

Title | INTEGRATING RESPONSIVE CARE AND EARLY LEARNING INTO NUTRITION DELIVERY TO IMPROVE EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES IN MOZAMBIQUE

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Integrating responsive care and early learning into nutrition programs is urgently needed, feasible to deliver, and aligned with best practices.

INTRODUCTION

Integrated interventions that promote nutrition and caregiving result in better early childhood development (ECD) outcomes for children. USAID Advancing Nutrition has been providing technical support to two implementing partners in Mozambique (Transform Nutrition and Alcançar) to integrate responsive care, early learning, and ECD monitoring into community-based nutrition programs and child health services in Mozambique. Here we present baseline findings of our evaluation of the integrated package of nurturing care interventions.

METHODS

INTERVENTIONS: Integration of responsive care, early learning, and monitoring of children's development into a package of nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene interventions focused on children in the first 1,000 days. Partners deliver the programs through community-based nutrition groups, home visits, the government's community health worker program, mass media, and during facility-based child health services.

EVALUATION: The study employs a quasi-experimental design to assess the impact of our partners' program on ECD outcomes and a mixed-methods approach to assess implementation fidelity and quality. From February to March 2022, we recruited a random sample of 961 caregiver-child (ages zero to two years) dyads from 12 districts in Nampula Province. Half of the districts to receive the full nurturing care package (intervention) and half to receive the basic nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene package (comparison). Child development was measured with the Ages

and Stages Questionnaire; care practices are measured with the family care indicators and a 24-hour dietary recall. Caregiver depression was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire. Routine program implementation data are captured using attendance records and supervision checklists.

FINDINGS

- **73 percent of children were at risk of potential developmental delay.**
- Limited support for early learning in the home and sub-optimal infant and young child feeding (see figures 1 and 2).
- **23 percent of caregivers were experiencing elevated symptoms of depression.**
- The percentage of supervision visits with at least 80 percent of the checklist items completed is increasing over time (from 53 percent in October–December 2021 to 76 percent in July–September 2022).

Figure 1. Home Environment Indicators



Figure 2. Infant and Young Child Feeding Indicators



CONCLUSIONS

- A large proportion of children in the study sample are at risk for developmental delays, and a great opportunity exists to strengthen nurturing care practices.
- Integrating responsive care and early learning content into community-based nutrition programs is feasible. However, it requires ongoing supervision and strengthening of service provider capacity to improve program quality, as well as advocacy to sustain it.



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