

Adapting to a Changing World

Rosalie Colfs, Handicap International

Optimal nutrition is fundamental to achieving USAID's broader mission to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people emerge from humanitarian crises and progress beyond assistance. For over 50 years, USAID has pioneered efforts to combat the devastating effects of malnutrition, continually learning and adapting its response to ever-evolving nutrition needs and understanding.

As USAID prepares for the future, the Agency will apply new evidence to better address malnutrition and adapt to shifting needs and priorities. Scaling up the coverage of evidence-based nutrition interventions is vital to continuing progress and sustaining existing gains. The confluence of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions will remain of fundamental importance as USAID adapts to ever-changing conditions worldwide.

The Global Food Security Act of 2016 solidified the U.S. Government's continued, bipartisan commitment to reducing hunger, malnutrition and poverty around the world. The ongoing implementation of the U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy 2017-2021 will maintain a focus on improving food systems and increasing the production and consumption of nutritious foods, leading to well-nourished populations.

Evolving and newly emerging nutrition issues will require innovative solutions. The rising, double burden of malnutrition, with both undernutrition and overweight and obesity prevalent in the same communities, requires increased coverage of actions to simultaneously address both forms of malnutrition. Increasing concentrations of hunger and undernutrition in countries affected by conflict need to be addressed. Continuing to expand nutrition's role in resilience will empower people to maintain their nutritional status while they cope with and recover from adversity.

The international nutrition community is also accumulating a growing body of evidence that undernutrition in adolescent girls and women prior to pregnancy leads to undernutrition during the first 1,000 days and harms the child's lifelong health and nutritional status. Greater focus is now given to interventions geared toward enabling women and girls to improve their nutrition prior to pregnancy. USAID is leading efforts to advance nutrition surveillance, including of women and adolescent girls, to enhance understanding of the most prevalent nutritional deficiencies and allow more effective interventions to be targeted to the appropriate groups of people.

Nature is playing a role, too: the negative effects of climate change on both water availability and nutrition worldwide are rapidly increasing. Studies show that some of the ways climate change is impacting nutrition include decreased food production and food security, lower birth weights, and lower body weight in women. Additionally, some crops show decreased protein, zinc and iron content due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide; it is likely that additional effects on nutrients have yet to be discovered.

New nutrition challenges are also surfacing where populations shift from rural to urban areas. Global urbanization, combined with the youth population "bulge" and large groups of young people eschewing farm lives for careers in cities, will have far-reaching effects on food security and nutrition. As these trends gain momentum, diets will transform and the double burden of malnutrition will increase across continents.

Nutrition programming will need to seek creative new ways to improve food systems, food quality, nutrition behaviors and social norms around eating, in addition to continuing to implement and scale up established approaches to improve nutrition. To achieve this, USAID will seek out strategic and innovative ways to support partners in becoming more self-reliant and capable of leading their own development journeys. This includes



A nurse leads a health education session for a group of community members. These educational sessions were part of a package of integrated services supported by USAID's Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and Tuberculosis program (2016-2012).

JSI, 2010

encouraging the private sector to play a positive role in improving nutrition through their products, services and marketing practices. USAID will also continue to work toward enhancing country recognition of nutrition as a driver of national development, and worthy of prominent attention and increased funding. Ongoing, strategic investments in nutrition, especially by governments and the private sector, are needed to increase the potential of achieving imperative nutrition targets.

The multi-sectoral causes of malnutrition require a multi-faceted solution. Nutrition will play a key role across USAID's multi-sectoral programs, with investments that are sensitive and specific to nutrition encompassing many areas of development. Sustaining USAID's leadership role in nutrition research and policy and continuing to make high quality technical assistance available to country programs will result in further, substantial returns on the investments USAID has already made to improve global nutrition.

Experience gained and lessons learned through the implementation of USAID's nutrition activities and broader development agenda have shaped each iteration of nutrition programming. Through close collaboration with partners, faith-based organizations, host-country governments and the international nutrition community as a whole, USAID reaches millions of vulnerable people each year, especially women and children, with nutrition interventions that save lives, treat and prevent undernutrition and improve long-term health and development. These efforts build stronger health and food systems, foster more resilient populations and assist countries on their journeys to self-reliance.