

Food security focus for Africa's Indian Ocean islands

The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), have teamed up to address food security and nutrition needs for countries in the IOC sub-region and the Islands of Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe.



According to the IOC executive director, Jean-Claude de l'Estrac, speaking at a workshop on the matter the past week, food security and nutrition are priority areas for achieving the sustainable development goals.

Improved nutrition is both an input and an outcome for socio-economic development of IOC and Island countries. For every dollar invested in improving nutrition, there could be as much as 16 to 32 dollars in terms of economic returns.

This workshop has brought together participants from relevant sectors of SIDs in Africa namely Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, Seychelles, Reunion, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe. Delegates include nutrition specialists, government technicians and researchers in the fields of public health, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, education, food and nutrition surveillance, trade, food safety, environment, planning, sustainable management, finance, food industry, rural development, agro-business and communication.

With the developmental variations of the member countries of IOC, the region faces both under-nutrition and overweight/obesity contributing to overall burden of disease including rising levels of non-communicable diseases. Improving nutrition through multi-sectoral approaches therefore remains of top priority.

“The IOC and FAO have jointly embarked on mutual collaboration to develop the capacities of SIDs to evaluate and monitor nutrition situations, analyse options, and implement nutrition sensitive agricultural policies and programmes that impact positively on nutrition,” said Patrice Talla Takoukam, FAC representative for Madagascar/Comoros/Mauritius and Seychelles and FAO-IOC liaison coordinator.

Ending malnutrition

The Indian Ocean Commission and partners with support of FAO have developed the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (PRESAN) to sustainably improve the quality and availability of food in the sub-region.

The third pillar of the strategy focusing on nutrition seeks to diversify the food systems, fortify food staples with micronutrients and embark on effective nutrition education and sensitisation for nutritionally sound

behaviour while establishing appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks for an enabling environment for improving optimal nutrition outcomes and curb generational cycle of poverty and malnutrition and advance socio-economic development.

“Island countries of Africa have the potential to end all forms of malnutrition if policies on food security and nutrition could be translated into effective result based implementation frameworks with multi-sectoral accountability mechanisms to monitor impact and sufficient resource allocation to drive implementation,” said Mohamed Ag Bendeck, FAO senior expert on nutrition.

“Under this framework each country is being assisted to develop independent nutrition policies with multi-sectoral implementation frameworks,” he added.

Building partnerships

Under the CAADP Nutrition Initiative and the framework of the Regional Food and Nutrition Security Strategy, this workshop is poised to strengthen inter-country experiences sharing and country networks of development professionals and experts in island countries and contribute to the achievement of mainstreaming Nutrition into agriculture and development policies and programmes as part of the follow up on ICN 2 framework for action while supporting island countries to achieve their nutrition targets of the Malabo declaration by 2025 and nutrition commitments of the SDGs by 2030.

The FAO Regional Conference for Africa (Abidjan, 4 - 8 April 2016) recommended the need to monitor the implementation of ICN-2 outcomes by supporting Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the formulation of their nutrition policies. The outcome document of Rio+20, “The Future We Want” (United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development), also acknowledged that SIDS need particular attention in effort towards sustainable development.

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