



PHOTO & CAPTION

Helping Children Grow Up Strong



Photo: USAID/Babacar Niang

Malnutrition is a serious issue in Senegal: it causes stunted growth among 22 percent of children under five. An additional 20 percent of children are underweight. USAID is addressing this through a community-based nutrition and growth monitoring pilot project.

Traditionally, growth monitoring involves tracking growth rates of infants and children under three years old each month. If a child's growth rate falls below a certain benchmark, nutritionists advise mothers on improved feeding. Research has shown that children who fail to achieve normal growth by age two

never achieve it later in life — there isn't much time to catch the problem. Mothers do not always follow standard feeding advice, often finding it overwhelming.

USAID's pilot project focused on children under two and used weight gain, rather than growth rate, as its main measurement. It also actively engaged mothers and entire communities in nutrition education. Health experts worked with mothers to find realistic local nutrition solutions. If the child's growth did not recover, workers helped the mother find other options.

After just 12 months, the results in the targeted community were impressive: more than 90 percent of mothers regularly brought their children for weighing, and malnutrition decreased by 37 percent among children younger than two. One mother said she noticed visible improvements: "Many babies were very thin when they were enrolled, and now they are big."

The pilot project is expanding to other districts. Senegal's government was impressed with its overwhelming success, and is introducing the core approach on a national scale.

In the village of Affé in northern Senegal, community health worker Ndeye Sock, right, discusses feeding habits with a mother, Atta Diaw Niang, as the two consider options to increase her child's weight and prevent stunting his growth.