

## USAID/OFDA NUTRITION SECTOR UPDATE – OCTOBER 2012

### SECTOR OVERVIEW

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's efforts to prevent and treat acute malnutrition. USAID/OFDA-supported programs are community-based, linked to local health systems, and use evidence-based approaches that decrease morbidity and mortality resulting from malnutrition. In addition to supporting infant and young child feeding programs, USAID/OFDA funds nutrition education, initiatives aimed at improving nutrition systems, and operational research to advance best practices and build local capacity to treat acute malnutrition. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$67 million to support nutrition activities, including nearly \$65 million for nutrition interventions in 16 countries and more than \$2 million for global and regional nutrition initiatives. The majority of USAID/OFDA's programs were based in the Horn of Africa and western Africa's Sahel region—two areas where drought severely impacted communities' abilities to produce and purchase sufficient quantities of diverse foods, thereby increasing the risk of spikes in acute malnutrition levels among vulnerable populations.

### HELPING COMMUNITIES MANAGE MALNUTRITION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

After prolonged drought conditions resulted in widespread food insecurity in the Horn of Africa in 2011, USAID/OFDA continued to support integrated health, nutrition, water, and accompanying sanitation and hygiene programs in the region in FY 2012. Many programs in the Horn of Africa are designed to enhance or improve community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM)—an approach that involves



*A health worker measures a child's mid-upper arm circumference to screen for malnutrition in Turkana County, Kenya. (Photo by Michael Gebremedhin/USAID)*

training community members on the timely detection and at-home treatment of acute malnutrition. With USAID/OFDA support, the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) has helped Government of Kenya (GoK) Ministry of Health-run clinics adopt CMAM programs. With CMAM active in the areas of Kenya that are prone to drought, nutrition partners and the GoK can quickly and effectively scale up their existing programs when families begin having difficulties accessing food. The benefits of these community-based programs are many, and they long outlast the emergency. For example, consistent access to malnutrition treatment services helps ensure that people receive treatment earlier and are in a better position to withstand the next emergency. Additionally, these programs help prevent

malnutrition—and its damaging life-long implications—among vulnerable children under the age of two. Nearly 10 years ago, USAID was one of the initial supporters of the CMAM approach. Due to its proven ability to enhance resilience through local capacity building and improved nutrition outcomes, CMAM is now the global standard for the treatment of acute malnutrition.

### TAPPING THE POWER OF GRANDMOTHERS IN BURKINA FASO

Through Helen Keller International, USAID/OFDA has trained grandmothers on healthy nutrition practices to share with their communities in 20 villages in Burkina Faso—a nation where the proportion of malnourished children under five exceeds the U.N. World Health Organization critical threshold of 10 percent. The grandmothers also learned how to screen children for acute malnutrition and prepare nutrient-enriched food. As respected elders in their villages, the grandmothers are able to effectively

communicate this new information, which increases knowledge of beneficial feeding options and subsequently improves the nutritional status and health of children and pregnant and lactating women. Through demonstrations in their villages, the grandmothers teach mothers how to prepare enriched porridge using locally available ingredients while screening children for acute malnutrition and talking about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for infants. As a result of these visits and presentations, mothers have adopted healthier, sustainable habits and begun to share the information with friends.

## **FEEDING INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN IN YEMEN**

To reduce the mortality rate of malnourished children and decrease persistently high levels of acute malnutrition in Yemen, USAID/OFDA supported five partners in FY 2012 to treat malnutrition from fixed and mobile centers, provide therapeutic foods, establish stabilization sites for life-threatening cases, put in place nutrition surveillance systems, and train community workers to identify cases of malnutrition and refer them for treatment. USAID/OFDA also builds the capacity of Yemeni health facilities to handle cases of severe malnutrition, while training community members on appropriate ways to help children receive the nutrition they need at home, so that they no longer require professional care.

## **FORTIFYING FOOD IN GUINEA, MAURITANIA, AND SENEGAL**

The addition of essential micronutrients to food staples, such as flour and cooking oil, ensures that vulnerable individuals have access to adequate quantities of vitamin A, folic acid, iron, and zinc in their diets during lean months, as the majority of people will continue to consume staple items even during times of crisis. USAID/OFDA is supporting national food fortification programs in three West African countries. In addition to assisting governments as they develop and implement fortification regulations, the programs partner with private sector enterprises and provide equipment, fortification supplies, and training to companies that produce, package, and market the target staple foods.



*A Burkina grandmother demonstrates how to prepare a nutritionally beneficial meal. (Photo by Karey Haywood/USAID)*

## **IMPROVING EMERGENCY NUTRITION TREATMENT CAPACITY AND COORDINATION**

In response to a recurring shortage of experienced emergency nutritionists, particularly in French-speaking countries, USAID/OFDA established an agreement with Action Against Hunger/France to create an intensive emergency nutrition training program in West Africa that coordinates with on-the-job mentoring programs from a consortium of non-governmental organizations. In addition, USAID/OFDA supports UNICEF regional nutrition programming, capacity building, and response coordination throughout the Sahelian countries, including activities such as conducting annual nutritional surveys and training additional local health personnel in the management of acute malnutrition. Furthermore, through the U.N. World Food Program (WFP), USAID/OFDA is supporting a regional food security market analysis and population vulnerability assessment to provide reliable and timely data that can be used by WFP and partners to tailor food security and nutrition programs more effectively. Such information guides targeted programming, including cash-based activities, emergency food assistance, and supplemental feeding, throughout affected areas in the Sahel.

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