

# Advancing the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Agenda with District Nutrition Coordination Committees

## Key Results and Lessons from Northern Ghana



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

### Key Takeaways

- The establishment of DNCCs has been pivotal in advancing the multi-sectoral nutrition agenda in 17 districts.
- Through DNCCs, USAID Advancing Nutrition promoted collaboration among sectors and influenced the integration of FNS into the 2022–2025 MTDPs of the 17 districts.
- With the right training and tools, DNCCs can help accelerate the country’s efforts to address both immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition.

## 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. The situation is worse in the north of the country. As part of efforts to address malnutrition in northern Ghana through a multi-sectoral approach, USAID Advancing Nutrition supported to establish District Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCCs) in 17 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs).<sup>1</sup> The project built the capacity of the committees to advocate and coordinate planning and implementation of food and nutrition security (FNS) activities by various sectors. This brief highlights this intervention and the results, as well as lessons learned and recommendations for sustaining the gains.

## Background

Malnutrition is multifaceted and must be addressed with a wide range of interventions. USAID’s 2014–2025 Multi-sectoral Nutrition Strategy calls for a coordinated multi-sectoral approach to “promote and strengthen coordinated planning and programming across sectors (health; agriculture; water, sanitation, and hygiene [WASH]; environment; early child care and development; education; economic growth; and social protection), as well as geographic convergence of multi-sectoral interventions/services to address the multiple causes of malnutrition.”<sup>2</sup> The importance of a coordinated multi-sectoral approach to

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> USAID. 2014. *Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014–2025*. <https://www.usaid.gov/nutrition-strategy>

addressing malnutrition is emphasized in the 2014–2017 National Nutrition Policy of Ghana and the 2022–2025 National Medium-Term Development Policy Framework.

A multi-sectoral approach requires systems and mechanisms to have a shared vision, make concerted and coordinated efforts, and find sustainable solutions. The USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project supported some districts in the Northern and Upper East Regions of Ghana to set up DNCCs to facilitate coordinated planning and implementation to tackle malnutrition using a multi-sectoral approach. However, many of these DNCCs became dormant when the SPRING project ended. With learning and experiences from the SPRING project, USAID Advancing Nutrition took up the challenge to strengthen and reignite interest in DNCCs, beginning with the 17 districts.

## Approach

### Development of a DNCC Implementation Strategy

In consultation with key stakeholders at regional and district levels, USAID Advancing Nutrition developed a DNCC implementation strategy that clearly outlined the pathways for establishing and operating DNCCs. The strategy defined the importance of DNCCs, core mandates, governance and accountability mechanisms, and strategies to engage and influence local development planning with a focus on nutrition.

### Establishment of DNCCs

In line with the strategy, USAID Advancing Nutrition worked with Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) of the Upper East, Upper West, Northern, and North East Regions and the 17 MMDAs to form and inaugurate the DNCCs in March 2021. With an average of 13 members, the DNCCs comprised representatives from the relevant technical departments of the District Planning and Coordination Unit (e.g., health, education, agriculture, gender, social welfare, community development, and environmental health); civil society; the private sector; and academia. They were oriented on their roles and tasked 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. Inaugurating the committees, leadership across the 17 districts and the four RCCs emphasized the need for the DNCCs to perform their respective functions to help address the malnutrition

*“Many committees go to sleep after inauguration. This must not be one of such committees. We will do all within our reach to ensure the functionality of this committee. See your work as service to the people and play your roles as required, so that the next time we meet, we would have success stories to share.”*

—Honorable Emmanuel Asore Avoka, district chief executive, Garu.

### Building DNCCs' Capacity for Effective Coordination and Advocacy

To help the DNCCs perform their role, USAID Advancing Nutrition conducted trainings to strengthen the skills of DNCC members in advocacy and negotiation, resource mobilization, and team building. The project also funded quarterly DNCC coordination meetings, which brought members together to take stock of the multi-sectoral nutrition activities in their respective districts, identify results and challenges, and plan ahead. The coordination meetings became a crucial platform for coordinating the activities of the various sectors in relation to nutrition and an important way to promote collaboration. Some of the meetings served as mid-year or annual review meetings, where the DNCCs invited external stakeholders and evaluated the performance of nutrition in their respective districts.

In addition, USAID Advancing Nutrition worked with the RCCs to develop a checklist for assessing the functionality of DNCCs. The checklist assessed, among other things, whether a DNCC had all core departments and stakeholders represented, held quarterly coordination meetings, had an approved annual action plan, and conducted joint activities. Officers from the Regional Planning and Coordinating

Units used the checklist to engage the DNCCs at their quarterly coordination meetings, thereby helping DNCC members to identify gaps and take the necessary steps to address them. In most cases, the lack of documentation on DNCC activities was a gap. The DNCCs also performed poorly in terms of raising funds for nutrition to complement central government funding.

## Supporting DNCC Engagement in Medium-Term Development Plans

The formation of the 17 DNCCs coincided with Ghana's development planning cycle for 2022–2025. Given this opportunity, USAID Advancing Nutrition supported the DNCCs to engage the plan preparation team<sup>3</sup> in each district to integrate nutrition and resilience interventions into the medium-term development plan (MTDP) of each of the 17 districts. Most of the DNCC members were already part of the plan preparation team.

The project oriented the DNCC and plan preparation team members on how to mainstream FNS into the MTDPs using the *Ghana Multi-Sector Food and Nutrition Security Guidelines*. These guidelines, developed by the National Development Planning Commission with support from USAID Advancing Nutrition, show 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.

In line with the FNS planning guidelines, the project supported DNCC and plan preparation team members to jointly conduct food and nutrition situational analyses to understand the challenges related to health and nutrition, food production, WASH, and social protection in their districts. This helped them identify and prioritize key food and nutrition issues that needed to be addressed in the MTDP. Following this, they formulated objectives, strategies, and activities for FNS, as well as indicators to measure FNS performance, for inclusion in the MTDPs. They also mobilized communities and empowered them with relevant information that enabled them to influence discussions at MTPD public hearings and validation meetings at the community level. DNCC and plan preparation team members used all relevant and available platforms to champion the nutrition course.

## Integrating DNCCs into District Planning and Coordinating Units

In a bid to sustain the DNCCs and the multi-sectoral nutrition agenda, the 17 MMDAs made efforts to integrate the DNCCs into the District Planning and Coordinating Units (DPCUs). The DPCUs, which comprise the various departments of the assembly, are mandated to provide leadership in the planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of development projects and programs in the districts and are required to hold quarterly meetings to advance this course. District officials argued that integrating DNCCs into DPCUs would help keep the DNCCs functional and put nutrition high on the agenda of the districts, as they would be meeting alongside the DPCU to discuss nutrition and other development issues periodically. Besides, most members of the DNCC were also part of the DPCU.



The Yendi DNCC in a planning session on FNS during the MTDP preparation.  
Photo credit: Mohammed Nurudeen/USAID Advancing Nutrition.

*“Most of the DNCC members are already part of the DPCU and so when the DPCU is meeting, the DNCC can ride on it.”*

—Salifu Ibrahim Tiani, district development planning officer, Nadowli-Kaleo

<sup>3</sup> The National Development Planning Commission 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

The DNCCs have been pivotal in advancing the multi-sectoral nutrition agenda in the 17 districts. Through their efforts, integration of FNS in the MTDPs has significantly improved. A comparative review of the 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 MTDPs showed that the number of FNS issues, objectives, and activities increased in the 2022–2025 MTDPs compared with the 2018–2021 MTDPs. For instance, the number of FNS objectives increased from an average of 14 to 18, and the number of FNS actions increased from an average of 48 to 141. Total budgetary allocation to FNS for the 17 districts also increased from GHS 45,795,000 in 2018–2021 to GHS 177,486,225 in the 2022–2025 MTDPs. In nine districts, budgetary allocations to FNS increased by at least five percent. These are important milestones toward achieving sustainable domestic financing for nutrition.

The DNCCs have also improved collaboration among the various departments in the implementation of nutrition-related activities. For instance, they were able to jointly plan and conduct cooking demonstrations in 340 communities across the 17 districts to increase knowledge and interest in the preparation and consumption of foods that can improve household nutrition. While the health and agricultural officers facilitated the cooking demonstrations and shared messages on nutrition and food safety, the environmental health officers used the same platform to disseminate key messages on sanitation and hygiene.

*“We used to think nutrition is about health alone, but now other departments are appreciating the fact that they have a role to significantly play when we talk about nutrition issues. Now we work as a force, not an entity.”*

*—Mark Atoobey, nutrition officer, Yendi Municipality*

## Lessons Learned

For the multi-sectoral nutrition agenda to be achieved, mechanisms such as DNCCs are critical. With the right capacity, leadership, and evidence, the DNCCs can exact the right influence to ensure that FNS interventions are adequately planned and budgeted for in the MTDPs, and bring all the sectors together for a more coordinated response.

## Recommendations

The USAID and other development partners, as well as civil society organizations, should support the DNCCs to monitor the implementation of FNS activities included in the MTDPs of the 17 districts to ensure that funds are released and expended as budgeted. Although the budgetary allocation for FNS is paramount, it is equally important to ensure that the budgeted activities are implemented.



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