



# FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



SOLOMON TAMIRAT • SAVE THE CHILDREN

## Influencing Policy and Supporting Change for Sound Nutrition Policies in Ethiopia

In the decades following the devastating famine that claimed the lives of more than 700,000 Ethiopians in the 1980s, international donors focused food-related assistance to the country on emergency relief rather than the development of a sustainable agriculture and nutrition program. However, to prevent future disasters and ensure that children receive sufficient nutrition to support their development, a more comprehensive approach to nutrition interventions was necessary. The country needed to diversify the crops it grew and change common behaviors that limited the diets of young children and pregnant women. Thus, in 2008 with support from development partners, Ethiopia developed its first National Nutrition Strategy and launched the National Nutrition Plan (NNP). The 2008-2013 NNP was a major step forward ➤

## ENGINE TECHNICAL BRIEF 2

EMPOWERING NEW GENERATIONS WITH IMPROVED NUTRITION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



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toward ending under-nutrition in Ethiopia and set the stage for the design and implementation of comprehensive nutrition projects, such as Empowering the New Generation to Improve Nutrition and Economic Opportunities (ENGINE).

To support the country's nascent focus on nutrition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) designed ENGINE to not just build capacity for the

delivery of nutrition services, but to bolster the policies and structures responsible for shaping Ethiopia's nutrition program. ENGINE accomplished this mandate both directly, through participation in the revision and design of the country's national nutrition policies and program, and also through technical support to the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and other government bodies.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2012-2015 NNP

In 2011, the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) requested ENGINE's assistance in the review and revision of the NNP to align its implementation timeline with the Health Sector Development Plan and the Growth and Transformation Plan-I (2010 - 2015). ENGINE, other development partners, and the GOE drew from their extensive knowledge of the 2008 NNP's strengths and weaknesses to identify two primary ways in which the program should be strengthened in its second iteration:

- ◆ **Implementation must be multisectoral:** The revised NNP must clearly articulate the responsibility of each sector involved in implementation. Most notably, MOA programs must support Ethiopian's nutrition needs as well as the government's production goals.

- ◆ **Programs must support nutrition through the entire lifecycle:** A comprehensive nutrition program must recognize the unique needs of women of child-bearing age, infants, and children, emphasizing the first 1,000 days of life, as well as those of adolescents and the elderly, and include appropriate interventions to target each group.

As part of the technical working group and five task forces (multisectoral engagement and governance; maternal, infant, and young child feeding; gender; nutrition-sensitive agriculture; and social behavior change communications and advocacy) that contributed to the NNP revision, ENGINE successfully championed inclusion of these key concepts in the 2012 plan.

## ROLL-OUT OF THE NNP

Though federal ministries supported the 2008 NNP, regional and woreda offices and ministries were unfamiliar with it, which limited implementation at the service delivery level.<sup>1</sup> ENGINE thus worked with the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and Regional Nutrition Technical Committees to introduce the multisectoral approach, the concept of nutrition-sensitive agriculture, the 1,000 days concept, and other key aspects of the plan through workshops at each of the three levels of government.

Evidence of the agricultural and other sectors' increased understanding of the importance of nutrition were seen by the MOA's commitment to implementation of the NNP and the inclusion of nutrition activities in several other government plans. As a member of the MOA's Food and Nutrition Technical Working Group, ENGINE supported the development of a strategic plan to guide the ministry's implementation of the NNP. The MOA's second Agricultural Growth Program (AGP-II, 2016–

2020) prominently features support to "improve the diversity and nutritional content of smallholder production and processing" as a cross-cutting theme in each of its five components.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the 2014 Productive Safety Net Program IV (PSNP IV), Ethiopia's social security program, incorporated nutrition in its interventions, which were traditionally focused on food security.

### Multisectoral Coordination

In 2010, the GOE established a multisectoral National Nutrition Coordinating Body (NNCB) to support implementation of the NNP. However, because the NNCB did not have clear terms of reference or accountability, it met only twice before ENGINE's launch.

In collaboration with ENGINE and other development partners, the FMOH revitalized the NNCB as well as several other national and regional coordinating bodies. The government's goal in establishing these bodies was to facilitate cooperation and collaboration for nutrition activities across sectors; however, when the

1 Eileen K, Masresha T, Tesfaye H, Dilnesaw Z, Aregash S, Tarik K, Habtamu F, Joan V.W. Multisector Nutrition Program Governance and Implementation in Ethiopia: Opportunities and Challenges. *Food Nutr Bull*, December 2015 vol. 36 no. 4 534-548.

2 Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia Agricultural Growth Program II (AGP II) Program Design Document January 2015.

revitalized NNCB first met, it was clear that without more education of its members, the coordination bodies would fail. ENGINE and UNICEF therefore worked with the FMOH to organize a capacity-building workshop in each of the four ENGINE-supported regions to explain the basics of nutrition, nutrition-sensitive approaches in non-health sectors, the multi-sectoral approach to nutrition, the various sectors' roles in supporting the NNP, and how each member could contribute to the success of the program.

### Exchange Visits

To further encourage cooperation and support for nutrition interventions at the national and regional levels, ENGINE partnered with FMOH, UNICEF and the World Food Program to arrange exchange visits to Uganda and Brazil for members of the national and regional technical and coordinating bodies including state ministers, and regional vice presidents.

The five-day visit to Brazil introduced delegates to the systems Brazil has created to coordinate various sectors to implement the national food and nutrition policy. In Uganda, participants learned about the country's successful national food fortification program and a multisectoral coordination platform chaired by the office of the president. Through the two visits, the Ethiopian delegates came to understand their role in developing and supporting nutrition policies and programs.

The Ethiopian delegates were particularly impressed by the system in Brazil, where many sectors work together in support of nutrition services and the body overseeing nutrition programs reports directly to the president's office. The FMOH supported the establishment of Ethiopia's regional coordination bodies but the group did not have the power to influence all sectors. Recognizing that involvement of the president's office was a significant factor in the success of Brazil's nutrition program, the Ethiopian delegates drafted terms of reference for the development of a combined nutrition and food policy and a proposal to make the NNCB accountable to the prime minister's office and the regional coordinating bodies accountable to their respective regional presidents' offices. This proposal was also included in the 2016-2020 NNP 2.

### Engagement with Parliament

Under the leadership of the MOH, in March 2014 ENGINE collaborated with UNICEF and the USAID-funded FANTA III project to organize a two-day workshop for 58 parliamentarians.

ENGINE and its partners introduce the politicians to the magnitude of childhood stunting and its devastating ef-

## The Seqota Declaration

In July 2015, the Ethiopian government renewed its commitment to nutrition when it unveiled the Seqota Declaration—named for a town at the epicenter of the famine that claimed more than 700,000 Ethiopian lives in the 1980s. The declaration promises to end childhood undernutrition in Ethiopia by 2030 by implementing a three-phased multisectoral plan. During the innovation phase (2016 to 2018), the government will closely monitor the implementation of targeted interventions in a select group of communities. Using the lessons learned from this first phase, in 2019 and 2020 the initiative will expand to a wider group of vulnerable communities and continue to refine its approach. The final phase, national scale-up, will run from 2021 to 2030.

In particular, the Seqota Declaration sets out to eliminate stunting in children under two and, like ENGINE's work, will focus on ensuring adequate nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life. The declaration will strengthen political commitment for nutrition, which in turn may help address some bottlenecks in regional coordination.

facts in Ethiopia using statistics from the Cost of Hunger study conducted by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute and The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) that illustrate the effects of hunger on the country's economy and the health and educational development of its citizens. Data from the ENGINE baseline survey were used to show the magnitude of child and maternal undernutrition in woredas represented by the politicians. ENGINE developed materials to explain the necessity of curbing undernutrition in the first 1,000 days of life and identified ways in which the attendees could support of the NNP.

The parliamentarians developed action plans with activities such as educating other parliamentarians, including nutrition in sector plans and allocating sufficient funds to cover activities, and reviewing and revising existing laws or proposing additional legislation in support of nutrition activities.

Implementation of the plans has been slow; however, ENGINE is working with the MOH to identify ways to support the parliamentarians' goals. Growth through Nutrition will establish more robust collaboration with parliament and other key political influencers.

In its final months of implementation, ENGINE once again capitalized on these strengths as it supported the development of the 2016–2020 NNP. The wealth of knowledge the project gained about which interventions work and why—and why some do not—will be invaluable in informing the next project’s efforts to advocate for effective nutrition policies.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ **When developing a multisectoral plan, activities must work within each sectors’ current mandates.** Not only does working within the government’s systems facilitate the adoption of project activities, it creates sustainability of those initiatives as well. The 2012 NNP defined each sector’s role in implementation, however it couldn’t change other sectors’ mandates. Consistent partnership and engagement was essential to ENGINE’s success in influencing the changes necessary to fully support the NNP. One of ENGINE’s goals for the development of the 2016-2020 NNP was to ensure that activities proposed for each sector align with the respective ministry’s current initiatives.
- ◆ **Education and persistence is essential to fully realize implementation of a multisectoral response.** As shown through the country’s experience with the 2008 NNP, establishing a policy or program is just the first step. Successful implementation of a national program requires awareness of roles at every level of the government, from national bodies to the communities it impacts, and with every sector involved in implementation. ENGINE found that simply informing actors of their roles was insufficient to establish their full engagement. However, when individuals understood why improving nutrition is essential to Ethiopia’s health and economic development and the role they—as employees of the agriculture or education or economic sectors—had in supporting quality nutrition services and activities, they were likely to actively own and lead NNP activities
- ◆ **To be successful in advocating for supportive policies, projects must understand the root causes driving the behaviors and situations targeted for change.** ENGINE was successful in influencing Ethiopia’s nutrition policies and in supporting their implementation because of the extensive understanding of the country’s NNP and the ministries that support the project gained through years of working alongside and within the government system. This knowledge is essential for determining entry points for influence and understanding which aspects of policy to target in order to create grassroots changes with meaningful impact. This level of familiarity cannot be realized without hands-on experience with the system. ◆

## ABOUT ENGINE

The Empowering the New Generation to Improve Nutrition and Economic opportunities (ENGINE) project was the U.S. Agency for International Development Ethiopia Mission’s flagship multisector nutrition project. ENGINE, which was implemented from September 2011 to September 2016, built on the Government of Ethiopia’s National Nutrition Program and the U.S. Government’s Feed the Future initiatives to prevent undernutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, from the start of pregnancy until the child is two years of age. The project was led by Save the Children in partnership with Tufts University, Jhpiego, Land o’ Lakes, the Manoff Group, Valid International, and Jimma University and worked in 116 *woredas* across the Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, SNNPR, and Somali regions of Ethiopia.

ENGINE partnered with Ethiopian ministries to strength existing multisector coordination and support the development and revision of nutrition policies, guidelines, and standards. It integrated instruction on nutrition into the pre-service curriculum for health and agriculture workers and built the capacity of frontline

health and agriculture workers to provide high quality nutrition services. The project’s social and behavior change communication activities promoted optimal maternal, infant, and young child feeding practices and dietary diversity at the community level. Work with vulnerable households educated participants about nutrition-sensitive agriculture techniques and livestock management to increase consumption of nutrient-dense foods and augment household income. ENGINE promoted improved water, sanitation, and hygiene practices to prevent diarrhea in children and improve nutritional status, mainstreamed gender in all its activities, and implemented a rigorous research strategy to support and guide effective nutrition policies and practices.

*For more information on ENGINE, contact:*

Dr. Habtamu Fekadu, Chief of Party, ENGINE  
email: [habtamu.fekadu@savethechildren.org](mailto:habtamu.fekadu@savethechildren.org)  
Old Airport P.O. Box: 387, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Web: [ethiopia.savethechildren.net/ENGINE](http://ethiopia.savethechildren.net/ENGINE)