

Closing Micronutrient Gaps with a User-Friendly and Context-Specific Tool and Process to Optimize Diets

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BACKGROUND

Most populations in low- and middle-income countries lack adequate dietary diversity to meet global dietary recommendations. At the same time, community-based nutrition programs lack field-friendly tools for optimizing local diets. In response, USAID Advancing Nutrition piloted the user-friendly, Excel-based Optimizing Local Diets Tool to

assist programs from design through early implementation to develop culturally responsive, seasonally available, economically viable, and nutritious lists of key foods and/or food-based recommendations to close key nutrient gaps in specific populations. Such tailored solutions can address critical nutrient gaps for these specific populations.

INTERVENTIONS

The Optimizing Local Diets Tool guides users to select culturally appropriate local and regional foods to promote dietary diversity among the population they are serving. It facilitates the collaboration among a multidisciplinary project team to identify the most suitable local foods for a given context and specific population, fostering cross-disciplinary food-systems knowledge. To address nutritional gaps, this tool can create customized lists of food options for enhancing household dietary diversity and

providing tailored dietary recommendations for children 6–23 months. Additionally, it supports a market-driven approach for developing formulations of local enriched flour-based blends for complementary feeding, to align with the unique nutritional needs of specific consumer groups. Data on nutritional composition are sourced from regional food composition tables, with the option to incorporate fortified ingredients and supplements, such as multivitamins, if available.

OUTCOMES

USAID Advancing Nutrition has tested the Optimizing Local Foods Tool in three distinct contexts involving two programs in Zimbabwe and one in Niger. The tool has effectively formulated nutritionally tailored recommendations for specific populations, guiding users in incorporating a variety of locally available foods, such as bambara nuts, mopane worms, baobab fruit, and indigenous

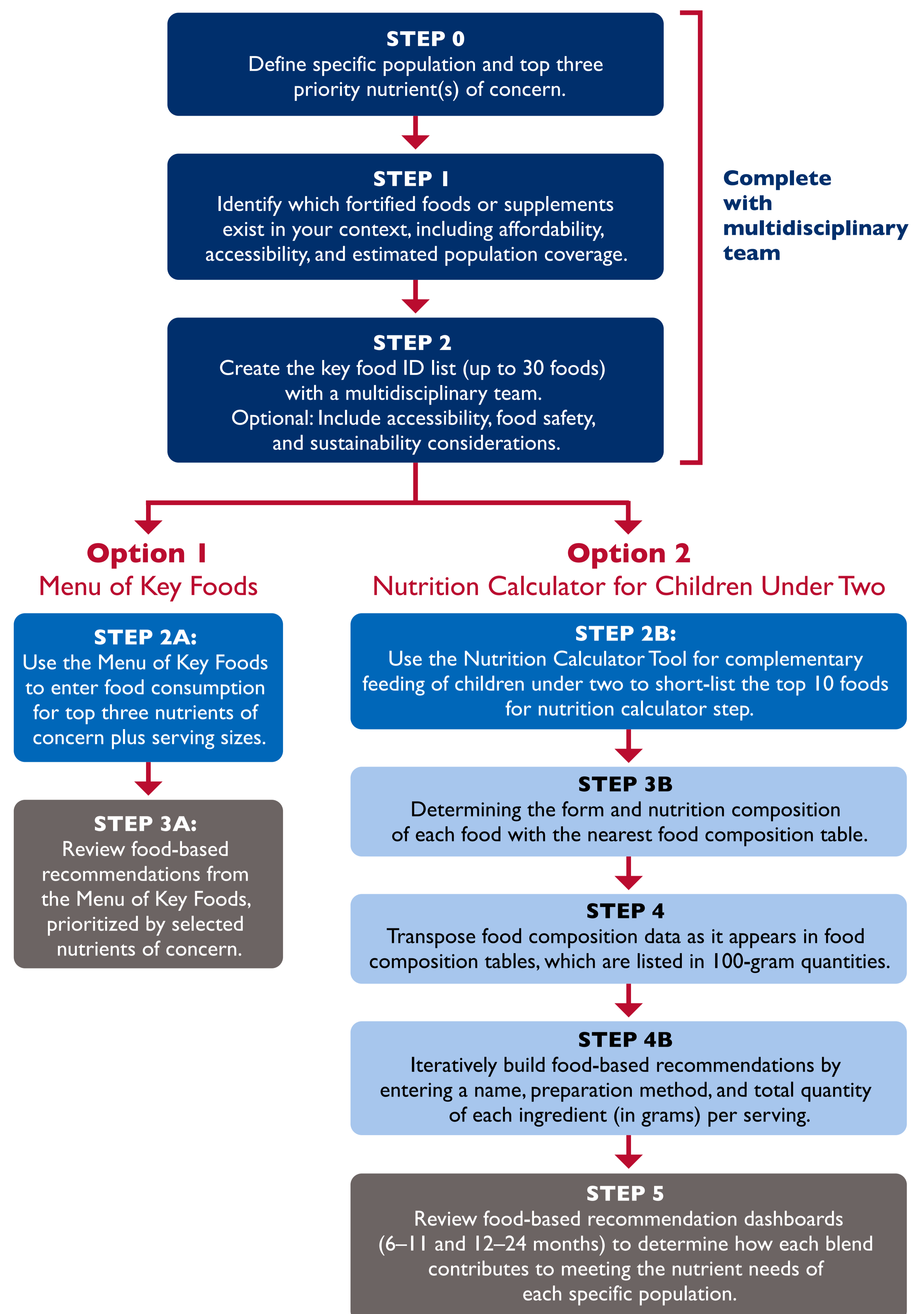
dark green leafy vegetables. The programs have utilized the tool to develop a select list of up to 31 local foods, complete with appropriate serving sizes, enabling users to create diverse and nutrient-dense meals organized by food group. We have gathered user feedback and are currently finalizing the tool and an accompanying instruction manual.

CONCLUSION

The Optimizing Local Diets Tool empowers implementing partners to effectively utilize the rich variety of local foods, ensuring that the specific nutritional requirements of

specific populations are met. This approach promotes the sustainable use of local foods to improve dietary diversity among the most vulnerable segments of a population.

Figure 1. Using the Optimizing Local Diets Tool to Build Food-Based Recommendations



The Optimizing Local Diets Tool aids in identifying local, diverse foods to fill essential nutrient gaps for specific populations, such as children 6–23 months.