

## **Food Security: access and quality**

Food Security? The first time I heard the phrase, it conjured images of a warehouse, guarded by armed men... Food Security, we all know, is much more than food quantity. The green revolution has not ended the recurring problems of starvation and malnutrition encountered in many parts of the world, and in particular sub-Saharan Africa.

More often than not, the issue, as emphasised by the name of this forum, is about access to existing food, and about the quality of this food. Access itself is more complex than the popular image of emergency work, moving food to an area where the population is in danger of starvation. Access to food needs to be continuous, adapted in quantity and quality to the needs and the traditions of the different members of a population.

Food Security can be a survival issue in extreme cases. In many more cases, it is an issue of development, and an issue of human right.

What do we, researchers, have to offer? What do we do to improve food security? What could we do?

The organisers of this Internet-based forum have suggested that we could:

- Review the current state of the art with respect to research and development activities that affect food systems in sub-Saharan Africa;
- Identify gaps in current food and health research strategies;
- Recommend future research strategies;
- Improve the links between researchers, in particular young scientists, in Africa and Europe.

The first bullet point will be answered by the papers submitted to this forum and the subsequent discussions. From this review, we will be able to identify gaps, and we will be able to work towards recommending research strategies. Improving links between researchers is a direct objective of this forum. The media used is certainly the most powerful at removing distances between continents. But it also has limitations that we should keep in mind: not everyone has access to the internet.. not yet!

It is important, therefore, that we document our constituency: who is taking part in this e-forum? Which organisations, countries or regions are represented, which ones are not and why?

Many questions are being asked by Food Security researchers, around the world. Questions are, after all, at the source of all research! But others -politicians, practitioners, donors and beneficiaries of our work- have questions for researchers, too. Are we listening to them? We would like to offer some of them here, in order to start our discussions:

### **Historically:**

What problems have we solved, in recent decades?

Which ones do we still need to work on?

Why have we failed to solve some of the problems?

What is the plan for the future?

**At the macro-level:**

What policies need to be in place to ensure food security in Africa?

Is food security just a production issue?

Are we seeing, now, central governments relinquish the responsibility for Food Security to a free market of private enterprises?

**At the micro-level:**

Who is involved in research on Food Security? Who should be?

How do we listen to the beneficiaries of our work?

How do we work with them?

**Technically:**

How do we ensure enough food of the right quality?

How do we, and can we, apply advances from other areas of research to the traditional fields of Food Security?

How do we know what to research? What are the priorities?

*And many more questions should be added, by you, the participants of this e-forum.*

We will discuss among these issues –and others, possibly- those that resonate with the participants of this forum. Clearly the view we can offer will be our own, based on our own experience and aspirations. It would therefore be informative that postings submitted to the forum provide some background information on the author, their work and the organisation(s) they work for, to offer readers a global and in-depth understanding of the issue and a context to the ideas expressed.

We look forward to a dynamic and productive exchange of ideas: this forum is yours, and it is up to you to make it a successful place to share ideas as well as results from past or on-going research, a place of reflection and place of exchange.

Welcome aboard!

Dr Bruno M D Tran