



Mainstreaming Food and Nutrition Security into Local Government Development Plans

Key Results and Lessons from Northern Ghana



A shopper buying vegetables at the Tamale Central Market. Photo credit: Clement Boateng/USAID Advancing Nutrition.

Key Takeaways

- Developing the right tools and guidelines, such as the multi sectoral nutrition planning guideline, is crucial for achieving FNS planning and integration.
- With the right capacity and training, DNCCs are a critical mechanism for nutrition advocacy at the local government level.
- Integrating FNS into the MTDPs is an important step for ensuring sustainable domestic financing of nutrition.
- Monitoring is necessary to ensure that funds budgeted for FNS are released and FNS activities are implemented as planned.

Introduction

Malnutrition remains a major public health issue in Ghana. Nearly 18 percent of children under five are stunted, 12 percent are underweight, and six percent are wasted.¹ The situation is worse in the north of the country. As part of efforts to address malnutrition, USAID Advancing Nutrition supported 17 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in northern Ghana to develop their 2022–2025 medium-term development plans (MTDPs) and integrate food and nutrition security (FNS) actions into these plans. This included constituting multi-sectoral nutrition committees to lead FNS planning and coordination, developing FNS planning guidelines, and facilitating joint planning sessions. This brief highlights this intervention and the results, as well as lessons learned and recommendations for sustaining the gains.

Background

Through the 2022–2025 National Medium-Term Development Policy Framework, the 2014–2017 national nutrition policy, and other policy instruments, the Government of Ghana promotes a combination of high-impact nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions to address both the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition. These include growth monitoring and promotion; anemia prevention and control; promotion of infant and young child feeding; vitamin A supplementation; water, sanitation, and hygiene services; agriculture and food security interventions; social protection and safety nets programs; and school feeding programs. Effective implementation of these interventions in

¹ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and ICF. 2023. *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Key Indicators Report*. Accra, Ghana; and Rockville, Maryland, USA: GSS and ICF. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR149/PR149.pdf>

districts requires adequate planning and allocation of funding. The MTDPs are an entry point for MMDAs to plan and budget for FNS.

Approach

Formation of District Nutrition Coordination Committees

To improve planning for nutrition at the district level, USAID Advancing Nutrition first supported the formation of District Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCCs) in the 17 MMDAs.² The Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) of the Upper East, Upper West, Northern, and North East Regions inaugurated the committees in March 2021 and tasked them to champion and facilitate planning and budgeting for nutrition activities, ensure collaboration and coordination between stakeholders, and mobilize resources to support nutrition activities, among other things.



The Garu DNCC being inaugurated in March 2021.
Photo credit: Mohammed Nurudeen/USAID Advancing Nutrition.

DNCCs have an average of 13 members in each district, comprising representatives from relevant technical departments within the District Assembly (e.g., planning, health, education, agriculture, gender, social welfare and community development, and environmental health) and from civil society, the private sector, and academia. USAID Advancing Nutrition conducted trainings for DNCC members to strengthen their knowledge and skills in advocacy and negotiation, resource mobilization, and team building. The project supported them to convene quarterly coordination meetings to plan and review their activities. Working with the RCCs, the project used the quarterly meetings to conduct supportive supervision for the DNCCs to assess their functionality and provide support as needed. The DNCCs became the main vehicle for USAID Advancing Nutrition's support to the 17 districts in planning for FNS during the 2022–2025 MTDP preparation process.

Development of Food and Nutrition Security Planning Guidelines

The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is the body responsible for coordinating the planning functions of ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as MMDAs, toward achieving national development goals. It regulates the decentralized planning system in Ghana through various instruments and guidelines, such as the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Sector and District Medium-Term Development Plans*, which is a step-by-step guide for preparing the MTDPs (figure 1). To help MMDAs integrate FNS into their MTDPs, USAID Advancing Nutrition supported the NDPC to develop the *Ghana Multi-sector Food and Nutrition Security Planning Guidelines*. Modeled on the MTDP process, these guidelines outline how to integrate FNS at various stages of the planning process, including situational analysis; prioritization of development issues; and formulation of goals, objectives, and strategies.

For example, at the situational analysis stage, MMDAs are required to analyze the current situation with FNS as it relates to health and nutrition; food production; water, sanitation and hygiene; social protection; etc. This helps them identify and prioritize key FNS issues, from which they can formulate FNS objectives guided by national policies, and map out FNS activities.

² Daffiama Bussie Issa, Nadowli-Kaleo, Wa East, Sissala East, Sissala West, Bawku West, Bawku, Garu, Tempene, Mamprugu-Moagduri, East Mamprusi, Nanton, Sagnarigu, Gushegu, Mion, Yendi, and Karaga Districts.

Figure I. Steps for the 2022–2025 District Medium-Term Development Planning



Source: Guidelines for the Preparation of Sector and District Medium-Term Development Plans, NDPC, October 2020.

The project worked with the NDPC to orient officials from Ghana’s 16 regions, as well as DNCC and plan preparation team³ members, on the FNS planning guidelines. Through this, they got a better understanding of the role of each sector in addressing malnutrition and how to better integrate FNS into development plans.

Joint Food and Nutrition Security Planning Sessions

USAID Advancing Nutrition supported the DNCCs and the plan preparation teams to conduct joint planning sessions on FNS. During the three-day planning sessions, they applied the FNS planning guidelines to analyze the FNS situation in their respective districts and formulated objectives, strategies, activities, and performance indicators. These eventually became key elements of the 17 MMDA’s 2022–2025 MTDPs.



The East Mamprusi DNCC in a planning session during the preparation of their 2022–2025 MTDPs. Photo credit: Mohammed Nurudeen/USAID Advancing Nutrition.

Analyses of Budgets and Expenditures for Food and Nutrition Security

In collaboration with Results for Development, the project supported the DNCCs to conduct budget and expenditure analyses of nutrition and resilience from 2018–2020, estimating the percentage of funds allocated, released, and spent on nutrition and resilience. The analysis showed low allocations and releases for FNS in many of the districts, which helped inform budgeting for FNS in the 2022–2025 MTDPs.

³ The NDPC requires every MMDA to compose a team of representatives from all departments or units to form a plan preparation team, led by the district coordinating director, to develop their MTDP.

Key Results

A comparative review of the 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 MTDPs for the 17 MMDAs showed significant improvements in the integration of FNS, as highlighted below:

Number of FNS issues identified increased from an average of 17 to 21

Number of FNS objectives increased from an average of 14 to 18

Number of FNS actions increased from an average of 48 to 141

Budget for FNS increased in the 2022–2025 MTDPs of 10 districts

FNS objectives contained in the 2022–2025 MTDPs include strengthening maternal, newborn, and adolescent health care; strengthening the prevention and management of malaria cases; promoting livestock and poultry development; improving access to safe and reliable water supply; increasing access to improved and reliable environmental sanitation services; and ensuring effective child protection. The successful integration of FNS in the MTDPs is an important step toward ensuring sustainable domestic financing of nutrition. The next step is to ensure that funds budgeted for FNS actions are released and spent as required.

Lessons Learned

- For MMDAs to effectively plan and budget for FNS, timing is key. USAID Advancing Nutrition’s efforts aligned with the timelines for preparing the 2022–2025 MTDPs, thus creating the opportunity for the project to influence the planning process.
- Multi-sectoral planning committees, FNS planning guidelines, and joint planning sessions on FNS are critical components for enhancing FNS integration into the MTDPs of local government.

The specific [FNS] guidelines really helped the districts to properly integrate FNS issues and actions into the 2022–2025 MTDPs more than they did in previous plans.”

Planning officer, RCC, Northern Region

Recommendations

- USAID and other development partners should support DNCCs and civil society to monitor implementation of the MMDAs’ planned nutrition activities to ensure that funds are released and expended as budgeted.



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