



SNAPSHOT

Fortified Meals Improve Childhood Health

Nearly half of previously underweight children in Ojo de Agua are now reporting healthy weights with the introduction of nutritious foods and improved household hygiene.



Foto por Fintrac Inc.

The Miranda-Quintanilla family is relieved and happy with Holman's recovery and weight gain. The family continues to attend USAID-ACCESO trainings to learn more ways to improve their overall health.

“Now I see my son and he is different.”

Francisco Miranda,

Father of Holman Miranda

In the small community of Ojo de Agua, Lempira, most of the 54 women that have children under two lack resources to provide these children with balanced meals that lead to healthy development. Most rural children live on beans and flour tortillas, which do not provide the vitamins and nutrients they need. To help families improve the nutritional value of their meals, USAID-ACCESO is introducing moringa, a leafy green plant rich in iron and vitamin A.

The community first began working with the project in November 2011 through trainings in food preparation, household improvements, and personal and household hygiene. The project also works closely with community health posts, teaching the volunteers how to monitor a child's development.

“Before we only weighed the children,” said Maria Hernandez, a health volunteer. “Now we know what to do in order to help the children improve.”

Hernandez had never even heard of moringa, let alone imagined the impact this simple green leaf could have on childhood nutrition. After attending USAID-ACCESO trainings, Hernandez learned that one small moringa plant could provide abundant sources of iron for an entire household.

Francisco Miranda and Claudia Quintanilla were worried about the health of their 10-month-old son, Holman, who was hospitalized for 14 days due to problems in his lungs. He subsequently fell under the third nutritional percentile for weight. Following the project specialists' recommendations, Claudia began mixing a spoonful of dried moringa leaves into Holman's meals. In just one month, Holman recovered his appetite and gained 2.42 pounds.

“This [moringa] is good for the family,” said Francisco. “I was worried, but now I see my son and he is different.”

Like Claudia and Francisco, Maria Benitez was worried about her six-month-old daughter's low weight and overall health. After attending USAID-ACCESO nutrition trainings, Maria also started feeding her daughter powdered moringa three times a day. Her daughter, Nayely, also gained 2.42 pounds in the first month. Maria said she is extremely happy with her daughter's health improvement; she plans to continue attending project trainings.

Both Nayely and Holman will turn two years old above the third nutritional percentile, which is critical to healthy cognitive development. 44 percent of the Ojo de Agua children who were underweight before project intervention are now reporting healthy weights.

The project is having significant success across the six departments in which it works. In the past year, malnutrition rates with assisted children in prioritized communities have decreased by three percentage points, from 19 to 16 percent.