

# How to Assess a Global Approach to Food and Nutrition Security

## Interview with by Gina Kennedy

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Pascal Corbé: Gina, Nutrition is a big subject in the last couple of years in development cooperation. And there is also a subject here of looking at it in conjunction with other areas, because people that you can't look at nutrition without looking at education, health, water and sanitation, and agriculture obviously.3:34

Why is it important to look at these things in conjunction?  
28s

Gina Kennedy: It is a really good question. It's because nutrition is very complex and there is not just one... Nutritional status of people also involves also many different aspects. So it involves not only getting enough energy, which was the focus maybe in the 70s and 80s, but also making sure that micronutrient requirements are met. And now more and more in this day and an age we see diet-related, non-communicable diseases.  
So it all points to the fact that we need higher diet quality.

4:05 There's been a lot of good studies to tell us what higher diet quality means. In general, the Lancet study that's come out has shown you that fruit and vegetable intake is a good indicator for better diet quality, more whole grains, less intake of red meat for certain populations that are overeating red meat. But also attention to ultra-processed foods. So nutrition is really becoming on the global agenda because of the Lancet's study showing that nutrition is one of the leading causes to morbidity of populations throughout the globe. It's not just a developing country issue.

4:45 but it is also of concern to all nations. And it is very interesting that the UN General Assembly just declared this decade 2016-2025 the decade of action for nutrition. So, as you said, it has become really important on the global stage. So it is a really good opportunity to talk about nutrition.

5:09 Why does nutrition to be multi-sectoral? - Well, people eat food. Where does food come from? It really needs to come from agriculture. There really is no other solution to where food can come from. So you need to think what agriculture can do to provide better quality diets and full-fill more of the nutritional needs of people. And then of course, you need all the aspects of the food system, marketing, appropriate food processing, appropriate food storage, appropriate components of processed foods to meet nutritional goals.

5:40 so there is also the aspect that we need to consider ... as we have done in the GIZ study (set a marker!!) the UNICEF conceptual framework. So look at the basic causes that lead to malnutrition and some .. are food, health and care, relating to your immediate causes that lead to your nutrition status, dietary intake and your health status.

6:01

P: Let's just go back to the survey that you did for GIZ. Can you just explain to us, what were the indicators and why is it important that that GIZ did this study now? That is forthcoming now.

6:12

G: GIZ undertook baseline studies - so not me, not Bioversity - but the GIZ project team undertook Baseline studies in ten countries that are part of their OneWorld-No-Hunger programme. And what they did which is really exciting in this case, they chose three food-based indicators. 6:28 So they

chose one experiential indicator of food security, so how the household experiences ... are they experiencing food insecurity?

*(hier geht ihre Stimme immer hoch, also schwer nach food-based indicators etwas mehr zu nehmen und dann rein zu schneiden)*

And you ask questions such as: was there a time in the past four weeks in which you worried that you might not have enough food to eat. Because you didn't have resources to buy food? Was there a time in which you had to eat that you thought that were less healthy for you? was there a time - it gets more severe - when you had to skip a meal or when you went a whole day without eating.

6:58

But looking at it not from a perspective of religious observance or anything like that, but really of food insecurity experience. 7:06 So they would have chosen to behave differently but because of monetary constraints and access to food, they weren't able to feed themselves as they feel themselves they should have.

7:16

P: What do you think is the contribution to development cooperation though? Why does a development implementing agency have to do this? Why is it important in that sense?

G: Well, it is part of the One-World No-Hunger programme, which is a BMZ programme. They are interested and probably following up on the MDGs but now went to the SDGs. So it is an international effort. And part of that international effort is focussed on nutrition and part of also the goal of nutrition is to look at how agriculture can become more nutrition-sensitive and how we can improve diets through more diversification of agriculture systems.

But it as well encompasses aspects of health and care. Particularly when you are at programme implementation level because that they all work together to influence the ultimate nutrition status.

8:10

P: In your first answer you already went into something that I find quite interesting. What can agriculture do to improve nutrition? There is another question that I had further down but we are here at this right now - the behaviour change kind of thing.

If I put broccoli on the table with my kids maybe .. are they going to eat it? So if agriculture is putting broccoli on the table, it is not necessarily going to happen. So it is a question for me with demand .. how to create demand. Can you follow me?

So if you say to agriculture you need to produce that and that product, it is not going to create the kind of demand necessarily that has a better nutritional value.

8:58

G: Right, I think maybe it is easier to think of it at different levels or different scales. So we're not talking about big agriculture in this project ... the context of this project. We're really talking about the context of very small areas which for the most part are having problems with food security - they are showing up as food insecure, most of the countries in the baseline studies - and they are also having problems with the diversity of the diet.

9:29

So when you have a problem with the diversity of a diet, it is a proxy for you, you're probably going to have problems with micronutrient adequacy of your diet. So, it is not so much ... you know, it is about agriculture but it is at the scale of agriculture. So at these scales, at these communities that were are talking about, a lot of them are subsistence to agriculture based. So if they grow food - both for sale but also preserve some of it or have better postharvest techniques - those are activities that can help them to feel more food secure.

10:02 Then on the diversity aspect, it needs to go hand in hand. so of course agriculture needs to be able to diversify and up till now there has been a big focus on staple crops and that is the definition of food security. As long as they have enough staple crop, to feed my family and sell and then the nation has enough staple crop to feed itself, this was considered that you are food secure.

But I think that we moved beyond that now. To know that there needs to be more diversity in the food supply, at different scales.

So the context of this project really is at a smaller scale. 10:36 it's more district level scale. And what we are talking about is strategies that help those specific communities diversify their food basket. So the strategies could come from own production, from home gardening, from integrated home-set food production, planting more fruit trees, but also from more diversity in the market. So there are many things that one could look at but we are not looking at sort of multi-industrial types of agriculture as the solution. 11:04

P: So this survey, what kind of indicators in terms of behaviour change in a broader sense - information that leads to behaviour change – which indicators were used?

G: Right. As I was starting to explain, they used a good set of food-based indicators. Two indicators that are very particular to diet quality. one is the individual dietary diversity score for women. And using that same data you can calculate a new indicator called minimum dietary diversity for women. So that is the proportion of women of reproductive age in the population that consume five out of ten food groups in the previous day. 11:42

What this indicates is a proxy indicator for the nutrient adequacy of the diet. So the more women who are medium dietary diversity, the probability increases that their micronutrient adequacy from the diet is improved.

And why that's important, is having a better micronutrient status. Gives you more energy, gives you more potential - also women with their reproductive function, has better birth outcomes for children - and it is protective for the reproductive cycle, for the lifecycle.

Similar indicators were also asked about children. So these are Unicef and WHO indicators of minimum acceptable diet. and that is composed of minimum dietary diversity and minimum meal frequency for children. 12:26 of a very specific age range of 6-23 months.

So those are the primary indicators for outcome and the way you measure whether your project is having success is if women's knowledge increases, is ... in the context of ... this based on women were we had a discussion today during the seminar. (Verweis einstellen aufs recording video) Of course, it is important to involve other decision makers in the household: men and grandmothers and other people who influence these dietary intake practices. 12:59

So it is a whole big effort for behaviour change but I think the baseline is getting people to understand why it is important to diversify. How diverse foods provide different micronutrients and how those micronutrients help the body function better. Particularly for young children, and also for women and the entire household. That is an important strategy. 13:22

Then there is a particular target audience of agriculture. So ag-extension, people at national level making agriculture policies. For them to also understand why it is important to have a diversified agriculture production system.

And then I am moving out a little bit, health and education. Those are also very important entry points. It is generally the health sector that monitors the health of children, the growth of children. So they can also be champions in providing these messages and understanding the importance of diversification, how were are measuring it in the project, but you know how we get toward the end goal. Which is better dietary diversity for families measured through the sentinel population of women and children. 14:06

P: So in a way the baseline is in a way also a piece of communication already in itself, if I get you right. Because you want to get a sensitisation with it. Are you relaying the results to the people?

G: I would hope that the baseline studies - now that there is an output of the program. It wasn't my output but the program now has the ten baseline studies. They are in printable form and they are in PDF. So yes, I think the intention of the program is to disseminate this information. It depends, I think, on each country programme and how the program is managed but I would hope that they maybe have a workshop to disseminate these results at different levels with in the country. That would definitely be an aim. I think events such as the one we had today and maybe this youtube video are the ways for the program to get the messages out.

15:03

But is interesting you say was the synthesis of the baseline an intervention in itself, because for three years now there has been a report called the Global Nutrition Report and one of the main things that they says in the global nutrition report, we feel like this is an intervention in communication, to communicate the problem of nutritional problems that the world is facing. What are some of the potential solutions and we keeping on track or making progress to our global commitment? So in a sense, yes. One can say that these types of results of baseline studies are in its own way a form of communication and advocacy. 15:41 (21 ZEILEN = CIRCA 126 SEK)

P: Well there you have Lawrence Haddad who is obviously a strong communicator himself, who pushes on the issues. I can see that.

GIZ findings indicate that there is quite a variety or difference in results between the countries. Can you explain that or do you have an idea why that could be? Is it maybe because the results are measured in a different way also?

G: Yes, well one of the food indicators is a food insecurity indicator and the purpose of that indicator is to assess the experience of food insecurity and it does have to do a little bit with diet quality but it really more an indicator of food insecurity and do you feel like you are getting enough energy? Do you feel food secure in the sense of you had enough food to eat? So it is more of an indicator of energy.

The other two indicators, the minimum acceptable diet and the minimum dietary diversity for women, are really more about the adequacy of the diet that also includes micronutrient adequacy. So there are two different concepts really that are being measured. so you don't necessarily expect in all situations for the indicators to be looking exactly the same.

16:56

What was very interesting when I looked at the summary of the ten baseline studies was that in some populations food insecurity is a big problem - for example in Kenya, in these results because of area where the study was undertaken -

P: 70%

G: Yah, up to 80%. Whereas in other countries, Ethiopia and India, they weren't experiencing from their perspective - from the perspective of the woman reporting - so much food insecurity. 17:22 We'd have to look at country context-specific factors. India for example, has a public distribution system and maybe that helps the population feel that they are more food insecure and if times really got bad, they can rely on that social safety net, to help get them through.

But what was interesting is there were differences in populations meeting minimum acceptable diet and minimum dietary diversity for women but in general they were pretty low. 17:51

So even when a population was experiencing less food insecurity, such as the case in India, their dietary diversity was low. Also, Ethiopia was a case that I remember. So why would that be? maybe in Ethiopia they have quite a few dietary restrictions, they are vegetarian and so we have to focus on food groups that they are comfortable to eat and comfortable to give to their children. Ethiopia in that context that population fasts. They have a lot of fasting rituals that they observe. And it is

written in that baseline study that the woman could have been fasting, on different days of the week. So you have to consider those factors when you are interpreting the data. But in general yes, dietary diversity is something, for these ten country sites in the GIZ programme that definitely deserves some attention and some work toward improvement. [18:49](#)

P: So in a way, the huge difference in the felt food insecurity is at least partly an indication that you need to adjust your programs and look at these countries in that way and that country in that way. Am I right?  
[19:08](#)

G: Generally for food security, you are looking, historically you are looking to see if staple food production is enough to meet needs - and by needs in a nutritional sense, it is generally the energy needs of the population. So if we are just trying to break down what is happening in Kenya, they might not even be able to meet their needs for calories, their needs for dietary energy. [19:28](#) Whereas it would seem - but we haven't looked - it would seem that you would have to investigate really that in India maybe - you know the countries that were experiencing less food insecurity, that they were more able to meet their coordinates. Whereas based on these proxy indicators of micronutrient adequacy, I would guess that most of the populations in the baseline are suffering from micronutrient deficiencies because of their diets are not diversified enough. [19:56](#) to provide all the vitamins and minerals needed to fulfill requirements.

P: One of your recommendations was that you need cash transfers, social transfer programs. (Diese Frage und Antwort kann uU ganz raus.Sie sagt nicht viel dazu.)

G: Well, i think cash transfers and social transfer programs are a good way particularly if they go hand in hand with behaviour change communication. It is a good strategy particularly in very vulnerable populations to help pull them out extreme food insecurity. [20:29](#) I have looked at other data from India that is measuring this food insecurity scale or even other indicators of household food insecurity and their perception of being food insecure does seem to be a little bit better. [20:46](#) But you know many countries, the country where I come from, the United States we also have social safety nets, to provide food to people who fall below the poverty level and might otherwise be falling into .. really feeling hungry.

So I think that social transfer programs are proven to be an effective means to get people out of severe and moderate food insecurity.  
[21:12](#)

P: Now you did the surveys for GIZ Food and Nutrition Security Program which is financed by BMZ. From your deeper insides in the baselines is there any - sort of to round it off - is there any basic recommendation that you think that the program should maybe adjust its way, its way of looking at it or its approach?

G: Actually today's seminar was very interesting but let me just say that I and (?), we didn't do the baseline surveys. They were conducted through people brought on.

P: From your analysis, ya!

G: Yes, we just did the summary analysis of the ten baseline surveys. So the actual data collection [21:58](#) and all that hard work was done by other teams.

But yah, the seminar was informative today to sort of point out a few things that could have come out more. For example, we saw some cases where maternal knowledge about the importance of diversifying food or the importance of feeding more frequent meals came out that their knowledge was high, yet their practices were low.

So I think it is quite important to also do some value analysis and some more qualitative research to look at those areas where we might have questions that need to be further explored.

22:38

So why was it for example in Kenya and Ethiopia that women can say yes I know it is important, that I give my child a diversified diet. I know that it is important that I feed my child more frequently, yet they are not practising it in the observed indicator of minimum acceptable diet.

22:53

So there might be gender barriers. You know it could be that the woman doesn't have control of monetary resources to buy the food that she has learned is important to buy. There could be other reasons or influences of older family members, grandmothers or other people.

So that gender aspect that came out that could really be looked at maybe a little bit more by the project teams. (smiles)

23:15

P: Last question. From my side now. When I first arrived in Africa and I was in workshops like that, I was always amazed by all the needs assessment and then I was even more amazed when some African stood up and said well guys, we don't need another needs assessment. You come here and make needs assessments and needs assessment. We know what we need. 23:34

Is there anything that you can see through from what was taken the data from that people were indicating that they - whether they do or not - whether they really need ... that they do know already what they need?

23:51

G: Yah, that is a kind of tough question, to try and ascertain from this type of data collection. I agree with you completely that data fatigue and just collecting information for the sake of collecting information is really not a good idea. I do feel having been part of the process over the last year that it was very carefully considered, which types of data to collect and not just collecting data for collecting data itself.

24:20 I good example of that - and it even came out in the seminar today - was that people said why didn't you collect information on anthropometry. That's when you measure children's' height vis-a-vis their age, their weight vis-a-vis their age and their height vis-a-vis their weight.

Yes, very important indicator to have but the people around the table making decisions about data collection decided that in the life of a two or three-year project those indicators aren't the most likely indicators to change. Therefore rather than to expose the population to even more data collection, we don't have really a plausible reason to think, for example, stunting which is height for age could change, we won't collect it. 24:58

So you get criticised if you do and criticised if you don't but the point is very well taken.

And then the other point is the information should absolutely go back to the populations because the also can come up with their own ... you know you sit with them, you say look we found out that only 7% of the women here are meeting this threshold of five food groups out of ten. And then we look at the food groups. These are the food groups that a lot of women consume. and these are the food groups that hardly any women consume. 25:28

What are strategies that you can think of to help diversify the diet? Can you plant more fruit trees? Can you utilise the fruit more? Can you have a home garden and grow more vegetables? Can you start drinking some milk, give some eggs rather than selling it all?

So I think yes. You have to show the results to the communities themselves because ultimately it is them who have to come up with their own solutions. 25:53

But it is a standardised way for GIZ's track what the problem looks like using a standardised set of indicators.

P: Final final question. Just think one second if you really look at this, reflecting on it. What do you think what is the most counter-intuitive, promising insight that you gained from looking at what the studies have brought up?

G: Yah, that's a tough question. I mean I found it very useful and very beneficial myself being a person who works at dietary diversity to see where we are. So without a doubt there it provides a very good benchmark, for that moment in time when those indicators were collected. Really what was the situation? How much people were diversifying? So it gives you a lot of ideas, again, breaking it into the food group analysis 26:50 we can see what food groups we want to look at and which food groups most of the population are consuming. It gives you quite a lot of insight if you start to look at the data in this way.

Now some of the surprising things ...

Gina:

But I guess it wouldn't surprise you if you had read the mdg reports – was I found it encouraging that quite a lot of the population - and these are really underserved populations - had access to safe water, but on the contrast access to safe sanitation was really lagging behind. 0:18

and you can benchmark that to what their goal mark was set for the mdg in 2015 and so we still see in 2016 when this information was collected, populations falling way below that set goal for 2015.

And that goal was worked on between 2000 and 2015.

0:40 And so there is of course always hope and there is always room for improvement but there is certainly some aspects that we have a long ways to go.

Pascal: thank you very much.

Gina: yes, thank you too.