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USAID Advancing Nutrition Final Report

October 1, 2018–February 2024

Executive Summary



FEBRUARY 2024

About USAID Advancing Nutrition

USAID Advancing Nutrition is the Agency's flagship multi-sectoral nutrition project, led by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), and a diverse group of experienced partners. Launched in September 2018, USAID Advancing Nutrition implements nutrition interventions across sectors and disciplines for USAID and its partners. The project's multi-sectoral approach draws together global nutrition experience to design, implement, and evaluate programs that address the root causes of malnutrition. Committed to using a systems approach, USAID Advancing Nutrition strives to sustain positive outcomes by building local capacity, supporting behavior change, and strengthening the enabling environment to save lives, improve health, build resilience, increase economic productivity, and advance development.

Disclaimer

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development. The contents are the responsibility of JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

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Acknowledgments

The global leadership and staff at USAID Advancing Nutrition wish to thank and acknowledge the many individuals and organizations who contributed to the definition, implementation, sharing, and use of our work over the past five years. Of particular note are the many individuals at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Washington, D.C. within the Bureaus of Global Health (GH); Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS); Humanitarian Assistance (BHA); and at the Center for Children in Adversity who steered and co-designed work with us. Special recognition goes to our cross-Bureau leadership team at USAID, noting the tremendous commitment of time and support received from Leslie Koo (GH), our contracting officer's representative (COR); Ingrid Weiss (REFS), our alternate COR; Elizabeth Bontrager (BHA); and Banchiamlak Bizachew, our contracting officer. These individuals, and their many colleagues, brought the utmost professionalism and expertise to their roles and the nutrition community is by-far the better for their efforts. We had the distinct pleasure of working with USAID Mission staff in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Africa, Ghana, Honduras, India, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda who provided us with the vision and resources to complete a wide range of activities that strengthened capacity, policy, systems, and outcomes for nutrition in a wide range of contexts. We shared and tested our global tools and approaches with these and many more countries, and we hope others will continue to adapt and use our outputs to inform additional research, understanding, and implementation in the years to come.

USAID Advancing Nutrition was a consortium of 10 partners. While JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) led the project, our accomplishments are shared with our partners who contributed staff, experience, expertise and countless hours of planning, discussion, and reporting. And, for that our heartfelt gratitude goes out to our Partner Advisory Group members and support staff at Save the Children, Helen Keller International, Results for Development, National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, University of California, Davis, Cornell University, The Manoff Group, and the Africa Nutrition Leadership Project at Northwest University. The leadership and systems at JSI provided this large and complex project with exactly what was needed to support individuals living around the world to do excellent work every single day, providing a welcoming environment at JSI's offices as well as through the virtual spaces established during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without exception, our work aimed to improve nutrition outcomes in countries most affected by the direct and underlying contributors to malnutrition. We worked with a broad range of stakeholders—governments, communities, nongovernmental, and civil society organizations, research entities, and numerous experts—who brought their knowledge, commitment, and expertise to all that we did together. The extent to which each stakeholder brought their unique experience to the work for the good of the whole was inspiring, and it shows in our results which highlight the importance of localization, multi-sectoral collaboration, and learning as critical to sustaining technical and research advancements for nutrition across health and food systems in development and fragile and humanitarian contexts.

Finally, I wish time and space allowed me to name every single person who worked on this project. Instead, I simply thank each and every one of you and acknowledge your greatness as professionals and as human beings. You committed, led, listened, facilitated, developed, wrote, presented, endured, reviewed, adjusted, created, debated, persevered, and triumphed. And you did this with a level of rigor, excellence, good humor, patience, respect, and good will that was both inspiring and humbling. I could not have asked to work with a more amazing team! I have learned so much from you and I hope you are as proud of yourselves as I am of you for the diverse and important results described in this report.

With warm regards to you all,

Heather Danton
Project Director, USAID Advancing Nutrition
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Acronyms

BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CLA	collaborating, learning, and adapting
DEIA	diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance
GH	Bureau for Global Health
GNCP	Global Nutrition Coordination Plan
IR	Intermediate Result
JSI	JSI Research and Training Institute
MSN	multi-sectoral nutrition
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PSMN	Plan Stratégique Multisectoriel de Nutrition (Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategic Plan)
RCEL	responsive care and early learning
REFS	Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security
RFSA	Resilience and Food Security Activity
RMS	Resource Mobilization Strategy
SBC	social and behavior change
SPRING	Strengthening Partnerships, Nutrition, and Innovations Globally
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Background

USAID awarded JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., and a consortium of 10 global partners a five-year contract in August 2018 with the goal of strengthening implementation of the *USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition (MSN) Strategy 2014–2025*, which endeavors to improve human nutritional status and health around the world. Later named USAID Advancing Nutrition, the project aimed to provide technical support for country-led scale-up of effective, integrated, and sustainable nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive policies, programs/interventions, and systems. The work contributed to USAID’s objectives for preventing child and maternal deaths, the Global Food Security Strategy, Achieving an AIDS-Free Generation, and the Global Child Thrive Act. Our work built on USAID’s legacy of nutrition investments, including previous USAID flagship, multi-sectoral nutrition activities, Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) and Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) III.

Recognizing that nutrition is a critical link across USAID’s global health, food security, resilience, child development, and emergency programs, it was incumbent on USAID Advancing Nutrition to assist USAID in improving coordination of nutrition programs across USAID operating units, including strengthening operational effectiveness of the inaugural U.S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan (GNCP) 2016–2021 and facilitating a process across U.S. Government agencies to plan and launch the next iteration of the GNCP 2022–2026. These efforts also supported USAID’s global nutrition leadership, which aligns with the global commitment to end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition under Sustainable Development Goal 2.

Our approach sought to maximize linkages between USAID’s global priorities for nutrition and USAID Missions’ contextually-specific requests for assistance. We established thematically focused teams of experts that worked closely with USAID colleagues in the four Washington-based operating units that supported implementation of the MSN Strategy through USAID Advancing Nutrition: the Bureaus for Global Health (GH); Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS); Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and the Center for Children in Adversity. These same experts provided technical assistance to the 12 USAID Missions that bought-in to the project while also providing tailored technical assistance to 23 additional countries. We leveraged the expertise and global reach of our consortium partners to implement these programs, ensuring responsive and locally-driven results.

The breadth of activities and products completed during the five-year life of the project reflect USAID’s efforts to adopt and promote a systems approach to multi-sectoral nutrition programming—within and across health and food systems. We did this by supporting evidence generation and synthesis; improving measurement and learning; designing equitable and accessible tools and guidance; providing technical assistance to and strengthening the capacity of local communities, governments, implementing partners, and USAID; and disseminating and sharing these tools, resources, lessons, and evidence with a wide range of stakeholders using both targeted and global communications platforms.

Key Advancements for Multi-Sectoral Nutrition

USAID Advancing Nutrition’s work addressed both direct and underlying contributors to malnutrition as we collaborated with USAID to implement the *Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy*. We have contributed significantly to research, implementation, and learning in several areas of work that are critical to sustaining impact for nutrition, including—

- mother and child-centered nutrition service delivery
- healthy diets

- nutrition governance
- social and behavior change
- localization
- nutrition in humanitarian contexts
- anemia and micronutrient malnutrition
- collaborating, convening, and sharing.

The full report includes summaries of why these areas of work are critical, what USAID Advancing Nutrition contributed, and how USAID and the global nutrition community might continue to apply and adapt our work. However, a few highlights that reflect how the project contributed to key advancements for multi-sectoral nutrition over the past five years follow:

Mother and Child-Centered Nutrition Service Delivery



USAID Advancing Nutrition collaborated with key partners at the global and country level to better integrate nurturing care components—including nutrition, responsive care, and early learning—into existing mother and child services to improve the quality of nutrition services within health systems and better tailor those services. This has included research, technical assistance, and implementation and resulted in the development of resources and built the evidence base. Highlights of work that has advanced our understanding of what and how and to improve health systems and services for nutrition include—

- integrating [interventions to support early childhood development](#) into nutrition programming, which has also paved the way for additional work to [support the nutritional care](#) of children with feeding difficulties and disabilities
- conducting implementation research and developing tools to [improve the effectiveness](#) of growth monitoring and promotion programs
- exploring how to [institutionalize](#) the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative
- [building provider competencies](#) in breastfeeding counseling
- raising awareness of approaches and indicators [beyond stunting](#) to measure the impact of nutrition programs.

We had numerous technical lessons from our mother and child-centered work. Key among these is an **emphasis that caregiver well-being is essential** to ensure they receive support to act on recommendations, and that **delivering holistic services is essential** to achieve optimal child development.

Healthy Diets



USAID Advancing Nutrition developed a set of tools, guidance, and interactive resources and curricula spanning the entire food system—from food supply, through the food environment, to food and water utilization—that helps USAID and partners apply a food systems approach when programming to promote healthy diets. We also worked closely with USAID to fine-tune, share, and train USAID staff and partners in the use of an evidence-based conceptual framework that helps to apply a food systems lens to program design and measurement over several years. Some of our most

impactful activities have helped to [assess](#) the food environment, [measure diet quality](#), and [test measures](#) of consumer demand for nutritious foods. Learning from our work with USAID REFS helped to support a key hypothesis that **improving nutrition outcomes requires use of a food systems approach** because household actions alone are insufficient to improve diets.

Nutrition Governance



Recognizing how critical policy and governance is to sustaining multi-sectoral nutrition coordination, nutrition programs and outcomes, we supported nutrition governance-related work through 10 country programs at both national and sub-national levels. Our country-based work applied a range of approaches to enhance government commitment to nutrition based on country priorities. We collaborated with governments by providing technical assistance, supporting capacity strengthening, and acting as a convener and facilitator to—

- improve multi-sectoral nutrition policy development and adoption
- support multi-sectoral nutrition planning, budgeting, and financing
- institutionalize and define roles and responsibilities among a broad range of nutrition stakeholders to ensure transparent and consistent coordination and collaboration
- improve data use for accountability and decision-making.

We also developed a number of resources for global use/adaptation including a [Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Governance Resource Bank](#) and [guidance](#) for Scaling Up Nutrition Donor Network members for applying the nutrition policy marker. A key lesson from our work underscores the importance of having **clear commitment to nutrition financing** and to **leverage the use of existing governance platforms** to develop multi-sectoral nutrition financing, monitoring and accountability plans, policies, and procedures.

Social and Behavior Change



Social and behavior change (SBC) is a central element in USAID's nutrition-related strategies and, to that end, we designed USAID Advancing Nutrition with social and behavior change at its center. We recognize that sustainable change is possible only if key evidence-based practices are not only identified and shared with the full range of system stakeholders but are supported for uptake and use through contextually-appropriate actions. We developed an internal roadmap with USAID that guided our work over the five years with a focus on three areas: 1) quality implementation of systematic processes to design, deliver, and measure nutrition-related behaviors and [social norm change](#); 2) monitoring and [evaluation](#) for SBC decision-making; and 3) sustainability and scale-up of nutrition SBC. A seminal output from our work was a [suite of high-quality SBC tools](#) to design, deliver, and measure nutrition-related behaviors and social norm change. However, an area where we made significant advancements, is defining and testing SBC approaches in fragile and humanitarian contexts. Our work has informed improved guidance for [complementary feeding practices](#) in emergency settings and helped implementing partners of BHA-funded resilience and emergency programs to better plan, implement and learn from integrating nurturing care within infant and young child feeding programming with practical guidance on how to layer and sequence activities by the [ages and stages](#) of children under two years of age. From our work with Breakthrough ACTION and a wide range of other key nutrition stakeholders, we learned that **co-creating solutions with human-centered or behavioral design approaches may support new insights and opportunities to resolve persistent challenges** like low participation in services or adherence to standard protocols by health workers.

Localization



Throughout the five years, we used a facilitative approach that drew on local experts, organizations, and institutions to sustain results. At the same time, COVID-19 pandemic-related travel limitations increased opportunities for localization given the need to work remotely alongside in-country teams. Through [multi-year partnerships](#), supported, in part, through USAID’s New Partnership Initiative, we applied a range of approaches to strengthen the technical, operational, and functional capacities of local organizations and networks to improve nutrition outcomes. Several of our outputs

point to our experience in strengthening capacity of local partners to deliver and sustain high-quality multi-sectoral nutrition services and programs, such as [Strengthening the Capacity of Local Organizations Working in Nutrition: Learning, Implications for Localization, and Recommendations](#). A key learning from our capacity strengthening work was that **while training is useful, mentoring and supportive supervision contribute substantially to building competencies and sustaining change.**

Nutrition in Humanitarian Contexts



BHA supports both emergency and non-emergency programs. USAID Advancing Nutrition developed resources, guides, and tools to support quality nutrition program implementation. For example, we supported BHA to better understand challenges to and improve programming of resource transfers for protecting nutrition in emergency contexts. In non-emergency contexts, we tested program design and implementation tools and guidance and provided on-demand technical assistance to Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) partners. An example of

our technical assistance included, testing and evaluating the sustainability and suitability of strategies that promote [local foods](#) to replace U.S. government-provided resource assistance to address undernutrition in fragile settings. We contributed to better understanding the potential for using nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions [in emergencies](#) and to [advance social and behavior change](#) sustainability and evaluation in fragile contexts. In the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), we supported acute malnutrition treatment and prevention programming by helping improve collaboration and accountability among a full range of government, nongovernmental, and multilateral stakeholders. A key finding from across our portfolio of work in humanitarian contexts was that **investing in protecting complementary feeding in emergencies could help mitigate and reduce child wasting.**

Anemia and Micronutrient Malnutrition



We had the opportunity to collaborate with USAID and a range of global experts to address key gaps in both evidence and practice related to addressing micronutrient malnutrition and, in particular, iron-deficiency anemia across both health and food systems. In addition to developing and testing guidance for improving large-scale food fortification at the national level, we facilitated the development of guidance for conducting [context-specific assessments](#) of the causes of anemia to inform selection and design of appropriate interventions, and, in collaboration with research partners

tested the validity and accuracy of [hemoglobin measurement](#) based on blood specimen type and HemoCue models. A key advancement came from our work with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition to [revise the estimate](#) of the global impact of micronutrient malnutrition and develop a transparent methodology to update the estimate in the future. We now understand that 1.4 million women of reproductive age and preschool aged children experience deficiency of at least one micronutrient. Learning from our micronutrient malnutrition work points to the **importance of maintaining a multi-sectoral lens** to micronutrient malnutrition prevention and treatment as collaboration with research, implementation, surveillance, and standards stakeholders—across sectors—has helped to refine or improve plans at country level and inform global research gaps.

Collaborating, Convening, and Sharing



USAID Advancing Nutrition strove to facilitate learning and sharing while also developing the evidence base across a range of topics. Knowledge management and communications were key to this effort. We learned the importance of bringing key stakeholders together to not only share but also debate and learn from each other to strengthen evidence; inform better practice; and advocate for changes in policies, programs, and strategies. Convenings were organized and facilitated for USAID, such as through [ongoing support](#) to the Global Nutrition Coordination Plan as well as the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Global Learning and Evidence Exchanges held in Year 2. We

also planned and hosted a number of convenings with external experts/stakeholders to inform new priorities for USAID such as the consultation on improving food systems for complementary feeding held in December 2023. We used a collaborative approach to our implementation research to, for example, understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition programming globally. We also relied on and facilitated USAID's use of expert consultations and cross-government collaborations to review, share and improve program evidence, design, implementation, and measurement. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the methods, tools, and platforms for promoting collaboration. Our learning from facilitating gatherings and discussions in virtual, hybrid, and in-person environments points to the **continued importance of opportunities for one-on-one interactions to build trust and understanding** among and across stakeholder groups.

Key Results and Outputs

Our activity results framework supported the advancements described above and included three Intermediate Results (IR):

1. Equitable provision and utilization of proven, quality nutrition interventions and services at scale
2. Country commitment and capacity for multi-sectoral nutrition programming strengthened
3. Global learning, evidence, and innovative practices generated and applied to nutrition programs.

We summarize key achievements, results, and additional lessons learned over the life of this project by these three IRs below to provide a more comprehensive picture of the many useful outputs and achievements from the past five years of programming. We also encourage you to read the full report and visit our website for a more complete view of our work.

Equitable provision and utilization of proven, quality nutrition interventions and services at scale

Our efforts under IR 1 focused on developing, testing, and applying tools, guidance, and better practice in a range of technical areas to develop or improve the quality of services and interventions for nutrition. Our global and country work came together to increase or improve the utilization of evidence-based interventions and services at scale. We incorporated our cross-cutting technical competencies—social and behavior change; capacity strengthening; monitoring, evaluation, and learning; and knowledge management—into the development and testing of the guidance and tools we completed. This multi-sectoral, matrixed approach helped us distill lessons. For example, the more than 50 reports, briefs, and resources developed across our global and country programs to support women, infant, and young children's diets, demonstrated that addressing social norms around and building social support for women's diets can help increase consumer demand for healthy foods. Our [Generating Demand for Healthy Diets: Social Marketing Guide](#), incorporates critical learnings into a tested tool that enables teams to make informed marketing decisions, create strong marketing campaigns, and diagnose and solve challenges to improve access to and demand.

We also made strides to promote the integration of responsive care and early learning—two components of the Nurturing Care Framework—into nutrition services to promote optimal growth and development outcomes for children. For example, we developed [10 videos](#) to train health workers on how to recognize children’s cues and counsel caregivers on providing responsive care to their children. As a part of this work, we elevated an urgent need for the nutrition community to provide better support and inclusive services for children with feeding difficulties and disabilities through a virtual convening in collaboration with UNICEF. We also finalized a brief produced with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, [Nurturing Young Children through Responsive Feeding](#), which explains responsive feeding and how to create the enabling environments caregivers need to responsively feed their young children.

Given the range of priorities across USAID operating units, we developed strategies to address program quality and implementation gaps among implementing partners, government service providers, and private sector actors within and across food and health systems. We focused on household and child care and feeding practices with an emphasis on high-quality social and behavior change and gender across all systems and sectors. Our results reflect our commitment to a facilitative approach that drew on local experts, organizations, and institutions to sustain results.

Figure I. Organizations Supported



Country commitment and capacity for multi-sectoral nutrition programming strengthened

Under IR 2, we strengthened capacities among a range of stakeholders; improved nutrition governance, including increasing government commitments to nutrition financing; and built evidence to improve program approaches, better understand program contexts, and improve measurement. These efforts provided a strong foundation for our most sustainable results. Localization underpinned our approach to all this work and we carried out capacity strengthening of both individuals and organizations with an eye to sustaining—and improving—skills, competencies, and outcomes. We employed a comprehensive set of strategies and approaches ranging from mentoring to workshops and training to peer-to-peer learning for strengthening capacities. Some example trainings included anemia prevention and control (in Ghana), nutrition-sensitive agriculture (in India), nutrition advocacy (in Kenya), and orienting health workers to key practices for responsive care and early learning (in Mozambique, Ghana, and the Kyrgyz Republic). As a part of our capacity strengthening efforts, we trained a total of 51,687 people in various health and nutrition topics, developed tools to strengthen nutrition content in pre-service curricula of health

service providers, and provided training on nutrition-sensitive agriculture program design for implementing partners and nutrition programming and funding for USAID staff.

Locally-led nutrition programming was at the heart of our technical approach, and we applied facilitative approaches to strengthen the capacity of governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Over the life of the project, we supported a total of 775 organizations across 29 low- and middle-income countries (box 1).

Ten country programs supported nutrition governance, each applying different approaches to influence and implement government policies, strategies, and investments toward nutrition. We supported the efforts to strengthen seven national nutrition plans. We also applied funds from GH to support global better practices for nutrition governance, producing policy briefs demonstrating the value of multi-sectoral nutrition investments in three counties in Kenya; a [Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Governance Resource Bank](#); and a brief entitled, [Transitioning Nutrition Financing from USAID to Domestic Resources](#). We found that—

- Supporting nutrition policy development and adoption requires collaborating closely with multi-sectoral government counterparts, tailoring to local contexts, and using data and evidence.
- Planning, budgeting, and financing are vital to translating nutrition policy into action, requiring strong political commitment from multiple sectors and relevant data, policies, guidelines, and capacity strengthening.
- Actors across sectors need to coordinate and collaborate to implement nutrition actions, which projects can support by building on existing government bodies, facilitating productive meetings, reviewing progress, and planning next steps.

We built our learning around case studies, literature reviews, quantitative studies with population-based surveys, qualitative studies, and implementation research, which often employed mixed methods and resulted in the production of at least 45 manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals. We also mentored local partners in conducting research and trained staff and partners in writing manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Significant themes in our research and measurement work included improving the measurement of healthy diets, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, micronutrient status, integration of responsive care and early learning into nutrition services, health worker capacity, and the burden of micronutrient deficiencies in global and local contexts.

Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) has been at the core of everything we do, as evidenced in a number of key initiatives we explored over the past five years. USAID Advancing Nutrition brought together staff across teams, outside experts, USAID colleagues across operating units, and a wide range of stakeholders to pursue both evidence generation and facilitated learning. In addition to applying CLA to program learning and adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic, we used a CLA-led approach to inform the Women's Diets Learning Agenda which focuses on ensuring women and adolescent girls can consume healthy diets and access high-quality health services. Our work strengthening the capacity of local organizations developed learning and recommendations on localization efforts.

Box 1. Organizations Supported

Host country government agency: 491

Private sector firm: 73

Educational institution: 39

Professional association: 3

NGO/implementing partner: 121

Other (e.g., working groups, non-US donors, multilateral organizations, research institutes): 36

Global learning, evidence, and innovative practices generated and applied to nutrition programs

IR 3 was critical to ensuring our learning and results reached those who could use and adapt our findings to the range of contexts where USAID works. Over the life of the project, we developed and expanded USAID’s nutrition knowledge management platform, hosting technical resources and tools from a decade of USAID’s nutrition investments, and adding new resource collections to fill critical knowledge gaps on priority nutrition topics, including adolescent nutrition, feeding difficulties and disabilities, using local foods for optimal diets, and more. Our global reach leveraged multiple platforms, including social media, webinars, workshops, expert consultations (box 2), a bi-monthly [Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Resource Review](#) reaching over **19,931** subscribers. Over the life of the project, we hosted over **915** evidence-sharing events hosted with over **35,000** participants.

Box 2. Events Held

86 seminars

64 webinars

580 workshops

51 expert consultations

134 other (e.g., field days, health fairs, technical assistance, work planning)

The USAID Advancing Nutrition website has had over **149,783** downloads and we have over **8,562** X (formerly Twitter) followers and **13,203** LinkedIn followers.

USAID Advancing Nutrition facilitated sharing of multi-sectoral nutrition experiences and learning across USAID and globally. In 2021, in collaboration with USAID Washington, we hosted two virtual MSN Global Learning and Evidence Exchanges that highlighted country-based successes and learning in nutrition, reviewed current evidence, and provided a forum for exchange for USAID colleagues from Missions and Washington, D.C. The first event from February 8–11, focused on Africa and Latin American and the Caribbean. Approximately 240 people across 33 countries attended our 36 plenary and concurrent technical and skill-building sessions. The second event from March 23–25 and March 29–31,

highlighted content and speakers tailored to practitioners in countries across Asia. It included 24 sessions attended by approximately 150 people representing 26 countries.

Country Achievements

USAID Advancing Nutrition implemented high-quality programming and technical assistance through an established presence in response to 12 USAID Mission buy-ins. We included select highlights from our country work below:

 **BURKINA FASO**

- Trained technical staff and supervisors from six sectors responsible for the implementation of the country's Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategic Plan (*Plan Stratégique Multisectoriel de Nutrition [PSMN]*) on results-based management
- Developed a digital dashboard embedded within the District Health Information System 2, containing 25 indicators used to monitor progress towards PSMN outcomes

 **KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

- Reached 211,651 individuals from 42,320 households in 515 villages through 4,859 trained community volunteers (activists) on 9 nutrition and hygiene-related modules aimed at improving nutrition knowledge, attitudes, and practices
- Trained 2,900 healthcare workers on nutrition, anemia, and RCEL, who in turn provided 131,000 counseling sessions to 19,900 pregnant women and 32,588 children under two

EAST AFRICA

- Established a regional learning network—Learning Network on Nutrition Surveillance—focused on nutrition surveillance that brings together key experts and stakeholders from Djibouti, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda
- By sharing best practices and experiences, network members broadened their repertoire of resources and strengthened their country-specific nutrition surveillance systems

 **MOZAMBIQUE**

- Supported the government to establish district multi-sectoral nutrition coordination committees in 19 districts
- Trained 60 high-level government officials in food and nutrition security policies and strategies
- Supported the training of 164 health providers, 132 staff from Transform Nutrition, 301 community health workers, 2,500 volunteers, and 28 journalists in RCEL.

 **GHANA**

- Facilitated the development of government planning guidelines for food and nutrition security and strengthened the capacity of nutrition stakeholders in 17 districts to apply the guidelines to their 2022–2025 medium-term development plans
- Supported health workers to conduct outreach and home visits, helping to reach 262,832 children under five and 136,227 pregnant women with essential nutrition services and RCEL

 **NIGER**

- Supported the government's transition from mass campaigns to vitamin A supplementation through routine health services, training 15 trainers, 505 health workers, and 3,899 community volunteers
- Supported the training of 104 heads of health centers and community stock managers in the Ministry of Health's drug logistics management system to help address supply chain challenges

 **HONDURAS**

- Mapped and assessed food system actors and trained and/or provided technical assistance to 4,691 food system actors from 11 municipalities on best practices in food production, administration, and handling
- Reached 24,979 households, 9,225 children aged 0–59 months, and 1,671 pregnant women through project activities in support of services delivered by health, education, local government, and food system stakeholders

 **NIGERIA**

- Bolstered the capacity of five State Committees on Food and Nutrition by co-creating capacity strengthening plans based on results from a baseline organizational capacity assessment
- Launched the Subnational Food Systems Dashboard, which enables state-level actors to access data on over 70 indicators for their state

 **INDIA**

- Reached 24,598 women self-help group members with content on horticulture, aquaculture, women's empowerment, and nutrition via 138 trained community cadre members
- Trained 51 school management committees involving teachers and parents on nutrition and women's empowerment for agriculture

 **TANZANIA**

- Supported the Prime Minister's Office institutionalize annual planning and budgeting meetings to ensure nutrition technical staff could review the plans and provide necessary inputs for smooth implementation
- Supported the Prime Minister's Office to develop the Resources Mobilization Strategy (RMS) and a methodology and tools to conduct annual RMS assessments

 **KENYA**

- Established functional government-led and funded county and subcounty MSN platforms in Kakamega, Kisumu, and Kitui Counties
- Trained and supported 186 sector-wide nutrition champions engaged in prioritizing, securing funding for, and holding county governments accountable for the quality and coverage of nutrition services

 **UGANDA**

- Conducted a market surveillance study to determine the availability of fortified food brands at the retail level and the presence and concentration of the required micronutrients in the four fortified food vehicles
- Developed training manuals for fortifying maize and wheat flour, and edible oils and fats and trained 36 trainers and 132 personnel from 26 industries

Challenges

Like all large and complex projects, USAID Advancing Nutrition met with a number of obstacles during implementation. We list a few of these challenges below:

- The U.S. government shutdown in the first quarter of operations delayed start-up.
- USAID's restructure inhibited the ability of each bureau supporting USAID Advancing Nutrition to consistently define/describe and share its priorities for nutrition programming.
- There were limitations on collaboration with multilateral organizations at the global level for the first two years of the project.
- Despite delays in country buy-ins and disparities in size and scope across country buy-ins, all had ambitious objectives.
- The COVID-19 pandemic eliminated travel and in-person gathering and required significant operational adaptation as the project grew exponentially.

Noting that all challenges also provide opportunities for innovation and improvement, we proactively adapted our approaches and applied lessons to respond to and mitigate these challenges. Some of these challenges resulted in outputs that others could use, such as our documentation of [COVID-19-related adaptations within USAID-funded nutrition investments](#). Another example of our response with positive results was our establishment of a dedicated Country Programs team to prioritize the quality of program plans and outputs. This created opportunities for sharing, and engendered strong relationships across country programs and global program staff, even with short-term country programs with demanding objectives.

Key Lessons and Recommendations

USAID's technical priorities for multi-sectoral nutrition programming influenced many of our lessons, while other points of learning arose from challenges associated with implementing multi-sectoral programming, providing technical assistance, testing tools and guidance, and completing implementation research, especially given COVID-19 pandemic related travel limitations. The full report includes a more comprehensive list; however, for the purposes of this summary, we list a few key learnings and recommendations, including a set of higher level or more general operational recommendations as well as a selection of our more technically focused recommendations.

Operational Recommendations

- **Prioritize localization from the outset.** Work in collaboration with local partners to conceptualize, design, and implement engagements. Determining the objectives and approach for country buy-ins, designing and implementing research and learning activities, and prioritizing capacity strengthening approaches collaboratively is critical to effective localization. This level of collaboration also takes a significant amount of time and, as a result, may be more costly.
- **Establish diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) principles** early on in project structures and ways of working. DEIA efforts should consider all aspects of work, including human resources, technical assistance and capacity strengthening approaches, knowledge management and communications, and research engagements.
- **Pilot tools and/or guidance materials** with the intended users where possible to help strengthen materials and increase the likelihood they are used for their intended purpose. Offer specific examples of applications that can address common questions.

- Provide consistent resourcing and adapting for **CLA implementation** throughout the life of the project. Fostering a learning culture, developing flexible CLA plans and processes, and providing on-demand technical assistance and coaching on CLA can help ensure success.
- **Build partnerships with and engage a range of stakeholders**, from academics to community-based organizations, to define and target communications outputs to maximize their quality, use, and adaptation.
- **When and where possible, build on existing evidence**, experience, guidance, and tools to avoid replicating effort. At the same time, look beyond the usual experts to engage local thought leaders and elevate the local knowledge, communities, and private sector actors that are critical to understanding and solving challenges within and across food and health systems.
- **Promote the uptake, use, and adaptation of research, evidence-based approaches, tools, and/or better practices** requires targeted dissemination strategies; interactive platforms that encourage direct engagement can expedite this process.
- **Work spanning multiple operating units requires tailored approaches for different stakeholders** given differing priorities and needs. Facilitating dialogue and ensuring cohesion across operating units could help unify messaging and streamline systems.
- Socialize opportunities offered by global projects with Missions as early as possible to stimulate interest and buy-in early in the project cycle. Achieving sustainable outcomes or change for nutrition is extremely difficult with very short-term country activities or scopes of work.

Technical Recommendations

Improving Nutrition Practices, SBC, and Responsive Care and Early Learning

- Improve definitions and measures of quality counseling to help improve the effectiveness of this critical service.
- Support a systematic approach for revising pre-service training, as this will have a significant impact on health worker performance.
- Use responsive feeding approaches to allow for iteratively tracking and evaluating changes in priority nutrition behaviors and factors.
- Engage men to improve maternal, infant, and young child nutrition needs thoughtfully, and document efforts to share and encourage best practices.
- Expand the use of behavioral science to scale quality implementation and innovations.
- Continue to develop resources and build the evidence base to integrate responsive care and early learning into nutrition programming to improve early childhood development.
- Continue to use and adapt our tools to improve the effectiveness of growth monitoring and promotion programs.

Improving Nutrition in Humanitarian Contexts

- There are notable constraints associated with programming unconditional transfers to protect nutrition of vulnerable populations in emergencies (e.g., in the duration, amounts, targeting, and scope [size] of unconditional transfers). USAID BHA and other stakeholders working in humanitarian contexts need to improve ways to program resources to protect nutrition in emergencies.

- Address supply chain challenges in providing ready-to-use therapeutic foods and supplements to reach more children, especially with last-mile deliveries.
- Build sustainability and feasibility considerations for social and behavior change into RFSA requests for applications.
- Help partners better assess the feasibility of local food-based approaches to improve dietary diversity by promoting tools/guidance developed by USAID Advancing Nutrition.
- Continue to test, adapt, and document experience in using USAID Advancing Nutrition’s decision tool for complementary feeding in emergencies.

Improving Food Systems for Nutrition

- Continue to test and adapt approaches to measuring consumer demand for nutritious foods and shaping.
- Continue to apply and adapt USAID Advancing Nutrition’s guidance for assessing where interventions may be most effective for strengthening the food environment to make nutritious foods more accessible.
- Share findings from our work on the impacts of climate change on nutrition programming with a range of multi-sectoral stakeholders within USAID to inform further discussion about ensuring the consideration of nutrition in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts and develop a learning agenda that helps to map interactive pathways within the climate and nutrition nexus.
- Use the food systems conceptual framework as a starting place to orient agriculture, food security and other sectors to the need to focus on diets as the critical outcome to improve nutrition, and to help actors identify food systems-related actions for nutrition.



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