

Comments on Yemen's National Agriculture Sector Strategy (NASS) and Investment Plan

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Context

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAI) of the Republic of Yemen has asked the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to review its National Agriculture Sector Strategy 2013-16 "A Promising Sector for Diversified Economy in Yemen" and related investment plan in connection with Yemen's submission for GAFSP financing. IFPRI provided a first round of comments on May 15, 2013 and we note that many of these comments have been incorporated in the Interim Update May 31st, 2013.

While further refinements to the NASS are possible and planned, the current update provides a sound basis for implementation and investment planning. This to me is a great achievement given the generally challenging situation that comes with the on-going political transition in Yemen. An additional encouraging development is the recent establishment of a National Food Security Council and a related Technical Food Security Secretariat, which promises to provide the necessary cross-sector governance, oversight and knowledge for achieving the goals set out in the National Food Security Strategy and related strategies such as the NASS.

Thus, while the current investment plan and program may not be as technically elaborated as in many African countries (which hugely benefited from technical assistance related to the CAADP process), the interim update of the NASS does promise to deliver urgently needed food security action in Yemen.

General comments

The objectives of the NASS and the related investment plan are well chosen and well aligned with the agriculture-related points of the National Food Security Strategy's Action Plan and with key features of the National Water Sector Strategy. The NASS touches upon the key areas of agricultural development in Yemen and the proposed interventions are very comprehensive and well-structured according to different agricultural sub-sectors and cross-cutting themes. The NASS also draws on most recent research findings, for example by paying attention to the critical agriculture-nutrition linkages. The NASS provides the most up to date estimates on key indicators such as poverty, nutrition, food imports etc. For the final version of the NASS, additional details could be included, for example on existing yield gaps, the potential for increasing productivity and output, and the cost and benefits of specific interventions.

The strategy provides priorities and a ranking of measures that is mainly based on past experience and a broad consultative stakeholder process. In future versions of the NASS, it may be worthwhile to complement the priority setting with quantitative analysis comparable to what has been done, for example, in the CAADP process. Ideally, such an analysis would provide quantitative estimates as to which policy/investment is likely to contribute to which specific goal and, if possible, by how much.

Specific comments

1. Likelihood for the strategy and investment program to realize growth and poverty reduction

- Is it aligned with the growth and poverty reduction targets in the country strategy?

Yes. Specifically, NASS mentions the concrete targets set by the National Food Security Strategy in terms of improving food security and child malnutrition

- Is it aligned with the internationally-agreed Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015?

Yes, it has a main focus on employment generation and nutrition, two important elements for MDG 1 related indicators.

2. Technical realism (alignment of resources with results) and adequacy of institutional arrangements to implement

- Does it establish evidenced-based feasibility, efficacy and sustainability of the proposed programs?

Yes, it mainly draws on lessons from past projects and stakeholder feedback. Institutional structures are currently being put in place, which promise to further improve food security related planning, monitoring and evaluation in the future

- Has the financial and economic merit been articulated by applying specific analytical tools such as cost-benefit analysis, risk assessment and beneficiary analysis?

Partially. It is my understanding, however, that more detailed analyses are planned for the final version of NASS

3. An inclusive review and consultation process

- Does it demonstrate commitment to gender integration and inclusiveness of vulnerable populations?

YES, there is a strong and welcome focus on gender and the poorest of the poor

- Does the plan present clear and verifiable evidence of participation by key stakeholder groups, (including farmer groups, the private sector and other civil society organizations), in the preparation of the strategy and investment plan and a mechanism to facilitate such participation in the execution of the proposed activities?

YES, there have been several stakeholder workshops both in Sanaa and in selected governorates, including key stakeholder groups

- Does it present a plan for engagement with the private sector and NGOs?

YES, the NASS actually sees MoAI as a sort of service provider that supports farmers and the private sector, the groups which are ultimately driving growth and poverty reduction

4. Consistency of country budgetary and development assistance commitments with the country investment plan

- Does the investment plan present a feasible financing plan with respect to both resources from the country (from public and private sources) and resources from the international donor community?

Yes, as far as I can judge

- Has the phasing of individual programs within the plan been presented based on priorities and donor funding scenarios and a clear indication of any interdependence among projects?

Yes, as far as I can judge

- Has a financing “gap” been put forward on which donors are expected to make programming commitments?

Yes

5. Adequacy of institutional arrangements for effective and efficient delivery, including M&E

- Does it sufficiently describe inter-agency and inter-sectoral coordination (agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, such as health/nutrition, natural resource management)?

Yes, the main coordination will be through the newly established High Council for Food Security and the Technical Food Security Secretariat

6. Coherence and/or consistency between policies, implementation arrangements and delivery mechanisms, and investment areas, priorities or program objectives

- Are outstanding policy issues required to achieve the desired change clearly presented?

Yes, by presenting the NASS as closely linked to the NFSS, which includes broader non-agriculture related policy actions (such as fuel subsidy reform, food trade etc.)

- Does it demonstrate the means and capacity for effective implementation given the level of resources from the country and donor community?
- Does it establish, for each investment area, clear delivery mechanisms and institutional arrangements (who does what, when) taking into consideration country policies, and program objectives?

Yes, partially. The “when” should be further elaborated in the final version

7. Appropriateness and feasibility of the indicators for impact and system for capacity improvement and accountability

- Defines anticipated results and presents targets and standards by which performance will be assessed during Plan implementation

Yes, however, targets could be made more specific (e.g. how many people are expected to be pulled out of poverty)

- Presents a data collection and analysis system/plan to effectively monitor and report progress against the planned targets.

Not yet, however it is my understanding that this shall be the task of the newly established Food Security Technical Secretariat.

8. Extent and quality of dialogue, (peer) review and mutual accountability system

- Who is responsible for implementation and what is the accountability system for results, including peer review arrangements?

MoAI is responsible. In addition, my recommendation would be to establish an independent monitoring and evaluation system for all food security related activities, which could be housed in the newly established Food Security Technical Secretariat