



# IMPROVING NUTRITION

## BACKGROUND

Countries of East Africa (EA) show some of the world's highest rates of maternal and child undernutrition. Malnutrition is the underlying cause of over 50 percent of child deaths in the region.

Stunting, a result of chronic nutritional deficiency, is a problem of larger proportion than other forms of under nutrition and a particular public health concern in the region owing to its high prevalence. It poses significant risk to the normal intellectual development of children and compromises the economic productivity of adults. Nine out of 32 countries that contribute to the global burden of stunting are located in countries supported by USAID/EA.

**Reduction of Stunting:** 2010, the East, Central, and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC) Health Ministers' Conference passed a resolution urging member states to implement interventions to reduce stunting. USAID/EA is supporting an assessment of the strategies used to address stunting in the region. The findings will be used to identify promising innovations and context-specific interventions that can be taken to scale.

**Food Fortification Standards:** From 2007, USAID/EA has supported the development of regional food fortification guidelines and standards for fortified foods. In FY 2011, ECSA will present the regional standards to the East African Community (EAC) legislative body for adoption. If adopted, these regional standards will reduce non-tariff barriers to trade and improve regional trade in fortified foods.

USAID/EA is also supporting advocacy and knowledge-sharing to encourage the food industry, governments and other stakeholders to adopt mandatory fortification of staple foods in order to reduce micronutrient malnutrition. For instance, the Mission facilitated a study tour to Nigeria by Mumias Sugar Company; the visit contributed to making Kenya the first country in the East Africa region to produce sugar fortified with Vitamin A. In FY 2011 the Mission also supported ECSA-HC to convene a regional consultative meeting to share experiences and advocate for legislation for mandatory food fortification in the region.

**Improving and Ensuring Laboratory Proficiency:** To strengthen national laboratories' ability to monitor food fortification, and enforce standards, USAID/EA supported the establishment of the ECSA Laboratory Proficiency Testing (LPT) Scheme in five countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia). Since 2007, five rounds of LPT have been conducted to assess and improve lab testing competencies. After each round all labs involved share and review results to agree on remedial actions to improve performance. The number of participating labs has increased from 11 to 20 in the five countries.

**Essential Nutrition Actions:** The Essential Nutrition Actions (ENA) framework is an integrated and preventative package of seven nutrition actions covering infant and young child feeding, micronutrients, and women's nutrition. USAID/EA has supported countries to build the capacity of service providers to roll out ENA, implement quality improvement initiatives, and share experiences on best practices, challenges, impact and implications for scale up.

**Aflatoxin control:** Aflatoxin exposure is particularly high in Eastern Africa, where the diet consists mainly of a single staple food that is vulnerable to fungal infection, either in the field or after harvesting. Consumption of Aflatoxin contaminated food is associated with stunting, impairment of cognitive development and reduced response to vaccinations. In collaboration with the regional Feed the Future Initiative, USAID/EA together with EAC and ECSA are taking a lead in highlighting aflatoxin prevention and control strategies to improve food safety and food security in the region.