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**Early Warning and Response in Title II  
Development Food Assistance Programs:  
Promising Practices and Lessons Learned  
from the Haiti Title II Multi-Year Activity  
Programs Pilot (2010–2013)**

Laura M. Glaeser

May 2014

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

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CNSA	National Food Security Coordinating Unit
DPC	Department of Civil Protection
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FFP	Office of Food for Peace
GAM	global acute malnutrition
GOH	Government of Haiti
HTG	Haitian Gourde(s)
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MUAC	mid-upper arm circumference
U.S.	United States
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

## Executive Summary

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In 2005, to facilitate programming that is more responsive to the evolving needs of its target populations, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) introduced an early warning and response element into its development food assistance program guidance. Broadly, this element was conceptualized to monitor food security conditions in program implementation areas, to analyze and report on these conditions, and to respond to signals of deteriorating conditions when these become apparent.

Following its introduction, many Title II development programs designed and implemented variations of the program-level early warning and response element to suit their programming contexts. In 2009, the USAID Mission in Haiti expressed a desire to formally build out this program element in the newly awarded Title II development programs operating in that country, given the high number and variety of hazards to which people in the country are exposed and interest shown by the Government of Haiti (GOH) in establishing a national-level means of more rapidly identifying and responding to deteriorating food security conditions. USAID/Haiti requested technical assistance from the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA<sup>1</sup>) to carry out this work, and, in 2010, the Title II program-level early warning and response pilot in Haiti began.

The pilot work in Haiti consisted of two main parts: 1) the provision of technical assistance to Title II awardees to construct an initial set of program-level early warning and response components and 2) a follow-up visit 1½ years later to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the developed components and their implementation and perceived effectiveness. The implications of this work can be used to help USAID in determining the future of the early warning and response element in Haiti and across Title II development programs more broadly.

Pilot findings indicated that the program-level early warning and response elements the Title II awardees in Haiti developed were largely functional, programmatically useful, and beneficial to other early warning stakeholders in the country. Areas where FANTA recommended Title II awardees in Haiti focus to strengthen implementation during the remainder of their programming included:

- Ensuring regular communication of collected early warning data and information both “upward” (e.g., to donors and departmental/national/international decision makers) and “downward” (e.g., back to the communities from which the data were collected).
- Enhancing capacities of local entities (e.g., beneficiaries, targeted communities, institutions) to actively participate in the program element, in an effort to 1) strengthen their ability to establish an evidence base of information that fills an identified knowledge gap and can be used for self-advocacy in the event of future, localized food security issues, and 2) increase the likelihood that the early warning and response activities continued beyond the life of the Title II development program, in part by encouraging demand for this information.

In addition to these Haiti program-specific recommendations, findings from this pilot work suggested ways to improve implementation of the program-level early warning and response element more broadly across Title II development programs. In particular, FANTA recommended that FFP consider shifting the

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<sup>1</sup> FANTA is currently operating under its fourth Cooperative Agreement (February 2012–February 2017). For the purposes of this report, “FANTA” also refers to work begun under previous Cooperative Agreements.

purpose of the program element from one of internal program monitoring and management (e.g., for development of trigger indicators and thresholds to determine when to request emergency resources) to one of strengthening communities' own capacities to monitor food security conditions; share monitoring data with sub-national, national, and/or international food security monitoring entities; and advocate for assistance to perceived food security concerns as needed using evidence collected through this monitoring. This implies a need for FFP to:

- Consider doing away with its request that Title II awardees develop trigger indicators and associated thresholds, emphasizing instead a programming approach that engages communities targeted for Title II development programs in basic food security context monitoring and that strengthens their capacities to apply this information to fill identified knowledge gaps and to self-advocate for assistance, when necessary, in response to localized food security issues. Trigger indicator and threshold mechanisms are highly technical and challenging to conceptualize and effectively implement. Such characteristics make these mechanisms difficult to sustain beyond a given program's life of activity and draw limited program resources away from other potentially more impactful activities.
- Develop clear guidance on how Title II awardees are to report information gathered through these food security context monitoring and data sharing efforts—including information on idiosyncratic and covariate events—to USAID (e.g., the USAID Mission in a given country and/or region, USAID/Washington), and how USAID is to use the information.
- Develop clear guidance on the types of institutions in-country with which Title II awardees should engage in partnerships and how they will build/strengthen those partnerships.
- Develop clear guidance on where the early warning and response program element should fall within the Title II development program framework (e.g., as a cross-cutting objective or as a component of program monitoring and evaluation [M&E]) and the level of resources it should receive vis-à-vis other program elements, as these factors have implications for the feasibility of the element's eventual sustainability.

In addition, Title II awardees should clearly define and facilitate the development/strengthening of partnerships between communities collecting food security monitoring information and the sub-national, national, and/or international entities that use this information, strengthening capacity across these entities as feasible to increase the likelihood that effective food security context monitoring and information sharing will continue post-program.

# 1 Introduction

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Developing programming that flexibly responds to the evolving needs of populations in developing country contexts—and in particular, the populations most vulnerable to food insecurity—is challenging at every level: from the donor, whose policies and processes must facilitate programming flexibility, to the implementer, whose program design must make strides toward achieving program objectives when conditions in the implementing environment are as good as possible and maintain this progress when conditions threaten the very lives and livelihoods of the populations they serve. These challenges are perennial in developing country contexts, and efforts to address them are many. One such effort is illustrated through FFP’s introduction of a program-level early warning and response<sup>2</sup> element into its development food assistance programs. Broadly, this element was conceptualized to monitor food security conditions in program implementation areas; to signal (through analysis and reporting) if, where, when, and why these conditions were deteriorating; and to allow for an injection of Title II emergency resources, where appropriate and available, to address the identified deterioration.

Following its introduction in 2005, many Title II development programs designed and implemented variations of the program-level early warning and response element to suit their programming contexts. In 2009, the USAID Mission in Haiti expressed a desire to formally build out this program element in the newly awarded Title II development programs operating in that country, given the high number and variety of hazards to which people in the country are exposed and the GOH’s interest in establishing a national-level means of more rapidly identifying and responding to deteriorating food security conditions. USAID/Haiti requested technical assistance from FANTA<sup>3</sup> to carry out this work, and, in 2010, the Title II program-level early warning and response pilot work in Haiti began.

The pilot work in Haiti consisted of two main parts: 1) the provision of technical assistance to Title II awardees in Haiti<sup>4</sup> to construct an initial set of program-level early warning and response components, and 2) a follow-up visit 1½ years later to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the developed components and their implementation and their perceived effectiveness, and to determine the implications of these findings for the future of the early warning and response element in the Haiti Title II development programs and across Title II development programs more broadly.

To facilitate discussion of the pilot work and related findings, this document is organized into four sections following this introduction. **Section 2** defines key terms in the document. **Section 3** provides background on the program-level early warning and response element within Title II development programs broadly, and in the context of the Haiti pilot work specifically. **Section 4** outlines key findings and associated learning from the Haiti pilot effort. Finally, **Section 5** suggests recommendations based on these findings.

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<sup>2</sup> References to early warning and response throughout this document relate to food insecurity (e.g., early warning of and response to food insecurity-related issues).

<sup>3</sup> USAID/Haiti’s request for technical assistance from FANTA to build out Title II awardees’ early warning and response element was informed by previous early warning efforts that FANTA undertook in Haiti, including a 2004 activity to adapt an early warning system for Title II programs based on a system employed in the country’s Northwest Department.

<sup>4</sup> Three Title II awardees were implementing activities in Haiti at the time of the provision of this technical assistance: ACDI/VOCA, Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision. These programs began operations under this round of development programs in 2008; their programming ended in 2013.

## 2 Key Terms

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The working definitions of key terms used in this document follow.

*Food security* – An existential state in which all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life (USAID 1992).

*Food availability* – One of the three main pillars of food security.<sup>5</sup> Food availability facilitates food security when sufficient quantities of appropriate, necessary types of food from domestic production, commercial imports, or social assistance are consistently available to a given population, are in reasonable proximity to them, or are within their reach (USAID 1992).

*Food access* – One of the three main pillars of food security. Food access facilitates food security when a given population consistently has adequate income or other resources necessary to purchase or barter to obtain levels of appropriate food needed to maintain consumption of an adequate diet and/or an adequate level of nutrition (USAID 1992).

*Food utilization/consumption* – One of the three main pillars of food security. Food utilization/consumption facilitates food security when food is consistently properly used within a given population, including through the employment of proper processing and storage techniques, through the demonstration of adequate knowledge and application of appropriate nutrition and child care techniques, and when adequate health and sanitation services are available and accessible to that population (USAID 1992).

*Title II awardees* – Organizations receiving Title II *development* program funding. In Haiti, these include ACDI/VOCA, Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision.

*Program-level early warning and response element* – The broad incorporation of early warning-related components (e.g., monitoring indicators, trigger indicators, thresholds, supporting information) and tasks (e.g., monitoring, reporting, responding) into Title II development programming.

*Early warning monitoring indicators* – A component of the program-level early warning and response element. Early warning monitoring indicators are composed of data collected through regular monitoring that provide information on food availability, access, and utilization/consumption conditions among populations in program implementation areas. Examples of early warning monitoring indicators include rainfall levels, retail prices for key commodities at specified local/regional markets, and caseloads of acutely malnourished children under 5 years of age.

*Trigger indicators* – A component of the program-level early warning and response element. Trigger indicators are composed of a subset of data extrapolated from regular early warning monitoring that indicates a potential food security anomaly requiring further investigation. Examples of early warning trigger indicators include significant variation from a predefined average in rainfall levels, extrapolated from early warning monitoring data on current and historical rainfall levels; and significant sustained

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<sup>5</sup> This document considers stability to be a component that cuts across and is therefore integrated into the food security pillars of food availability, food access, food utilization/consumption, rather than a pillar unto itself. Furthermore, this document considers these pillars to be hierarchical in nature. That is, food availability is necessary but insufficient for food access, and food access is necessary but insufficient for food utilization/consumption.

variation from a predefined average in retail prices, extrapolated from early warning monitoring data and available historical data on consumer price levels.

*Trigger indicator thresholds* – A component of the program-level early warning and response element. Trigger indicator thresholds are defined as the level of change (deterioration) in food security conditions beyond which an emergency food aid response is needed. Trigger indicator thresholds are typically context-specific, given variations in livelihoods across the populations that Title II development programs target.

*Supporting information* – A component of the program-level early warning and response element. Supporting information is composed of additional quantitative and/or qualitative data used to further analyze and triangulate early warning monitoring and trigger indicators and thresholds to constitute a convergence of evidence of food security conditions. Examples of supporting information include coping strategies<sup>6</sup> and pertinent secondary data (e.g., crop-specific rainfall requirements, labor wage rates, and historical trends).

*Idiosyncratic event* – An event whose impact is confined to a small group (e.g., to the level of the individual, household, or small group within a community).

*Covariate event* – An event whose impact is experienced among a large population (e.g., at the level of the entire community, region, or livelihood group).

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<sup>6</sup> Coping strategies are defined as behavioral responses people employ to manage food insecurity. These responses typically range in severity (e.g., from switching to a less preferred but cheaper staple foods to, at the extreme, selling productive assets). Illustrative examples of some of the coping strategies households in the pilot implementation areas used include a reduction in the number of meals consumed per day, a reduction in diversity of meals consumed, and an increase in the number of household members engaging in labor migration. This report distinguishes coping strategies (*ex poste* behaviors people employ to *manage* food insecurity) from adaptive strategies (*ex ante* behaviors people employ to *reduce the risk* that food insecurity will occur).

## 3 Background

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### 3.1 The Title II Program-Level Early Warning and Response Element

In 2005, as part of an effort to enhance the longer-term impact of Title II development programs and meet FFP's then new strategic goal of reducing food insecurity among vulnerable populations, FFP introduced the program-level early warning and response element into its development programming<sup>7</sup> guidance through a request that programs define and operationalize trigger indicators and threshold mechanisms. Prior to this new strategic plan, FFP programming had focused more on increasing levels of food availability, access, and utilization/consumption among target populations, and less on these populations' risk of losing their ability to obtain and use food. This shift in focus from increasing food security to reducing food insecurity made explicit the need for Title II development programs to address situations that impede progress toward stable improvements in food security and underscored the idea that reducing exposure to risk and increasing capacities to manage it ultimately reduce populations' vulnerability to food insecurity.

Programmatically, this strategic shift meant reorienting some field activities to address food-insecure households' vulnerabilities more directly. With this focus on vulnerabilities, the program-level early warning and response element was introduced into Title II development programs.

The Title II program-level early warning and response element was conceptualized to monitor food security conditions in Title II development program implementation areas; to signal (through analysis and reporting) if, where, when, and why these conditions were deteriorating; and to allow for an injection of Title II emergency food aid resources, where appropriate and available, to address the identified deterioration. FFP introduced these mechanisms, in part, to increase program response flexibility, so that Title II development partners could respond to identified, burgeoning food security issues in their implementation areas without having to divert development program resources and risk undercutting ongoing activities or wait until the emerging issue devolved to a scale requiring a full-blown emergency response.

Prior to introducing the early warning and response element, Title II awardees' responses to increased food needs resulting from a shock in a given implementation area often led them to 1) divert limited authorized amounts of obligated Title II resources from ongoing development activities to emergency response efforts<sup>8</sup> and/or 2) design new emergency programs targeting many of the same populations already receiving development interventions.

While, in principle, diversion of a portion of the Title II development program resources already in stock in a country allows partners to respond to some of the acute food needs presented by an emergency, in practice, these diversions rarely included resources sufficient to adequately respond to the totality of needs. In addition, shifting these resources to respond to an emergency food security issue without a

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<sup>7</sup> Title II development food assistance programs have gone by many names since their inception. The programs implemented in Haiti during the pilot were referred to as multi-year activity programs.

<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations allows for the diversion of up to 10 percent of available, *in-country* food resources to respond to a shock (U.S. Code of Federal Regulations 2011). However, FFP cannot guarantee "backfill" of these diversions or their associated cash resources with additional development resources. Backfill of any diversion of development resources above 10 percent of in-country food stocks is also not guaranteed.

guarantee that the diverted resources would be backfilled risks undermining ongoing development interventions. Furthermore, designing and implementing an emergency-focused program targeting groups that were also benefiting from development interventions presented conceptual challenges and management burdens for the implementer, the donor, and, in some instances, the beneficiary. FFP therefore devised the program-level early warning and response element to 1) allow ongoing development interventions to continue, to the extent practicable, in the face of emerging issues,<sup>9</sup> with appropriate modifications given changes to the implementing environment resulting from a given emerging shock, and 2) create a means by which additional, emergency resources could be funneled into ongoing development programs to respond to needs extending beyond what diverted development program resources could address.

It was anticipated that introduction of the program-level early warning and response element would increase Title II development programs' response flexibility and overall effectiveness, as Title II awardees could continue striving toward established development objectives while responding to emerging potential crises, thereby reducing targeted populations' vulnerabilities to food insecurity and improving longer-term program impact. Integrating trigger indicators and thresholds beyond which Title II emergency resources could be allocated into an ongoing development activity also represented a concrete effort by FFP to streamline its program management processes to more efficiently and effectively deliver the combinations of food assistance required to contribute to reductions in food insecurity among vulnerable populations.

### **3.2 History of Title II Program-Level Early Warning and Response in Haiti**

The relatively high incidence and prevalence of hazards that threaten food security in Haiti—such as droughts, floods, commodity price fluctuations, earthquakes, and hurricanes—have long signaled the need for functional early warning and response mechanisms. Prior to commencement of this pilot work in the country, Title II awardees had already developed an initial set of early warning indicators for their respective programs, modeled after CARE's Northwest Early Warning System for Haiti (Standen 2004), which operated from about 1996/7 to 2008.<sup>10</sup> In addition to this program-level work, broader, national-level early warning monitoring efforts have been operational in the country, including those of the GOH's National Food Security Coordinating Unit (CNSA) and the USAID-supported Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). Haiti's hazard-prone environment and the active presence of early warning institutions in the country made for an atmosphere conducive to piloting the Title II early warning and response element. However, the presence of multiple Title II awardees already implementing programming across several sectors and geographies also presented challenges, and made it imperative that the pilot work was harmonized both across implementing partners and with similar, broader national efforts in Haiti.

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<sup>9</sup> The program-level early warning and response element is most easily applied to slow onset hazards for which data are relatively easily collected (e.g., late onset of rains and/or drought, measured through rainfall data collected from rain gauges) and for which a smaller-scale, earlier response has the ability to offset initial negative impacts on effected populations and prevent the compounding of further negative impacts. This element is less easily applied to rapid onset hazards (e.g., earthquakes, anomalous disease outbreaks).

<sup>10</sup> FANTA provided technical assistance to support CARE/Haiti's Northwest Early Warning System in the early 2000s.

### 3.3 Haiti Pilot Background and Methods

In October 2010, the pilot work began when FANTA travelled to Haiti to assist Title II awardees in strengthening their program-level early warning and response element through the development of a set of pilot trigger indicators and thresholds and related components (e.g., early warning monitoring indicators, supporting information). FANTA's efforts were directed through in-country meetings with and a culminating workshop among the Title II awardees, USAID/Haiti staff, and key technical and GOH food security counterparts (e.g., CSNA and FEWS NET representatives). **Box 1** outlines the pilot program-level early warning and response element components developed from this technical assistance.

### Box 1. Haiti Pilot Program-Level Early Warning and Response Element Components

The pilot work in Haiti focused on the development of at least one early warning monitoring indicator, trigger indicator, and threshold for each of the three main food security pillars. As such, the pilot components served as proxies for key components of the food security pillars for which data were available.<sup>a</sup>

#### Availability

- *Early warning monitoring indicator:* Amount of rainfall (in millimeters) reported monthly from available rain gauge stations
- *Trigger indicator:* One month with more or less than the required rainfall for the dominant crop(s) during the production season, compared with available historical data and considering:
  - Agro-ecological zone
  - Soil type
  - Stage of crop development
  - Temporal distribution of rainfall across the month
  - Beneficiary population dependence on own crop production for food and income
  - State of market linkages within the production area
- *Trigger indicator threshold:* X%<sup>b</sup> estimated or confirmed reduction in crop yield for the dominant crop and/or the presence of more severe coping strategies

#### Access

- *Early warning monitoring indicator:* Consumer price levels (in Haitian Gourdes [HTG]) for identified key commodities from the CNSA's standardized commodities list, reported monthly from regularly surveyed markets
- *Trigger indicator:* One or more months of atypical price variance (in HTG) during a specific season compared with month-on-month trends and available historical data, considering inflation and:
  - Geographic area
  - Time of year/season
  - Prices of comparable substitute commodities
  - Presence and levels of food aid programming in the analysis area
  - Beneficiary population dependence on the market to source food
  - Beneficiary population income levels (purchasing capacity)
- *Trigger indicator threshold:* X% increase in consumer prices for key crops, considering inflation, compared with monthly trends and available historical data and/or the presence of more severe coping strategies

### Utilization/Consumption

- *Early warning monitoring indicator:* Global acute malnutrition (GAM) prevalence (using mid-upper arm circumference [MUAC]) reported monthly from Title II awardees' community screenings of children 6–59 months of age or underweight prevalence<sup>c</sup> (using weight-for-age measurements) reported monthly from Title II awardee rally posts
- *Trigger indicator:* Increase in GAM prevalence and/or underweight prevalence among children 6–59 months of age, compared with month-on-month trends and area-specific program baselines and considering:
  - Time of year/season
  - Attendance trends at rally points
  - Presence of complementary programming and types in collection areas

*Trigger indicator threshold:* X% or more increase in GAM prevalence month-on-month and/or X% or more increase in underweight prevalence month-on-month, with an absolute threshold set at the “crisis” threshold for GAM prevalence ( $\geq 10\%$ ) (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters 2009)

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<sup>a</sup> Given that the Title II development programs in Haiti were ongoing and approaching the midpoint of implementation at the time of the initial pilot work, it was imperative that the components developed for this element were immediately available and relatively easily implemented, so as to be able to discern results before the programs ended.

<sup>b</sup> Title II awardees in Haiti were not asked to determine specific trigger indicator threshold percentages or ranges of percentages during the initial pilot work, as these determinations required additional analysis and were likely to be highly specific to each awardee's programming context.

<sup>c</sup> While not typically considered a strong early warning indicator to proxy for utilization/consumption, underweight prevalence was included in the initial pilot work in Haiti as not all Title II awardees had begun collection of MUAC data in accordance with updated national protocols for nutrition screening. With regard to the broader inclusion of nutritional status as an early warning indicator, while nutritional status indicators are “lagging” in the sense that measured populations are already affected, a spike in malnutrition prevalence, in particular, acute malnutrition prevalence, is a clear sign that conditions in the implementing environment have changed.

In July 2012, FANTA returned to Haiti to analyze progress in implementation of the Title II awardees' pilot program-level early warning and response elements to understand their strengths, challenges, and potential future direction in Haiti, and the implications of this learning for similar elements in other Title II development programs. FANTA conducted a series of meetings with Title II development program staff from each awardee and, in particular, those staff charged with work related to each program's early warning and response element. Discussions focused on progress made on implementation (e.g., how the early warning and response element was incorporated into the Title II awardee's program structure, data collection/analysis/reporting methods and frequency, level of information sharing with other early warning stakeholders, utility of data and analysis for programming, associated challenges), as well as the perceived efficacy of implementation and overall utility of the element. FANTA also discussed data collection with some of the program and community-level enumerators associated with the element.

FANTA complemented these lines of inquiry with discussions with USAID/Haiti staff, to better understand the donor perspective. These discussions focused on such issues as how frequently USAID/Haiti received early warning reporting from awardees and how useful the Mission perceived such reporting to be. FANTA also engaged in discussions with other technical early warning partners in Haiti, including CNSA and FEWS NET, to understand the level of collaboration between the Title II awardees on program-level (micro) early warning and response efforts and the partners' macro (i.e., regional, national, international) early warning agendas.

## 4 Haiti Pilot Findings and Associated Learning

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Across the board, stakeholders reported that the pilot program-level early warning and response element was useful and that it should continue in the country’s Title II development programs. All stakeholders indicated early warning was an important component of food security programming, in particular in hazard-prone contexts such as Haiti’s, as they found it increased the frequency with which information regarding idiosyncratic and covariate food security conditions on the ground in implementation areas was available. In addition, the data collected through the element had the potential to fill an important information need for other entities, such as CNSA and FEWS NET, that look to conduct more refined food security analyses among populations highly vulnerable to food insecurity, but that do not necessarily possess the resources or the mandate to collect such detailed information directly.

The findings in this section are presented in line with the three principal tasks that compose the program-level early warning and response element: 1) monitoring food security conditions in program implementation areas, 2) analyzing and reporting on these conditions, and 3) responding to signals of deteriorating food security conditions when these become apparent.

### 4.1 Monitoring

Discussions with Title II awardees during the pilot follow-up indicated little divergence in the data each program collected and the processes used to collect them. These similarities in data and data collection processes allowed for a level of comparability and for aggregation of the data. In addition, awardees found the collected data useful, as it facilitated regular and more timely access to information on food security conditions, including the impacts of idiosyncratic and covariate events,<sup>11</sup> on the ground in their implementation areas and resultant efforts to address them.

Challenges related to monitoring that Title II awardees reported included the level of resources needed to establish and sustain the monitoring systems associated with the early warning and response element. The data and information required to set up and maintain a program-level early warning and response element are not insignificant. Collecting/deriving the necessary data and information requires establishing different kinds of data collection systems (e.g., identification and installation of rain gauges, identification of key retail markets) and collecting data from these systems at varying intervals—from once or twice across the life of the project (e.g., “baseline” coping strategies) to once or twice per day (e.g., rain gauge data).

Awardees also noted challenges in identifying, sufficiently training, and otherwise incentivizing data collectors, specifically data enumerators from the program communities, who were often needed to collect the data that kept these systems running. Title II awardees reported at least 35 people supported each element, including program staff and data enumerators. The training of these individuals to appropriately collect the data represented a significant level of effort in and of itself. Turnover also

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<sup>11</sup> An example of an idiosyncratic event impact to which this monitoring alerted an awardee was an increasing incidence of acute malnutrition among children 6–59 months of age in one of the program’s catchment areas. This information allowed the awardee to alert local authorities to the uptick in caseload earlier and refer affected families for care. An example of a covariate event impact flagged due to monitoring was crop damage among hillside farming communities in a program area due in part to high winds during the hurricane season. This information led the awardee to do a market analysis and advocate that farmers in the affected area increase planting of in-demand wind-resistant crops (e.g., tubers).

presented a challenge, in particular when data collectors did not work for the program in other capacities. All Title II awardees in Haiti who accessed program-level early warning monitoring data through members of their targeted communities remunerated these members with in-kind transfers (e.g., rain coats, backpacks, and clipboards to facilitate rain gauge data collection), rather than cash. These token transfers and the sense of volunteerism in service to their communities contributed to some enumerators maintaining the systems during the remainder of the Title II development programs. However, it is unclear whether such incentives would suffice in the medium term, especially as the GOH (CNSA) noted an intent to begin providing cash payments to similar enumerators in some parts of the country.

Title II awardees also reported challenges related to accurate, timely transmission of the collected data from the field to program staff, sometimes because the data were improperly collected and/or calculated (e.g., incorrect averaging of market prices, incorrect measurement of MUAC), sometimes because the data collector was unable to complete collection for a given period, and sometimes because infrastructures needed to transmit the data were unavailable (e.g., sporadic mobile phone service, impassable roads). To overcome some of these challenges, one Title II awardee sought resources from an outside entity to assist in developing a smart phone application that stored collected data and transferred them to a central database whenever the phone reached a cellular network (rather than depending on a program car to collect hard copies of data from each site). This investment allowed the awardee to access collected data, identify and correct for potential errors, and clean and analyze them more quickly.

Finally, the two programs that included the early warning and response element in their broader M&E system reported challenges identifying sufficient program staff and other resources to fully implement the element. While M&E and early warning monitoring share many similarities in theoretical approach, the methods and tools used to implement each are distinct enough that they are difficult to execute effectively without their own respective resource base. The extensive number of indicators Title II development programs are required to collect to facilitate basic program M&E alone speaks to a need to separate the work of program-level early warning monitoring from broader program M&E monitoring, in particular given the similar high level of effort that the pilot follow-up indicated collecting, verifying, analyzing, and triangulating the data requires. Pilot findings indicated that adding the program-level early warning and response element to already heavy M&E requirements created significant staffing and resource challenges for programs.

## 4.2 Analysis and Reporting

Discussions among early warning stakeholders during the pilot follow-up in Haiti indicated that the Title II awardees had a broadly collaborative relationship with the GOH (in particular, the CNSA and the Department of Civil Protection [DPC]) and, to some extent, with FEWS NET and USAID/Haiti for data analysis, information sharing, and discussion of technical issues. For example, the Title II awardees and several other stakeholders held about one meeting each month to exchange information on data trends and to discuss technical issues related to the collection, analysis, reporting, and response-development associated with this information. Findings also suggested that continued effort was needed in this area—in particular, with regard to communication and collaboration across early warning stakeholders. For example, while awardees reported that early warning data and information flowed within each's established early warning system (e.g., from the field to the country office for primary analysis; from the country office to CNSA departmental and national offices for inclusion in broader analyses), some information flows occurred more regularly than others (e.g., CNSA reported receiving the data and analysis relatively regularly, while USAID/Haiti and FEWS NET reported receiving them from only some of the awardees and only intermittently). In addition, all awardees noted providing limited, if any, feedback of the program-level early warning information and analysis to the communities from which

data had been collected, though these flows of information were beginning to increase among some awardees.

Awardees reported many challenges associated with analysis and reporting. For starters, analyzing monitoring data is facilitated, in part, by comparing collected data to a historical counterpart (e.g., comparing current retail market price trends for key staples to price trends for the same staple in the same market the previous year; the 5-year average price for the same staple in the same market for that time of year), as well as by determining whether the populations affected are responding negatively (e.g., employing coping strategies that are more severe) to the conditions detected. The latter, in particular, requires an understanding of the kinds and relative severity of livelihood strategies households in an implementation area normally employ (e.g., labor migration of one household member) and the kinds of coping strategies that these same households employ when their food security is threatened (e.g., removing children from school, reducing the number of meals in a day, sending more household members than normal to migrate in search of labor). Accessing such historical data for areas where Title II programs are being implemented, if they exist at all, can be highly challenging, and developing a baseline from which to understand livelihood and coping strategies is time consuming and can be constrained by personnel and resource availability, particularly if this is not adequately planned for in the program's design. Indeed, the lack of available historical data led some of the programs in the Haiti pilot to delay trigger indicator threshold development, as these partners had to first establish a historical reference for their implementation area (through the data they were collecting for the pilot).

Once initial analysis of collected data was complete, distinguishing what and how to report and to whom, as well as what to expect from reporting, posed additional challenges. With regard to the last, awardees noted disappointment at the minimal levels of feedback they received on their reporting. Other stakeholders, including USAID/Haiti, noted associated frustrations, though these stemmed more from a lack of clarity on how to translate early warning information received from the awardees into requests for resources and/or a lack of available resources to respond to an identified issue, both of which are discussed in the proceeding subsection.

### 4.3 Response

All awardee staff consulted in the pilot follow-up reported using the information derived from the program-level early warning and response element to inform a range of programmatic responses, though not necessarily to access traditional Title II emergency food aid resources. Responses included internal program changes (e.g., adding/adjusting program activities to respond to a noted vulnerability), requests for additional Title II assistance (e.g., emergency food security program applications for cash/voucher distributions), and design of new, non-FFP-funded activities.

Despite the recognized utility of this information in informing response, all awardees noted challenges translating the information into a response process. These challenges stemmed from a number of factors, including:

- **A lack of clarity on what information to share and with whom.** Awardees reported being uncertain as to what information derived from their program-level early warning and response element to share with counterparts, in particular, USAID. USAID indicated a similar lack of clarity, both at the Mission and in Washington, as to what to do with this information to start a response process.
- **A lack of clarity on the internal and external processes for requesting additional Title II resources.** Building from the preceding point, without a clear sense of how communicated information was to be used to initiate a response or what the response process required, it was

difficult for Title II awardees to know what information to provide or for USAID staff to know what to do with provided information (e.g., how should reported information be evaluated, what paperwork is needed to add emergency resources to a development program).

- **Limitations in the response tools available through Title II.** While additional Title II resources can assist in responding to some issues identified through early warning monitoring, they are largely limited to food-related responses (e.g., in-kind food aid or vouchers or cash for the purchase of food). However, response needs among shock-affected populations are rarely similarly limited in scope. In addition, and related to the preceding point, within the Title II response options available, it was not clear to the Title II awardees whether/when they should request additional, emergency resources through their ongoing development program (including if the additional resources were to be requested in the form of cash or vouchers) or through a separate Title II (emergency) food program or the Emergency Food Security Program, in particular if the beneficiary population to be targeted by the additional assistance included populations beyond those that the development programs targeted and/or if the response required a modality not included in the original development program (e.g., cash transfers, food vouchers).
- **Limitations in local response capacity.** Pilot findings indicated that local counterparts (e.g., department-level GOH representatives, local institutions and organizations) often did not have the human, financial, and/or other resources necessary to regularly, substantively engage in these tasks. Difficulties in implicating local entities in this work in Haiti stemmed largely from the limited availability of resources to effectively support their maintenance (e.g., infrastructure, such as vehicles for monitoring, computers for analysis, and staff for both), exacerbated by a lack of clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between local and regional-/national-level counterparts, and not from a lack of appreciation of the utility of the work of the early warning and response element.
- **Limitations in donors' comfort with funding responses based on early warning information and availability of *ex ante* funding.** Even when strong data and analysis clearly indicated deteriorating conditions, and donors (including USAID/FFP) with the mandate to address the specified issues had been identified, the pilot findings indicate that these donors were sometimes reticent to provide even relatively small amounts of response resources based on early warning analysis. There were two key reasons for this reticence. First, while the ultimate goal of early warning is to alert decision makers to changing (in particular, deteriorating) conditions so that they can respond earlier, it is nearly impossible to prove that taking a specified set of *ex ante* mitigating actions will prevent a shock or reduce its negative impacts. Such uncertainty is unsettling when making decisions about allocating limited available response resources. In addition, while earlier responses to idiosyncratic events typically require fewer resources, their relatively smaller, less severe nature makes it challenging for donors allocating limited response resources to consider them against larger, covariate events that present clear emergency needs. See **Box 2** for an example of a challenge faced by one of the Title II awardees in Haiti that illustrates this tension.

### Box 2. Example: Tension between Idiosyncratic and Covariate Event Response

One example that highlights the tension between idiosyncratic and covariate event response occurred when one of the Title II awardee's monitoring systems in Haiti detected an increase in the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition in 1 of their 10 areas of implementation. As the Title II program did not have the expertise, equipment, or mandate to address the highly specific needs of severely acutely malnourished children, and as other international nongovernmental organization programming to address severe acute malnutrition through rehabilitation-focused activities in the area had ended during the second year of the Title II program, the awardee's response protocol required that it refer the cases to the catchment area's health center, which was several hours away by car and which was known to often lack the supplies (e.g., medicine and specialized foods) needed to treat severe acute malnutrition. While the overall caseload of affected families was small, the expertise and supplies needed to address the problem were not reliably available locally. Furthermore, because the caseload was so small, traditional donors did not respond to the situation either, leaving the Title II program in a position of having a clear evidence-based understanding of the problem and a means of communicating the gravity of the situation for those affected, yet no internal response capacity or ability to garner the needed immediate external response.

- **Differentiation of responsibilities between entities that undertake early warning analysis and those who respond.** While within Title II programs those who analyze data and those who initially respond to that analysis (e.g., by adjusting programming based on data findings) are co-located, this is not the case at most levels of response thereafter, both within the system in Haiti and in most other, external response entities (e.g., donors). That is, the entities that traditionally engage in early warning analysis at the state level or higher (e.g., CNSA in Haiti) are often not the response entities (e.g., in Haiti, response would typically fall under the purview of the DPC). The fact that the tasks of this element are spread across two entities in Haiti (i.e., data collection, reporting, and analysis through CNSA and response through DPC and/or other entities) and elsewhere further complicates its overall functionality and results in time lags in response as information is transmitted and discussed and responses are planned.

## 4.4 Additional Findings and Learning

In addition to the findings associated with the main tasks of the program-level early warning and response element, other important findings resulted from the pilot follow-up. Among these was the need to delineate whether the ultimate goal of the element was to create sophisticated program-level early warning analysis units to signal when conditions had deteriorated to a level meriting an additional resource stream or to build local capacity among targeted communities and the entities with which they interact to undertake basic early warning monitoring. Differentiating the element's principal purpose as one of early warning analysis for internal use or early warning capacity strengthening is important, as it has implications for the kinds of investments required for its function and its ultimate sustainability post-program. Indeed, one of the key findings of the follow-up pilot work was that while the data collection, analysis, reporting, and response systems were broadly functional within each Title II program in Haiti after 1½ years, it was not clear that local counterparts (e.g., CNSA departmental observatories) had the human or other resources required to continue to support the communities who were carrying out this work following these programs' closures.

One factor influencing the level of investment Title II programs made in the early warning and response element and its ultimate sustainability was where the element was housed within the program structure. One program participating in the Haiti pilot work made this element a strategic objective, providing it a somewhat higher programmatic profile and related higher levels of staff, funds, and other resources. The other two programs made the element part of their overall M&E plan, which tended to cause early warning work to be buried among other program monitoring responsibilities within a program component (M&E) that was already limited in terms of staff, funds, and other resources.

## 5 Recommendations

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The pilot findings indicate that the program-level early warning and response element is highly useful for Title II programming and should continue. The element’s utility rests in part in its ability to allow Title II programs and other stakeholders to better understand conditions in development program implementation areas—which often include populations highly vulnerable to food insecurity—and adjust/advocate for programming adjustments when necessary to be more responsive earlier. Stakeholders outside of Title II also highlighted a utility in this element in its ability to allow for granular-level data and information collection. This capacity for more detailed primary data collection is something that entities that focus on meta-level early warning analysis (e.g., CNSA, FEWS NET) have neither the resources nor the explicit mandate to undertake. As such, the Title II early warning and response element fills a clear institutional need. However, there is room to improve implementation of the element, and some course adjustments are recommended should the work of the element continue in future Title II development programs in Haiti and elsewhere.

While many of the findings of this pilot work in Haiti are transferrable to other contexts in which a program-level early warning and response element is or could be implemented, there were some factors unique to the Haiti context that FANTA acknowledges may complicate replication of this work. Among these is the fact that the GOH is heavily involved in food security analysis and has the technical capacity to engage in and, to some extent, support program-level early warning work, despite its relatively limited resources. In addition, the Title II awardees in Haiti were implementing programs with somewhat similar strategic objectives, though they were working in different geographic corners of the country. This made it easier for awardees to collaborate to develop one set of early warning and response components relevant for all programs and then focus their efforts on sharing information on how to collect and analyze the data. Similar synthesis of early warning and response element components may not be possible if Title II programs in a given country are working toward different strategic objectives, though regular collaboration and information sharing across these programs should persist regardless of such variation.

### 5.1 Recommendations for Title II Development Programs with an Ongoing Early Warning and Response Element

Programs that already have an early warning and response element should continue efforts to improve information sharing and collaboration, as well as local capacity strengthening among stakeholders, with a particular focus on the communities from which data are collected and local institutions associated with the collected data. For example, if rainfall data are collected, programs should share them with local meteorological department and local ministry of agriculture counterparts. In addition, it is recommended that ongoing Title II programs that have not already done so develop protocols for sharing their program-level early warning information with:

- Other Title II awardees in the country
- The USAID Mission in the country and/or region
- Other early warning technical counterparts (e.g., host-government food security monitoring entities, host-government ministries of agriculture and/or national meteorological services, FEWS NET country and/or regional technical managers)

## 5.2 Recommendations for Title II Development Programs Considering Including an Early Warning and Response Element

Programs that are considering including an early warning and response element should create a clear and distinct profile for how the element is incorporated within Title II development programming.

Distinguishing this element can take several forms, including making early warning a strategic program objective or a supporting intermediate result, or including early warning as part of the program’s overall M&E plan. It is critical that the positioning of the element ensures that specific staff members undertake early warning activities as a discrete responsibility with a discrete budget. For example, programs can create a specific team within the M&E unit that is dedicated to early warning-related data collection, analysis, and reporting, but this team should operate from its own budget share.

Programs should also clearly articulate the purpose of the proposed early warning and response element, and the extent of the element’s focus on early warning analysis for internal programmatic use versus early warning capacity strengthening of targeted communities and local counterparts. Awardees must find a balance between these purposes that creates a basic, functional early warning system that is relevant to the food security monitoring needs of host-government and other early warning stakeholders *and* strengthens local capacity (e.g., host-government, community) to undertake basic tasks related to program-level early warning. While these purposes overlap somewhat, there are significant differences between the skill sets and resources each requires. As such, it is imperative that programs answer the questions “how will the investments in establishing data collection, analysis, reporting, and response systems be used, during the life of activity of the program and following its conclusion, and by whom” at the program design stage.

## 5.3 Recommendations for FFP

There are several factors for FFP to consider when planning the future of the early warning and response program element. Given limited local capacities for continued implementation after programs end, and given the conceptual and practical challenges associated with developing trigger indicators and thresholds, FFP should consider shifting the purpose of the program element from one of internal program monitoring and management to one of strengthening community capacity to:

- Monitor food security conditions
- Share monitoring data with identified, appropriate sub-national, national, and international food security monitoring entities
- Self-advocate for assistance to perceived food security concerns using collected evidence

This shift in approach implies a need for the following actions:

- At the design stage, Title II awardees should clearly define and facilitate the development of partnerships between communities collecting food security monitoring information and the sub-national, national, and/or international entities who use this information. This will strengthen capacity across these entities to increase the likelihood that monitoring will continue post-program.
- FFP should develop clear guidance on how awardees are to report information gathered through these monitoring and data-sharing efforts to USAID (at both the Mission and Washington levels) and how USAID is expected to use the information. This includes providing guidance on the process for whether/how additional, emergency resources can be allocated to ongoing development programs.
- FFP should develop clear guidance on where within proposals to include this program element (e.g., as a cross-cutting objective, as a discrete component of the program’s broader M&E) and the level of priority (and relative budget share) it should receive vis-à-vis other development

programming elements. These factors have implications on the amount of resources programs will devote to implementation of this element and the feasibility of its post-program sustainability.

## **5.4 Additional Recommendations**

FANTA makes the following recommendations specific to the remaining challenges associated with implementation of the Title II program-level early warning and response element highlighted in this report.

### **5.4.1 Monitoring**

The majority of constraints Title II awardees faced in implementing the monitoring component of the program-level early warning and response element were attributable to insufficient resource planning and allocation. Meaningfully integrating an early warning element into programming requires a clear conceptual understanding of what the program hopes to achieve through the element and the allocation of sufficient resources (human, financial, and otherwise) to carry it out. Whether a program elects to house this element within its broader M&E system, as a cross-cutting objective, or as an intermediate result, these factors must be adequately planned for during the initial program design and budgeting process. As part of this planning and budgeting, it is recommended that programs utilize mobile technologies to transfer monitoring data whenever possible, as such an approach ultimately reduces the amount of time and other resources required for data collection, verification, and analysis.

The question of how to remunerate community participation is a perennial challenge in development programming, and finding a workable solution is no easier in this context. However, if programs shift the focus of the element to one of establishing a food security context monitoring system that involves community members in feeding needed information into sub-national and/or national structures, while also strengthening the capacity of these structures, it would increase the likelihood that demand for such services will continue following the program's life of activity.

### **5.4.2 Reporting and Analysis**

Several stakeholders consulted during the pilot follow-up indicated a standardized reporting template and associated guidance would be useful to improve flows of information. These would clarify for Title II awardees the minimum information to share and with whom to share it. Such an approach would also allow those who receive the information to more quickly identify trends within and across Title II program areas, as all programs would report information collected in similar ways with similar frequencies.

Determining whether pertinent historical information exists and is accessible is another perennial challenge of implementing this type of programming in developing country contexts. This information should be used where it can be located and applied. Where it cannot, however, programs can begin to establish a historical record for their implementation area, though they will need to factor the lack of such a record into their analysis of the data they collect and the conclusions they ultimately draw. With regard to establishing a context monitoring "baseline," it is recommended that programs include this in their planning and budgeting at the program design stage.

### **5.4.3 Response**

Even with clarity on reporting and response processes within Title II, many larger response challenges remain. Response needs typically vary by situation, and it is unlikely that FFP or any other development programming entity will possess the flexibility of mandate and resources to be all-responsive, even with the advent of Title II development programming that contains additional cash resources (e.g., Community

Development Funds). As such, Title II awardees must continue to be nimble in leveraging complementary resources through other programming, when needed. In addition, even when donors have flexibility and programs have a solid evidence base for requesting support for a response, this does not mean resources will be allocated. Donors must attempt to balance expressed needs, available resources, and other considerations in their response calculus. By default, this sometimes means bigger emergencies or other priorities win out over early response. While this is a reality of the work, it should neither preclude awardees from continuing to advocate for consideration of earlier response on both financial and ethical grounds, nor should it preclude donors from continuing to search for more nimble response mechanisms and designating a portion of response funds for early response/mitigation activities.

Given the numerous structural challenges developing countries face, even the most sustainably oriented program is unlikely to be able to fully address the myriad issues associated with limitations in local response capacity in one programming cycle. This is an unfortunate but practical reality of working in marginal contexts on relatively short programming cycles. This does not, however, minimize the importance of designing programming that creates a solid, relevant, useful, community-run food security context monitoring system and generating demand for the data and information it collects in a manner that addresses as many structural issues as is feasible.

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