

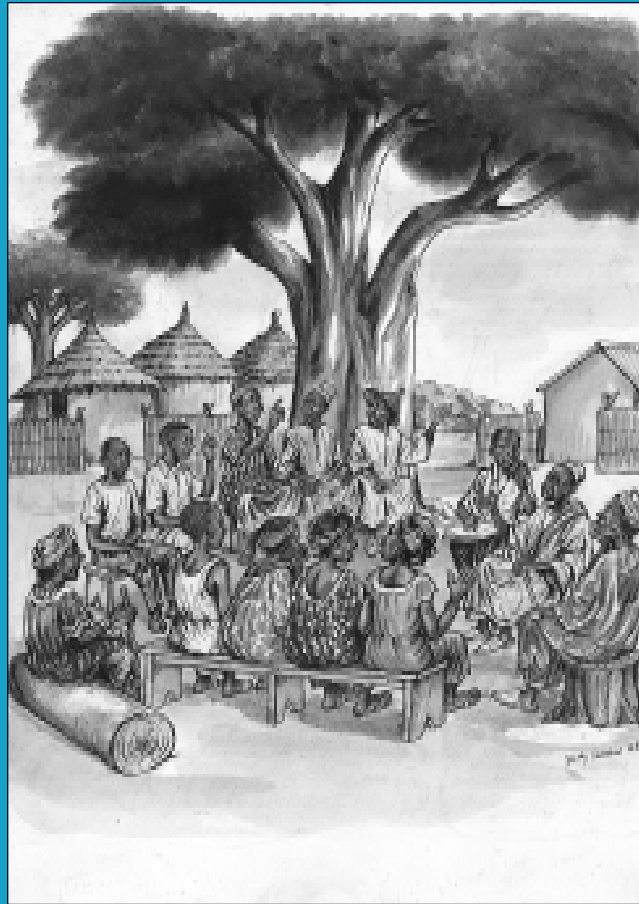
BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING

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A PRODUCT OF THE REGIONAL INITIATIVE TO REINFORCE CAPACITIES IN COMMUNITY NUTRITION



SANA
Sustainable Approaches
to Nutrition in Africa

USAID
Africa Bureau
Office for Sustainable
Development

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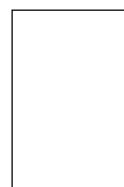
BASICS

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A Product of the Regional Initiative to Reinforce Capacities in Community Nutrition



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ACRONYMS

ACC/SCN	Administrative Committee on Coordination Sub-committee on Nutrition
AGETIP	Agence d'Execution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public (Agency for the Execution of Public Works)
BASICS	Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival
COGES	Comité des gestion de la boîte à pharmacie villageoise (Village pharmacy box management committee)
CPC	Contrôle de Promotion de la Croissance (Growth promotion control)
CNP	Community Nutrition Project
HFR	Hommes et femmes responsables (Men and women in-charge)
IEC	Information, education and communication
ICN	International Conference on Nutrition
IUNS	International Union of Nutritional Sciences
KPC	Knowledge, practice and coverage
MIS	Management information system
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ORANA	Organisation pour la recherche alimentaire et la nutrition en Afrique (Organisation for Food and Nutrition research in Africa)
ORS/ORT	Oral rehydration solution/oral rehydration therapy
PNSAF/E	Projet Nutrition Sécurité Alimentaire Familiale/Environnement
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
RKPC	Rapid knowledge, practice and coverage
SANAS	Service de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition appliquée au Sénégal
SARA/SANA	Support for Analysis and Research in Africa/Sustainable Approaches for Nutrition in Africa
SCN	Sub-committee on Nutrition
SECALINE	Projet Sécurité alimentaire et Nutrition élargie
SIAC	Système d'Information à Assise Communautaire (Community-based Information System)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Africa, malnutrition continues to kill millions of children, act as a catalyst to various childhood diseases, exacerbate rates of illiteracy and unemployment and impede overall socio-economic progress. Faced with alarming statistics of continuously high rates of malnutrition, their magnitude and multiple consequences, African countries have become increasingly committed to improving the social well-being of their citizens.

One approach to addressing malnutrition has been to establish Community Nutrition Programs (CNPs) that provide interventions ranging from deworming to growth monitoring and health education to home visits by health promoters. Although specific interventions have varied, these CNPs have had similar objectives, namely, to implement effective, sustainable approaches to combatting malnutrition. These programs have also experienced similar stumbling blocks, the most common of which include inappropriate planning and ineffective management of program interventions caused by overly-centralized administrative and financial management; poor targeting of program beneficiaries; lack of commitment from political entities; and failure to garner adequate financial resources for nutrition activities.

Various programs, however, have found ways to overcome these constraints and can provide invaluable lessons and enriching learning experiences. The unique feature of this document is that from beginning to end, it presents **lessons learned** from these diverse African experiences: basic elements, effective strategies, and necessary steps to sustainable community nutrition programming.

The highlights of these lessons are as follows:

Successful interventions are conceived of and implemented in a decentralized manner, centering around the community and encouraging **community participation** in every step of planning and implementation and at all levels of decision-making.

- ◆ **Program beneficiaries must be properly targeted** to ensure that those at highest risk benefit from the program's inputs and resources, as well as to maximize the program's efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- ◆ When governments understand the necessity and positive outcomes of community nutrition programs and are involved in all phases of planning and implementation, they are more likely to be **genuinely committed**, provide moral and financial support, and become key advocates.
- ◆ Programs with built-in **monitoring and evaluation** components provide essential information on program progress and impact. This information should be regularly reviewed by managers and supervisors, and used to address and rectify programmatic issues.

Carefully **linking interventions** with other development sectors such as agriculture and microcredit creates synergies that can enhance interventions and lead to positive outcomes. The most successfully integrated activities are achieved logically and feasibly combined using existing political and organizational structures.

This document also outlines a practical, five-step approach to establishing community nutrition programs using these experiences. These five steps, presented in Section III of the document are:

1. Identifying key partners involved in planning and implementation of a CNP;
2. Understanding the nutrition situation at hand;
3. Selecting the most appropriate program approach;
4. Developing the institutional framework for implementation; and
5. Designing an appropriate program action plan.

This document provides guidance for improving the effectiveness of community nutrition programs in Africa by illustrating pertinent country examples that re-enforce effective approaches to community nutrition programming. In doing so, it suggests ways that different governmental and non-governmental actors can collaborate effectively; emphasizes the importance of nutrition as an integral part of development; and serves as a useful reference tool.

Whether it is the successful linking of credit with education in Ghana, the way in which village animators take the initiative to request financial assistance for a CNP in Burkina Faso, or the steps a Niger-based CNP takes to ensure proper targeting, there are valuable lessons to learn for everyone involved in achieving successful, sustainable community nutrition programming in Africa; in particular planners and managers, central- and district-level nutritionists, and funding agencies.

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COMMUNITY NUTRITION: AN OVERVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

There could be no better time for addressing the malnutrition problems in the region. There is growing recognition of the impact and multiple benefits of improved nutrition on human well-being and sustained socioeconomic development. Simple, appropriate, cost-effective, and feasible strategies for reducing malnutrition are now available.

The World Summit for Children and the International Congress on Nutrition (ICN) presented an opportunity for governments to make public commitments to reduce malnutrition in its various forms. Governments are meeting this challenge through the formation of dedicated structures and programs to address poverty and sustainable livelihoods in the context of sound macroeconomic policies.

Actions to improve the overall nutritional status of the poor in developing countries have evolved strategically over the past decades. The early nutrition intervention programs that addressed the food-related causes of malnutrition and the rehabilitation of malnourished children have given way to more holistic approaches that integrate nutrition intervention with primary health care and community development. Multisectoral intervention strategies have been introduced that take into consideration the linkages among agriculture, education, economic status, environmental health, sanitation, and nutrition.

In an effort to improve on the impact of nutrition programs, more emphasis has been placed on the community's role in the planning and implementation stages and in the mobilization of indigenous resources to achieve the desired objectives. Thus, the employment of community-based strategies in nutrition interventions is a growing trend that has been facilitated by

popularizing the UNICEF conceptual framework and the «triple A» cycle. See Figure 3, page 24.

In spite of the growing awareness of the opportunities and potential offered by community nutrition programs (CNPs) for improving nutrition and contributing to community development and self reliance, implementating such programs has met with mixed success because of the inadequacy of planning and implementation approaches and processes. The more successful programs appear to be conceived as local initiatives or pilot projects conducted within a limited geographic area or among a small population. Due to a lack of adequate follow-up and evaluation, resources, and political commitment, these small-scale projects have limited potential for replication and expansion.

Many fruitful attempts have been made to identify the features of successful community nutrition programs. This document is an attempt to bring many of these ideas together for program managers and planners of community nutrition, health, and other development interventions, so they can plan and implement programs that are appropriate, relevant, effective, and sustainable.

The document is presented in a manner that “touches the conscience” of the reader. It uses actual experiences to present best practices and lessons learned, proposes approaches and tools to be used in support of certain key steps and uses illustrations to portray certain situations. Although the document uses examples mainly from West Africa, it can be applied to programs throughout the continent.

Much effort has been made to improve the nutrition situation in Africa, yet malnutrition in all its

2. THE NUTRITION SITUATION IN AFRICA

manifestations continues to affect large proportions of the population of the continent.

Over the past 15 years, no progress appears to have been made in reducing the prevalence of child malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, there is some indication that the nutrition situation has worsened largely because of population growth (ACC/SCN, 1997) and economic decline. African countries have among the highest infant and young child death rates in the developing world, much of which is due to malnutrition (Murray et al., 1996). Of the top 20 countries with the highest under-five mortality rates in the world, 18 are from sub-Saharan Africa.

A third of the world's maternal deaths occurs in sub-Saharan Africa (Graham, 1989) where an alarming number of babies are born low birth weight, 40% of children are stunted and one out of ten children suffer from acute malnutrition (ACC/SCN, 1997). A high proportion of low birth weight infants is substantially attributable to maternal nutrition prior to and during pregnancy and intra-

uterine growth retardation - the predominant cause of low birth weight in developing countries is an important cause of stunting (ACC/SCN, 1997).

Micronutrient deficiencies are widespread in Africa. An estimated 42% of African women as a whole, half of pregnant women, and a third of children under age five are anemic (ACC/SCN, 1997). Nearly a quarter of the African population is at risk of iodine deficiency disease (ACC/SCN, 1997), and over one million children between the ages of 0 and 4 are affected by vitamin A deficiency (Murray et al., 1996).

Causes & consequences of malnutrition

Malnutrition is caused by a combination of individual, household, community, national, and international factors, ranging from disease, cultural beliefs and customs, and high fertility rates, to poor economic status and limited access to health, and other social services. The consequences of malnutrition make its prevention a highly pertinent

TABLE 1
INDICATORS OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION STATUS IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Country	Maternal deaths/100,000 births	Under-five mortality/1000 live births	Low birth weight as % of all births	Prevalence of wasting in under 5-year-olds	Prevalence of stunting in under 5-year-olds
Benin	500	167	-	14	25
Burkina Faso	930 ^a	169	21	13	29
Côte d'Ivoire	600	150	12	8	24
Guinea	670	201	13	12	29
Mali	580	239	16	23	30
Mauritania	550	183	11	7	44
Niger	590	320	15	15	40
Senegal	560	124	4	7	23
Togo	640 ^a	125	20	-	34
Ethiopia	1400 ^a	175	16	8	64
Ghana	210	107	8	11	26
Tanzania	530	143	14	6	42

Source: ^a= UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1998 ; UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1999.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING
Background Information

TABLE 2
SOME EFFECTS OF MALNUTRITION ON HEALTH AND ECONOMIC STATUS

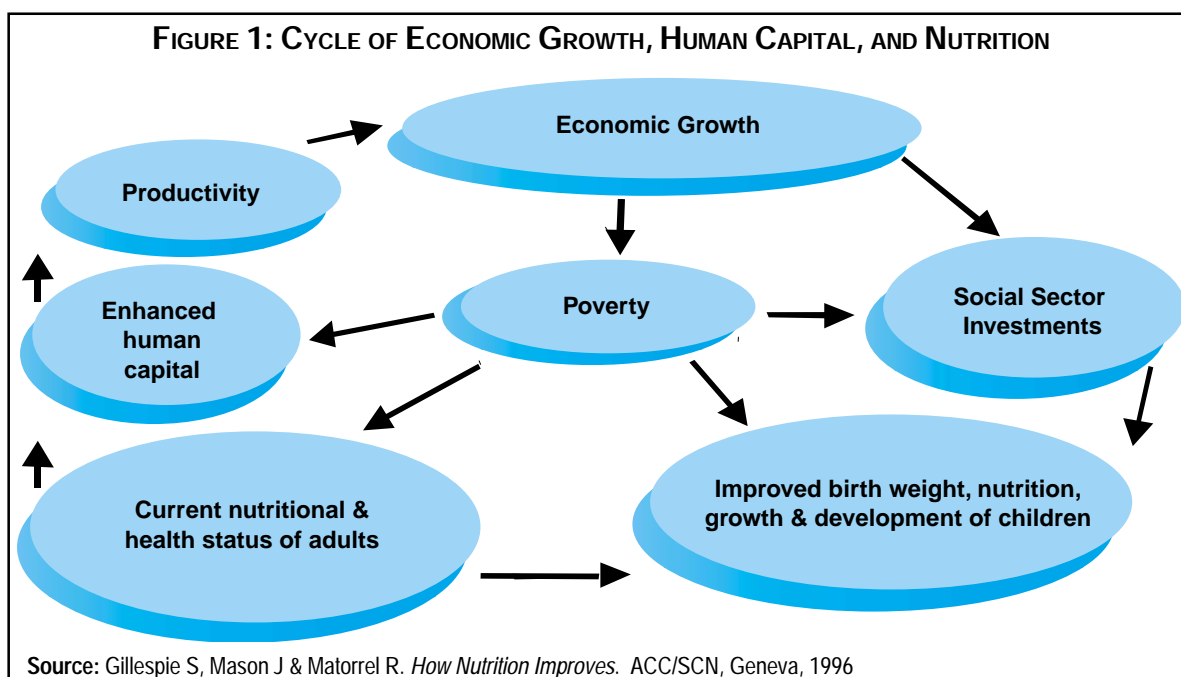
In infants and young children	In adults and women of childbearing age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Diminishes the ability to fight infection ◆ Impairs the immune system and increases the risk of some infections ◆ Impairs growth ◆ Increases the chance of infant and young child mortality ◆ Heightens fatigue and apathy ◆ Hinders cognitive and mental development ◆ Reduces learning capacity. <p><i>Source: Adapted from: Baker J, Martin L, Piwoz E. A Time to Act: Women's Nutrition and its Consequences for Child Survival and Reproductive Health in Africa. SARA. December 1996.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Increases the risk of complications during pregnancy ◆ Increases the risk of spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, impaired fetal brain development, and infant deaths ◆ Increases the risk of death from spontaneous abortion, stress of labor, and other delivery complications ◆ Increases the chance of producing a low birth weight baby ◆ Reduces work productivity ◆ Increases the risk for some kinds of infections, including HIV and reproductive tract infections ◆ Results in additional sick days and lost productivity.

priority. Table 2 (above) summarizes some of the adverse effects of malnutrition on the health and economic status of women and young children in particular.

It is clear that significant efforts will have to be made to prevent malnutrition and a further deterioration in the nutrition situation. Significant improvements in nutritional status and well-being in the long term can only be achieved through

sustainable and equitable economic growth and social development, particularly through education. See Figure 1 below.

However, there is a major role for community nutrition programs as a direct means of improving nutrition in the short term, and as a means of focusing attention on nutrition concerns and policies.



3. BACKGROUND ON INITIATIVE TO REINFORCE CAPACITIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Since the 1980s, a series of efforts have identified the crucial elements of successful community nutrition programs. These efforts have included:

- ◆ The 5th International Conference of the International Nutrition Planners Forum, Seoul, South Korea, in August 1989, which highlighted the **crucial elements of successful nutrition programs**;
- ◆ the 23rd session of the United Nations Sub-Committee on Nutrition (SCN) symposium, Accra, Ghana, in February 1996, which reviewed a series of **effective programs in Africa for improving nutrition**; and
- ◆ the 16th meeting of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS), Montreal, Canada, held in July 1997, where **success factors in community-based nutrition programs** were identified.

There is now agreement about what the factors are for successful community nutrition programs. However, most successes with community nutrition programs continue to be realized with small-scale interventions, and most efforts to “scale up” successful local programs or projects have failed.

The key challenges remain: What are the key factors for success of large-scale community nutrition programs? How do we apply the lessons learned from both small- and large-scale programs to ensure sustainability and replicability? How can successful local programs be scaled up effectively?

In 1997, three USAID projects, BASICS (Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival), SARA (Support for Research and Analysis in Africa) and SANA (Sustainable Approaches for Nutrition in

Africa), and The World Bank mission in Senegal, in collaboration with the Organization for Food and Nutrition Research in Africa (ORANA), established the “Regional Initiative for the Reinforcement of Capacities in Community Nutrition.” The aim of the initiative is to contribute to an improvement in the development and implementation of nutrition interventions in the francophone region of West Africa. Under the auspices of this initiative, a regional workshop to exchange experiences from community nutrition programs was convened in Dakar, March 23-27, 1998.

As a sequel to the workshop, a number of follow-up activities to strengthen the effectiveness, monitoring, and evaluation of community nutrition programs in the region are in the process of being realized. Two articles have been written to disseminate the lessons learned from the workshop and advocate for community nutrition programs as a tool to promote community development and nutrition improvement. One of the articles has been published in the 7th edition of “Dialogue sur la Santé de l’Enfant,” and another has been published in the December 1998 edition of *SCN News*, a twice-yearly publication of the Secretariat of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination Sub-Committee on Nutrition.

In addition, a number of documents are being prepared in the continued effort to build competence. One of these presents best practices and lessons learned from community nutrition programs/projects implemented mainly in sub-Saharan African countries. A table to facilitate self-evaluation of CNPs has also been developed and is in use.

4. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to improve the effectiveness of community nutrition programs by:

- ◆ reinforcing approaches and strategies that lead to effective, sustainable community nutrition programs;
- ◆ suggesting areas for potential collaboration and partnership between governmental and non-governmental partners and members of civil society in the implementation of community nutrition interventions; and
- ◆ advocating for nutrition as an integral component of the development agenda.

The document is written mainly for:

- ◆ planners and managers of health and nutrition interventions;
- ◆ nutritionists at the central or regional levels;
- ◆ program managers of community nutrition, health, and other development programs; and
- ◆ staff of donor organizations that provide technical and financial assistance.

The document is organized around six sections:

- **Section 1**
introduces the document with a statement on the current nutrition situation in Africa and describes the regional initiative to improve capacity in the implementation of community nutrition programs.

- **Section 2**
presents a brief overview of key thematic issues to be considered when planning and implementing a community nutrition intervention.
- **Section 3**
proposes the five stages for a step-by-step approach to the development of a community nutrition program, using as its building blocks indigenous knowledge and resources.
- **Section 4**
summarizes the three key enabling components for an effective and sustainable institutional and organizational framework around the management and implementation of program activities.
- **Section 5**
presents key factors in the success and sustainability of community nutrition programs based on lessons learned from the implementation of such programs in Africa.
- **Section 6**
lists useful reference materials and addresses.

5. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM?

A community nutrition program is a collection of activities aimed at solving the nutrition problems of a community with the full participation and co-operation of its members in a flexible, though systematic and well-researched manner. Community nutrition programs are implemented in both urban and rural settings.

The type of program described above is relatively rare. More common in many of the countries around the region are community-based projects/programs that, although they share some of the components of community nutrition programs, are

often conceptualized as projects to be implemented at the community level.

These projects view members of the community more as target beneficiaries than as active partners and key players in the decision-making process. A lack of community power over decision-making is matched by a lack of community involvement and, ultimately, a lack of impact (Gillespie, 1996). Such projects tend to rely heavily on external resources so they do not foster ownership or long-term sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING
Background Information

KEY FEATURES OF A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM

- ◆ Responds to the priority felt needs of the community
- ◆ Involves the community as a key player in the decision-making process and at all stages of the implementation process
- ◆ Integrates other sectors of development
- ◆ Is located close to the beneficiaries
- ◆ Uses communities local resources
- ◆ Affects the community as a whole
- ◆ Impacts directly and indirectly on nutritional status
- ◆ Reinforces the management and financial capacities of the community.

Source: Regional Initiative for the Re-enforcement of Competencies in Community Nutrition: "Workshop on Exchanges of Experiences", 23-27 March 1998, Dakar, Senegal.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING A COMMUNITY NUTRITION INTERVENTION

1. INTRODUCTION

In the planning and implementation of community programs, the following questions are often posed:

- ◆ How will the community be involved? Is it going to be involved at all stages of the implementation process?
- ◆ How well do the program approaches and strategies comply with national policies for sustainable community development?
- ◆ How well do the services to be provided fit with the plans and aspirations of the community for its own development?
- ◆ How well-equipped are the different stakeholders in terms of material and human resources, to ensure that the program is effective and sustainable?
- ◆ How effective, sustainable, and appropriate to the local context are the strategies and approaches to be used?

Often, community nutrition programs are planned as a package of nutritional services with attention given to “what is to be done,” “by whom,” and “when.” As such, a program can appear to be well-planned and fully implemented and yet have little or no impact on the nutritional status of the target population. The success of community nutrition programs relies on the incorporation of certain critical elements such, as political commitment, community mobilization

and participation, and human resource development from the programs’ inception (USAID, 1989), (SCN News, 1997). For a program to achieve nutritional improvement, sufficient consideration must be given to the methods and processes used in planning and implementation and their capacity to result in sustainable community development.

This section will discuss some of the basic principles to be considered when planning and implementing a community nutrition program by attempting to address the following issues:

- Why is there an emphasis on community participation at all stages of the implementation process?
- Should programs addressed be limited to health- and nutrition-related issues?
- Why is political commitment an indispensable element of successful nutrition programs and community development?
- Should community nutrition programs favor the involvement of men in the planning and implementation process, or should only women be considered as primary targets?
- Is there a standard model for improving nutrition at the community level?

2. SUPPORTING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION FOR NUTRITIONAL CHANGE

One may pose the question that, after years of implementing nutrition intervention programs,

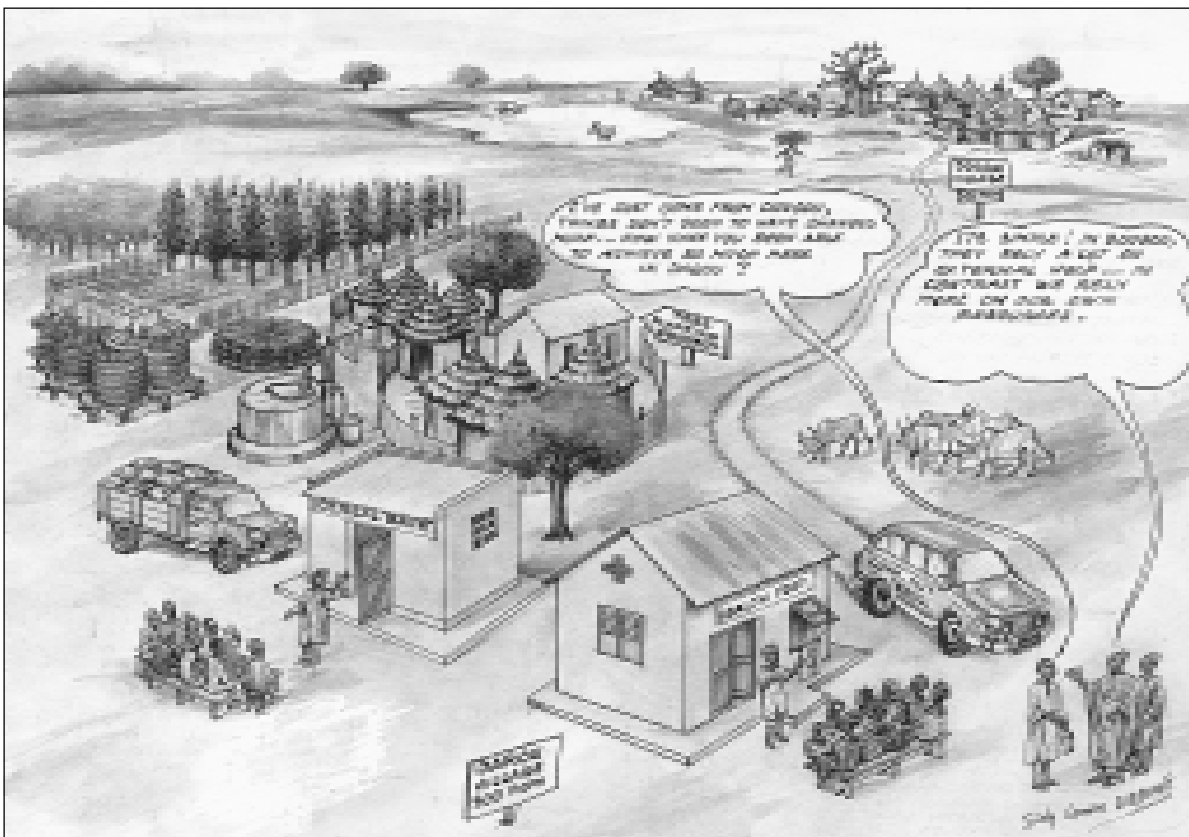
“Why is there an emphasis on community participation at all stages of the implementation process?”

“Nutrition programs can and do make a difference in many countries... if they emphasize processes of empowerment and ownership and are thus community-based in reality as well as in a name” Gillespie et al., 1996.

Community participation can lead to community empowerment and self-reliance, attributes that are crucial for sustained socioeconomic development in an era of dwindling economic support for

development in Africa, and growing constraints on public financing and provision of basic services at government levels. It also promotes program ownership and can ensure that programs comply with communities’ needs, aspirations, values, and norms. These factors are essential if program benefits are to persist after donor support and external assistance have been reduced or phased out.

Like many approaches, community participation does have its limitations. It can be difficult to enforce in areas with poor democratic traditions, such as a reluctance to share information and encourage participatory approaches to decision-making. It can be difficult to apply on a large scale and, when not done equitably, it can favor those already in positions of power and the elite in a community.



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING
Basic Principles for Planning a Community Nutrition Intervention

SOME BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- ◆ Improves the conceptualization process by making maximal use of local knowledge;
- ◆ Decreases dependence on external assistance and promotes self-help in tackling community problems through the strengthening of community structures and leadership;
- ◆ Ensures that the project is adapted to local socioeconomic and technological conditions; and
- ◆ Improves access to services for vulnerable groups.

In some cases, the opportunities presented by community participation are missed because partners outside the community are neither committed to the approach nor well-versed the mechanisms of the process. Although many community nutrition programs now include objectives related to community empowerment through capacity-building, success, and impact, they are more often equated with positive impact on malnutrition and behavioral change than with degree of community participation and transfer of skills at the community level.

A major challenge is how to ensure that at all implementation levels - national, regional, and sub-regional - the principles of community participation are adhered to. This will require

MECHANISMS FOR DIRECT COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- ◆ Orientation meetings to inform and motivate community leaders;
- ◆ community self-assessment of their needs for action;
- ◆ coordination of activities through existing community organizational structures;
- ◆ participation of community members in the implementation of program activities; and
- ◆ in-cash or in-kind contributions to support implementation of program activities.

Source: Adapté de USAID, 1990. "International Nutrition Planners Forum, Crucial elements of Successful Community Nutrition Programs." 15-18 August, 1989, Seoul, South Korea.

evaluation and consideration of (a) the interests and frustrations of various partners in the process of involving communities, and (b) their training, motivation, and equipment needs to develop a participatory culture. See Section IV, 1, page 48.

Community participation must be measurable so that its benefit can be assessed. Appendix 2 presents a matrix for assessing community participation at different levels of program planning, management, and implementation.

3. INTEGRATING NUTRITION WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Should programs addressed be limited to health- and nutrition-related issues?

The compartmental and vertical nature of early nutrition activities is considered to be a major factor in their limited success. Many determinants

of nutrition lie outside the health and nutrition domain, so health services are a necessary component of any strategy to improve nutritional status, but they are not sufficient by themselves.

There is ample evidence to show that malnutrition is caused by a combination of factors that can all be linked to poverty, such as inadequate feeding

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habits, poor access to health and education, low agricultural production, unsanitary environments, poor education, women's heavy workload, and low income (UNICEF, 1992). See Figure 4, page 25.

Improvements in nutritional status can only be achieved with interventions across different sectors. An integrated community-based approach, in which nutrition may be an entry point, has facilitated success in many community nutrition programs (USAID, 1989). Programs aimed at reducing women's workload, improving food security, and increasing income have been shown to have an impact on nutrition.

Coordination and integration are particularly important operationally. See Figure 2, page 21. Programs must allow sufficient time to establish working relationships with other sectors; find practical ways to integrate nutrition into other group agendas; and develop appropriate strategies, training, and support materials for community-level workers whose primary job might not be health-related.

Gambia

Box 1
**REDUCING WOMEN'S WORKLOAD:
 BETTER FAMILY DIETS**

In The Gambia, a study to determine the impact of hand-powered ram press technology for sesame oil extraction on the nutritional status of women and children showed that those women who used the ram press had better diets than their counterparts who pressed sesame using the regional diesel-powered expellers. This was due to increased oil consumption and the use of sesame cake in local dishes.

Women with access to a ram press could press sesame into oil in small quantities for home use whenever they need it and at a lower cost. Before, they had to travel distances to press sesame into oil, and the diesel-powered expellers could only handle large volumes of sesame.

Source: Silva-Barbeau et al., *Small-scale sesame oil production—A means to improved child nutrition security in the Gambia*. Semi-Annual Project Report (7/1/97-12/31/97). Thrasher Award. March 1998.

Ghana

Box 2

IMPROVING NUTRITIONAL STATUS: THE CREDIT WITH EDUCATION STRATEGY

In Ghana, Freedom from Hunger is using the Credit with Education strategy to improve the nutritional status and food security of women in poor rural areas. This strategy combines small-scale loans with education in the basics of health, nutrition, birth timing and spacing, and small-business skills.

Women invest their loans in income generating activities, then meet weekly to repay the principal and interest, and deposit savings. Learning sessions are also delivered during these meetings. The program has had a positive impact on the nutritional status of one year old children and on household food security. It has led to changes in infant feeding habits.

Source : Barbara MKNelly, Credit with Education Strategy for Improving Nutrition Security: Impact Evaluation Results from Ghana, Freedom from Hunger. Presented at the Mini-symposium on Sustainable Nutrition Security for Sub-Saharan Women Subsistence Farmers. 22nd International Conference of Agricultural Economists, Sacramento, California, 11-14 August 1997.