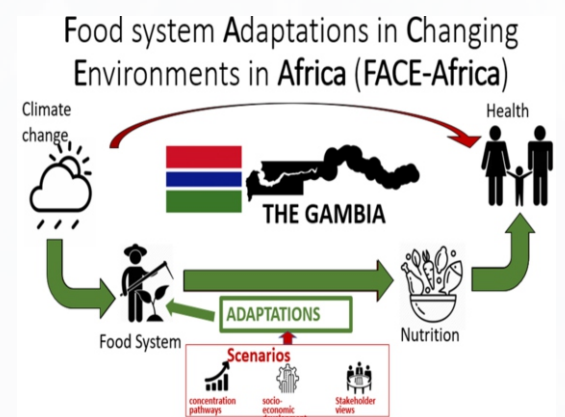


Figure 2. FACE - Africa Project Schematic protocol

From the Farm to the Plate

By Ousman Dem - NaNA

The Food Technology Services (FTS) of The Department of Agriculture (DOA) in partnership with the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) and the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) conducted farmer training on cooking biofortified cassava from the 8th - 15th July 2020. The training was done in North Bank Region (NBR), and Central River Region North and South (CRR-N/S). It centered on processing and utilization of selected bio-fortified cassava food products in the communities of Fass Njaga Choi, Alkali Kunda, Wassu and Mamud Fana. The training attracted twenty-five (25) participants from each of the mentioned communities, which cumulated to one hundred (100) trainees, ninety-five (95) of whom were females and 5 males.

The onsite capacity building programme was supported by the EU Funded FAO Project called Improving Food Security and Nutrition in The Gambia through Food Fortification. The objective of the training was to raise awareness on the consumption of micronutrient rich foods as one of the strategies to help address micronutrient deficiencies through a food-based approach and the use of Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC) approaches. Additionally, the training also increased farmers' understanding of the processing technologies for bio-fortified cassava to enhance food and nutrition security.

Three recipes were prepared during the training namely: cassava doughnuts, cassava stew, and cassava 'Mbahal'



Mother Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC)

By Alieu B. Kujabi and Fabakry Bass - NaNA

In its efforts to inform and sensitize people on health and nutrition at the grass root level, the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) adopted the 'Mother MUAC'. Mother MUAC is a WHO concept for mothers to assess the nutritional status of their own children as well as other children in their communities using the MUAC tape. This concept was first piloted in 15 communities in the Upper River Region (URR) and 15 communities in North Bank Region (NBR), in which 300 mothers were trained on the concept in 2019.

Mother MUAC is intended for mothers to screen children (6-59 months) for early diagnosis of acute malnutrition for timely intervention. As the activity takes the house-to-house screening approach, institutionalizing it will be a boost for both health and nutrition interventions where all families will be able to screen for malnutrition using the MUAC tape. If successfully implemented, this is expected to impact positively on under five morbidity and mortality in our communities and the country as a whole.

After successfully piloting the concept, NaNA with support from UNICEF conducted training of 300 mothers of childbearing ages on 'Mother MUAC' in NBW, NBE, CRRN and URR in 2020. The training was carried out by Community Health Nurses (CHNs) in the Village Health Services and supervised by Regional Health Directorate (RHD) staff such as the Nutrition Field Officers (NFOs), Regional Health Promotion and Education Officers and Regional Community Health Nurse (RCHN) Tutors.

Mother MUAC pictures



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