National food and nutrition investment in Mali to get a boost

Mali’s next food security investment plan would be more sensitive to agriculture and nutrition, and requires involvement of all key actors including ICRISAT in its formulation, said Dr Djibril Bagayoko, Head, Nutrition Coordination, Ministry of Health and Hygiene of Mali.

Leading a delegation, Dr Bagayoko met ICRISAT scientific staff to discuss a tool for planning and monitoring nutrition in Mali. The meeting focused on ongoing processes of developing the country’s next national food and nutrition investment plan, upcoming Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) forum in Mali and partnership opportunities between ICRISAT and the Nutrition Coordination Unit.

The next SUN forum is being hosted at Bamako. At the preliminary meeting, organized to discuss partnership opportunities, latest advances in sorghum breeding and aflatoxin management were also presented. During the introductory session, the regional Research Program and its major themes (Crop improvement, Integrated crop management, Systems analysis, Policy and impact) were presented by Ms Agathe Diama, Head, Regional Information, West and Central Africa. She underlined the importance of nutrition and its integration into the overall program through development of nutri-cereals and nutri-legumes and highlighted the achievements of the Smart Food campaign since 2017.

Dr Bagayoko committed to advocate inclusion of sorghum and millet in Mali’s Food and Nutrition Investment Plan. “Millet and sorghum are important sources of nutrients that can significantly improve the nutritional situation in Mali. It is unfortunate they are not included as major crops in the country’s national food security investment plan. These crops should benefit from better investment,” he said. He urged ICRISAT to build a case for millet, sorghum and groundnut as the country embarks on the development of a new plan that is more sensitive to agriculture and nutrition.

“In partnership with the Institut d’Economie Rurale (IER), we are improving sorghum protein quality by increasing levels of essential amino acids (lysine) in the crop. This breakthrough will help enhance protein content and digestibility of sorghum while helping correct protein deficiencies,” said Dr Aboubacar Toure, sorghum breeder, ICRISAT. He also touched upon recent developments in iron and zinc biofortified sorghum and millet.

Given that malnutrition is a major concern in Mali, Dr Bagayoko stressed the need to shift focus from food security to nutrition security. “It is time to change the paradigm of nutrition at all levels, including among decision-makers,” he said.

Dr Keita Djeneba Konaté, Scientific Officer, ICRISAT Pathology Laboratory in Mali, detailed the resources available and spoke about increased access to affordable technologies for testing and analysis as part of the national response against aflatoxin.

Scaling Up Nutrition Forum: ICRISAT will be actively involved in the next SUN Forum in Mali and in consultations as well as projects of the Nutrition Planning and Coordination Unit in the country. The focal point for this is Ms Agathe Diama and an ICRISAT team including Dr Haile Desmae, Dr Aboubacar Toure, Dr Baloua Nebie, Dr Keita Djeneba Konaté, Dr Jummai O Yila and Dr Nadine Worou. For more on Smart Food Read more..