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FINAL REPORT  
NUTRITIONAL ASSESSMENT OF AID  
ASSISTED ACTIVITY  
IN THE GAMBIA

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## PREFACE

This consultation was undertaken during the period from June 19 to July 15, 1983. Beyond numerous interviews and meetings held in the Banjul area, two field trips were successfully completed, one to the North Bank Division and the other to the Upper River Division and the McCarthy Island Division. Deepest appreciation must be expressed to the many people, both Gambian and expatriate, whose cooperation and hospitality were so important to the successful completion of this report. Special mention should be made of the essential contributions of Ms. Meri Ames of the Office of the AID Representative/Banjul and Mr. Nigel Taylor of The Gambian Ministry of Health. Without their continuing valuable support, this effort would have been impossible, given the time constraints and the breadth of the subject matter.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report has been specifically prepared to be of direct utility to the Office of the AID Representative (OAR) in The Gambia. It follows an earlier report prepared in March-April of 1983 during the evaluation and re-design of the Mixed Farming Project (MFP). If possible, this report should be read in conjunction with the MFP nutrition planning report. As this earlier effort provided a broad overview of the nutrition situation in The Gambia and as there are several other, similar overviews well known to OAR, such an overview will not be included in this report to avoid unnecessary duplication. However, for the reader without previous knowledge of The Gambia and without access to earlier overviews, the nutrition situation, based on available scientific and anecdotal information, has been very briefly and roughly summarized below.

### A. The Nutrition Situation

In an "average" year, the MFP report felt it was reasonable to assume that:

- At least one-third of children under five and a higher proportion of children under three would be seriously undernourished;
- At least one-half of pregnant and lactating women would be seriously undernourished;
- Somewhat less significant nutritional deficiencies of Vitamin A, riboflavin and, on a seasonal basis, Vitamin C would be found; and
- Protein requirements would be met for the great majority, but calorie (energy) deficiencies would be far and away the most significant problem.

The Gambia Government (GOTG) neither in colonial nor in modern times has had a nutrition division within its Ministry of Health (MOH), as has been the case in most other West African anglophone nations. There is thus a lack of data and experience over time with regard to nutrition, only partially ameliorated by the work of the Medical Research Council (UK) and Catholic Relief Services. Currently, a very limited amount of nutrition extension is sponsored by services within GOTG's Medical and Health Department (MHD) of the Ministry of Health, the Department of Agriculture (DOA) of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Department of Community Development (DCD).

The most severe nutritional problems occur, for all groups, during the rainy (planting) season at which time women expend a great deal of field labor, home food supplies are at their lowest point, child and infant care becomes uncertain and often insufficient, and infection rates are at their highest. Further aggravating the situation in recent years, the production of groundnuts, The Gambia's major export crop, has been low either because of climatic conditions or because the international market price for groundnuts has been below average or because both conditions have occurred in tandem. The results are drastically reduced national income which is normally used for the purchase of domestic and imported rice, the primary staple food of The Gambia.

#### B. OAR and Nutrition

As a result of the above situation and of the findings of the MFP report, OAR/Banjul requested the services of a nutrition planner to assess the Office's and the Government's efforts toward improving nutritional status and to make recommendations as to a strategy for future AID-assisted efforts. This report represents the response to that request. Due to funding limitations, this consultation had to be shortened from six to four weeks, thus requiring a tighter focus for the scope of work than had originally been desired. As a result, it was decided to concentrate on an assessment of the nutritional impact of current AID-assisted activities and recommendations directed toward improving the nutritional impact of future planned AID-assisted activities. This was to be accomplished within the framework established by OAR's Country Development Strategy Statement and its Annual Budget Submission. Therefore, the following sections of this report speak directly to those concerns.

## II. A REVIEW OF CURRENT AID-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

The projects of five AID-assisted organizations were identified during the initial briefing for review: Save The Children Foundation (working with DCD), Project Concern (working with MHD's primary health care system), the Mass Media project (within MHD), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) program, and the Mixed Farming Project. Primary emphasis was placed on the first four activities, as the farming project had been addressed from a nutrition planning perspective less than three months before. It should be noted that these observations are not an evaluation of the activities in the sense commonly used within the AID. Time constraints alone would have rendered such an evaluation futile. However, this report is a basic assessment with recommendations.

### A. Save the Children Federation (SCF)

SCF works closely in coordination with the Department of Community Development (DCD). Operational for less than a year, SCF is currently focusing its efforts in one-half of the North Bank Division. They have completed some initial training sessions for Community Development Assistants (CDAs), the Department's extension service primarily concerned with problem-solving techniques and enhancement of motivation. They have helped the CDAs work with villages in the creation of village gardens, communal farms (to supplement private farming for community purposes), construction of latrines, schools, and so forth. There is a very limited amount of nutrition training provided to CDAs for use during their extension work. Nutrition is not now a major emphasis and is not likely to become so in light of the mandates of other Ministries and Departments. However, it is important that what nutrition information is extended through the project be correct and supportive of other GOTG concerns. Although SCF/Gambia can call on the expertise available through its head office in the US, this is unlikely to be necessary, barring a major restructuring of the DCD's program.

Improvement of the nutrition aspect of the SCF/DCD extension work and its coordination with other agencies of the GOTG can be best pursued by liaison with the Nutrition Unit of MOH. The Nutrition Unit can provide technical

back-stopping, suggestions as to improved extension techniques, and can assure proper coordination with other nutrition extension efforts. SCF readily accepts this recommendation. Moreover, the matter was raised with MOH's nutrition officer, and he expressed willingness to do whatever he could to be of support to the program.

Currently, the program reaches only eight villages, and thus immediate impact is limited. However, SCF expects to be working with DCD for a number of years and further expects to expand its operations throughout the nation. Assuming that this program expansion does in fact occur, now is the time to begin coordination and to see that the technical information imparted in DCD extension services is accurate and useful. No difficulties are likely to arise, but OAR should verify collaboration from time to time during discussions with SCF and DCD.

#### B. Project Concern International

One of the most encouraging developments in MOH policy in The Gambia has been its decision to emphasize the development of an effective, village-oriented primary health care system. Although still in its infancy, discussions with many people directly and indirectly concerned with its operation indicate that the system basically is well-conceived and off to a reasonably good start. However, it is unfortunate that, as is so frequently the case with primary health care programs throughout Africa, nutrition is somewhat of a "step child." Very few resources, technical or financial, have been earmarked specifically for nutrition concerns. Nonetheless, the system is necessary and most, if not all, of the nutrition planning concerns which it raises can be dealt with locally, if dealt with now.

Project Concern's role in the system has provided or is providing technical expertise to the system's operation in three of The Gambia's divisions. The other regions are dealt with under other arrangements. With Project Concern's assistance, the system has recently produced a training manual for use with Village Health Workers (VHWs) and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). It deals with a number of concerns, nutrition among them. A review of the manual indicated vagueness in its nutrition-related instructions to VHWs and TBAs.

For example, the VHWs are instructed to recommend special diets for population sub-groups such as the elderly, weanlings, and others. However, there is no indication as to what those diets should be. This would not be too serious if these matters were being attended to during VHW/TBA training. Investigation indicated, however, that VHWs often knew the nutrition lessons they had been taught by heart, but lacked any additional information not clearly specified during training. Additionally, the Nutrition Unit of the MOH had been asked to review the lessons, had done so, and had made several recommendations for change. By oversight, few of those recommended changes appeared in the final publication of the manual.

It is important that AID-assisted activities get off to a good start, thus preventing the development of problems at a later date. The situation described above is a small, but significant, example of a poor start in regard to nutrition. It is strongly recommended that the nutrition lessons, only a small proportion of the total manual, be rewritten with the assistance of MOH's nutrition officer and inserted in the manual, replacing the current lessons. This will represent some inconvenience, but will be far less serious than re-training VHWs and TBAs in nutrition at a later date if the PHC's nutrition message is inappropriate. For example, the lessons seem to be biased toward protein foods rather than toward energy foods which, in my opinion, is the reverse of what should be the case. However, MOH's nutrition officer should have final determination regarding this and similar concerns.

Beyond this recommended change, the importance of primary health care, especially in the Gambian environment, should be stressed. OAR and AID/Washington wisely have chosen to support this program and should continue that support.

#### C. Stanford University/Academy for Educational Development

These two institutions jointly support the implementation of the Mass Media project in oral rehydration. The initial two years of the Mass Media project have been completed leading to a third "extension" year of activities designed to integrate and institutionalize the Mass Media approach. By all accounts, including its continuing internal evaluations, this project has been very

successful in getting its media message across to the Gambian population. It is generally accepted in nutrition planning that oral rehydration, while only a small part of the total picture, is nonetheless an important concept/practice in maintaining and encouraging improved nutritional status, particularly among infants and small children. For its evident success in educating the public in the use of an oral rehydration solution, the project deserves commendation. Undoubtedly, a number of important lessons have been learned in the use of Mass Media to spread a public health/nutrition message, lessons of value to the AID and to the GOTG.

Unfortunately, there appears to be another negative lesson to be learned from Mass Media's experience, not from the implementation of the project by Stanford and AID -- but with the initial conceptualization and design of the project itself.

Within the Medical and Health Department of MOH, the Department which is the service delivery system of the Ministry and which absorbs nearly 80% of the Ministry's budget, there has existed and exists a Health Education Unit (HEU). The mandate of the HEU includes such activities as Mass Media campaigns. It is thus the logical MOH institution to which the Mass Media project should have been attached. Whether or not this was ever envisioned during the project's conceptualization and design beyond passing reference, it was never made a condition for project implementation. Instead, Mass Media became, for all intents and purposes, a separate division, and an "expatriate" division at that, of the MHD. Given a considerable amount of administrative independence and shorn of a close day-to-day working relationship with an MHD unit, provided with (by Gambian standards) a large sum of money, adequate staffing, plenty of supplies, vehicles and so forth, Mass Media could hardly help but have a very significant, short-term impact. On the other hand, the HEU, which is expected to maintain and eventually expand on the Mass Media approach for the GOTG in the future, remains a tiny, under-staffed, under-financed, and all but unrecognized unit within MHD despite the great strides made by Mass Media.

Taking a closer look at the HEU, we find a small unit which appears nowhere in the MOH FY 1983-84 budget, and is thus completely dependent on handouts for its day-to-day activities. These handouts currently consist of some supplies (paper, pencils, etc.) and some petty cash (D660 or \$264) donated by UNICEF and some funds for training provided informally through MHD's In-Service Training budget, although this is not guaranteed. Despite these deficiencies, the unit is active in the preparation of materials using the UNICEF supplies and in the provision of training. But the staff must beg rides to the training center located some distance from Banjul or hire taxis out-of-pocket for which they hope to be reimbursed eventually by MHD. It is clear that during the first two years of the Mass Media project, little or nothing was accomplished in terms of integration/institutionalization with HEUs, and thus MHDs, ongoing activities. This reality was underlined by the decision of the MHD to extend the project for a third year in order to try and accomplish this integration/institutionalization "ex post facto." In recent months, not without some considerable pain and conflict, efforts have begun to merge the project's activities into the HEU. All parties agree that progress has been made and that further progress will be actively sought.

Integration/institutionalization should have been a primary objective from "day one" of project conceptualization, through project planning and project implementation. Because it was not, there is danger of having a very impressive short-term effect and a very unimpressive long-term effect in this particular area of concern. If the third year is not successful, the result may be something closer to a relief project than a development project. It could be argued that the HEU, at initiation of the project, was too small and under-supported to tolerate the integration of a project as large as Mass Media. If so, the project should have been scaled down in size or, preferably, the first phase of project activity (or an earlier, separate project) should have been designed to strengthen the HEU so as to make integration/institutionalization possible during Mass Media implementation.

In sum, the Mass Media project has made a real contribution to The Gambia. The integration/institutionalization difficulties mentioned above have been recognized and they are now being dealt with during the third year extension. AI and OAR should not inadvertently repeat this process in the nutrition

sector. It is, essentially, a question of absorptive capacity, a subject to be raised again later in this report. For the moment, it should be noted that MHD's Nutrition Unit is even less well supported than its Health Education Unit. Any relatively large-scale effort by either AID/Washington through central funding or by OAR/Banjul at this time in the area of nutrition would likely either swamp the infant Nutrition Unit or replace it with an activity which could neither be integrated nor institutionalized.

The Health Education Unit and the Mass Media project deserve praise for their recent and current efforts to bring about integration/institutionalization. Both AID and OAR should provide all necessary support to this process to bring it to a successful conclusion.

#### D. Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

The problems facing CRS/Gambia and OAR/Banjul in their relationships are not unusual in sub-Saharan Africa. These problems have developed over a number of years and, from experience, seem to be based on three basic factors: (1) an American PVO with a long history of involvement with PL 480 and Africa which has its own program objectives and desires to maintain its fullest programmatic independence (a situation not unique to CRS); (2) a local AID mission concern that one large portion (in dollar value) of the total AID effort in its nation be closely linked to, and supportive of, the important strategy objectives of the mission; and (3) a seeming inability on the part of AID/Washington and CRS/New York to come to a mutually acceptable agreement on the specifics of PL 480 programming. The result frequently has been confusion and inconsistency in AID/CRS relationships that would be unacceptable in nearly any other similar AID-PVO joint activity. The CRS program may be divided into two components: PL 480 distribution and other program efforts.

The debate as to whether the PL 480 food distribution program is a "relief" or a "development" program has raged for years. On the basis of my own experience and my observations of a number of such programs in Africa, my conclusion is that PL 480 is primarily a relief operation. Programming efforts have been instituted, as in Food for Work, whose intentions are to increase the developmental utility of food distribution. Nevertheless, the

use of imported foods and foreign distribution organizations effectively precludes real LDC integration and local institutionalization. The program can be justified on relief grounds given a recognized need. A malnourished population is not a firm foundation on which to build national development. On the other hand, PL 480 programs should be designed to be phased out over time. This, however, will not be practical until such time as AID and the donor/recipient community have successfully identified and implemented programs providing increased non-concessionary food availability to the malnourished segments of the population. To phase out the program prematurely would leave the same problems and no solution, even a short-term, relief solution.

In the Fall of 1983, CRS, GOTG, and AID jointly participated in a pre-evaluation assessment of the Gambian program. Various recommendations were made for program improvement. It was agreed that GOTG would call a meeting with CRS and OAR to approve and begin implementation of these recommended changes. To date that meeting has not taken place. This failure effectively frustrates everyone. AID and OAR do not have the assurances they require and CRS and the GOTG cannot receive approval from OAR for an expansion of the number of program recipients. This situation has gone on for months and is obviously programmatically disruptive. Discussions with the parties involved did not indicate any major reservations about implementation of the recommended changes, with the exception of OAR's reluctance to increase the number of recipients without clear evidence of need based on scientific studies rather than anecdotal information and unsubstantiated claims. If anyone has a hidden agenda, it must be brought out in the open immediately. The most effective way to do this is by holding the joint meeting which everyone has already agreed is needed. It is incumbent upon OAR and CRS to insist that this meeting be called at the earliest possible time. The longer this meeting is delayed, the weaker will be working relationships. At the meeting, OAR should insist that the recommended changes be instituted as quickly as possible, only altering the recommendations if OAR is convinced that such alterations have been fully justified, as alterations should have been made during the completion of the pre-evaluation assessment. Until such time as this meeting is successfully held and satisfactory evidence of additional need is

presented, OAR should continue to refuse consideration of any increase in program support.

Finally, CRS should give serious consideration to altering its food ration to include other grains than rice. The replacement of some or all of the rice with maize, sorghum, or millet would be further supportive of OAR's CDSS emphasis on agricultural diversification.

Beyond the PL 480 program, CRS is considering a number of other small projects which may have nutritional significance. The first phase of its oilseed project is completed and the second phase should begin, pending approval of funding. CRS is considering launching rabbit-raising projects for income generation and food production. Again, this also seems reasonable and nutritionally beneficial. Although not clearly linked to OAR strategy, it should be indirectly supportive. The single most interesting non-PL 480 project of CRS is its establishment of three mills for the processing of millet, sorghum, and maize. Decorticators are being attached to these mills to increase their utility. Given OAR's and GOTG's desire to reduce rice consumption and given that one complaint against using other grains is the difficulty in their processing, this seems to be an excellent project very supportive of OAR's strategy. CRS plans to add 20 more millers/decorticators in the near future. Local women's groups are trained to run them and take over their ownership and operation for the long term. This appears to be an excellent, village-based means of directing the entrepreneurial talents and enthusiasm of Gambian women, a means to save them considerable labor (identified as a major constraint to nutritional improvement) and, as mentioned, a means of encouraging the consumption of grains other than rice. It would behoove OAR to provide whatever support and encouragement is necessary to continue and expand this project, based on available information.

If OAR, CRS, and GOTG can work out a final understanding vis-a-vis the PL 480 program that agreement, combined with the other CRS projects, should bring CRS into reasonable compliance with OAR's country strategy. However, above all, it is absolutely essential that OAR's officers describe what it is they want from CRS and GOTG, communicate this clearly and expeditiously to both parties, and remain firm and consistent in their support of the determined policy. If

there is any one factor confusing the OAR/GOTG/CRS relationship, it is OAR's apparent indecision and inconsistency in this area.

E. Mixed Farming Project (MFP)/Colorado State University (CSU)

Somewhat less attention is given here to the MFP because a consultation in March/April of this year already has dealt with the nutrition policy planning aspects of this project.\* Several points should be re-emphasized.

One recommendation is that OAR should, itself, hire the recommended short-term nutrition consultants for the redesigned MFP with the assistance of AFR/TR/ARD (nutrition) as needed. Colorado State University and the Consortium for International Development (CID) have no specific expertise in the area of African nutrition, but rather are experts in the major components of the MFP such as agriculture, range management, and so forth. The expertise required for the short-term consultations does exist within other institutions, but is somewhat scattered. No one institution is likely to have all the necessary expertise within its staff. The consultations were designed to be undertaken by individuals with prior experience in West Africa and in each consultation's area of concern. The time allotted to each consultation is only sufficient if the consultant is able to "hit the ground running," thus the importance of experience directly related to the consultation's requirements.

A second point emphasizes the role of the female agricultural assistants and demonstrators who will be the primary beneficiaries of the proposed nutrition subcomponent of the MFP. These women have been referred to as "home economists." They are not home economists, but rather agricultural extension agents. Home economics is a worthy concern, but it is best dealt with, as is currently the case, by The Gambian Home Economics Association, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Community Development, and other similar agencies. AID has worked for some years in Africa to convince ministries of agriculture to include women on their extension staffs. It would be most regrettable, having begun to accomplish this in The Gambia, if these women were to cease

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\* This report also was done by Mr. Adams.

being seen as full-fledged agricultural extensionists and be relegated to a traditional "woman's role." Some additional nutrition training for the female extension agents may be warranted to assist them in optimizing their advice to women farmers who are also food preparers and to assist the GOTG's efforts to diversify food consumption habits. This training should not inadvertently lead to a re-definition of their fundamental role in agriculture. These women are indeed full extension agents, not home economists. AID should encourage, not discourage, this attitude.

### III. A REVIEW OF PROPOSED AID-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES

#### A. Agro-Forestry PID

This consultation overlapped with that of the Agro-Forestry PID team. At the request of the team leader, the Development Associates' consultant prepared an addition to their PID recommending the inclusion of a food consumption analyst nutritionist to prepare a study in the project area to determine the extent to which tree crops are currently utilized by the population, the types of food crops so utilized, and any additional tree crops that might be acceptable. It is intended that this study will assist the proposed project to identify tree species for project introduction that will have the maximum beneficial nutritional impact on the affected population. When considering a project that may potentially have nutritional impact, it would be very useful to include someone with nutrition/food consumption expertise at the initiation of the design. Had a nutrition planner not been available here, it is entirely possible that this recommendation might have "fallen out" of the final PID preparation. Thus, an opportunity to increase nutritional impact would have been lost. Now this potential project, on the basis of the information available, appears to offer positive nutritional benefits.

#### B. PL 480, Title II, Section 206

The PID has been prepared and is currently undergoing review in Washington. Two comments are warranted. A primary purpose of this proposed activity would be to support OAR's agricultural diversification efforts. For agricultural diversification to succeed, food consumption patterns will have to change. It seems that it might have been beneficial to recommend the diversification of the foods to be imported under this program rather than limiting imports to rice. Inclusion of maize, sorghum, or millet to the imported commodities might attain the same PL 480 goal, while encouraging changes in food consumption patterns. It might be argued that Section 206 foods would most likely be purchased by middle and upper income groups who might be expected to prefer rice and shun other grains. Evidence now is that this may not be the case.

The CEAP project study in the Diourbel Region of Senegal (whose characteristics are similar in many respects to the rural Gambia) found that as income rose, while purchases of rice increased, purchases of millet increased much more rapidly. As a result, the proportion of grain consumption attributable to millet significantly increased rather than decreased, as incomes rose (pp. 219-220 of CEAP report on Cameroon and Senegal studies). Thus, it is possible that the addition of a grain such as millet to the Section 206 commodities might actually improve sales and public support, while encouraging diversification in consumption.

Secondly, assuming the approval and implementation of this project, monies are expected to become available for use in development projects. While it is far too premature for a discussion of how any such monies might be spent specifically, this program could result in a source of funds for, among other purposes, the support of nutrition and nutrition-related initiatives at a future point when the GOTG's absorptive capacity might allow for the successful introduction of such initiatives.

## IV. GENERAL REMARKS - MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The Gambian Ministry of Health, as noted earlier, does not have a history of activity in nutrition extension nor does it have a nutrition division.

Currently, MHD's Nutrition Unit consists of one person: Mr. Nigel Taylor, a British VSO. Although recognized as intelligent, competent, and dedicated to establishing the Nutrition Unit as an effective, functional arm of the MHD, he currently has no budget, no vehicle, no counterpart, and no assistants. Directed by the MHD to create a Nutrition Unit, Mr. Taylor is obviously starting from scratch. However, as also mentioned in the MFP report, difficult though this initial situation may be, it does mean that he can concentrate on developing a nutrition program that directly meets current Gambian problems without carrying the "excess baggage" that is sometimes found in an out-moded, colonially-created nutrition program, as sometimes has been the case elsewhere in Africa.

Since his arrival less than a year ago, Mr. Taylor already has increased the visibility of the nutrition sector at MHD and GOTG generally. In support of his efforts, British ODA has, as its nutrition activity in The Gambia, agreed to provide him with a vehicle and money for spare parts, about \$300 annually for supplies over three years, another \$300 x 3 years for teaching supplies, another \$300 for office supplies, and about \$40,000 over three years for training fellowships designed for Gambian associates. Assuming this funding goes through without difficulty, his ability to pursue nutrition activities will be substantially enhanced. A Gambian counterpart is currently in training overseas and another potential associate is being considered for training. AID support might fall into one of two areas as follows. The Gambian associate awaiting training has been under consideration by AID as a participant for some time. She will again be considered for third country training by AID in the very near future. She should be provided a short, practical course (seven months to a year) in either Barbados or Jamaica. The two programs offered in these nations appear most appropriate to The Gambia's and MHD's needs. The second item is that the proposed British aid does not include any funds for the purchase of petrol for the new vehicle. Given the demands made on MHD's petrol ration, this could leave the Nutrition Unit immobile. Any means by which OAR could assist the Unit in

getting a small petrol allocation, could be one of the least expensive and most useful in supporting the Unit's development.

Otherwise, as mentioned in the Mass Media section of this paper, the Nutrition Unit, by virtue of being very new and very small, is at a vulnerable stage. Too much enthusiastic support from a foreign donor such as AID could easily overwhelm the Unit or effectively replace the Unit with a foreign project. This would be a very unfortunate development in the institutionalization process. On the other hand, simply ignoring the Unit could also be injurious. It is recommended that OAR and AID should stand ready to provide small-scale, short-term assistance to the Unit upon MHD's and the Unit's request and justification. Such assistance might entail TDY technical assistance, a seminar, a workshop, assistance in developing/producing a manual, or some other similar small, but important, effort. In future nutrition planning consultations to OAR, an assessment can be made whether the Unit is then ready for more significant, larger-scale AID support, assuming this falls within future OAR country strategy. Although limited in scope, this level of AID support to the Nutrition Unit should be within the Unit's absorptive capacity currently and as projected in the near future.

## V. GENERAL REMARKS - MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

A few brief comments on MOA/DOA's general orientation toward nutrition are warranted. MOA/DOA's basic thrust seems to be almost entirely focused on the change in food consumption from rice to other grains, and understandably so, given the focus of OAR's strategy and MFP activities. This, in effect, seems to represent "nutrition" to the Ministry and the Department. Their eagerness to move quickly in this area appears to be the major force behind their interest in developing a nutrition unit within DOA. It further results in suggestions, such as that of Gambia's Undersecretary of State and MOA's Acting Permanent Secretary, that AID finance the construction of a factory for the production of processed maize to be sold on the free market as an alternative to rice. Not a nutrition project, but a project with nutritional implications, it is doubtful that it would be economically feasible, particularly in getting the finished product into the hands of those segments of the population most nutritionally in need: the rural poor. Further, should it ever be given serious consideration by OAR as a project in the future, it should not be assumed without evidence that it would necessarily lead to maize supplanting rice in the diet, but might only lead to maize supplementing rice, thus defeating the purpose of drastically cutting rice imports. This project or a similar proposal should not be allowed to interfere with, or replace, the nascent efforts being supported through the MFP that are encouraging the Department of Agriculture's extension service to provide simple, practical information regarding the best use of maize in the Gambian diet.

## VI. NUTRITION AND THE OAR COUNTRY STRATEGY

The major thrusts of OAR's country strategy are to focus on improved national financial management and improved agricultural production/consumption through the introduction of increased agricultural diversification. Improved national financial management would undoubtedly positively influence all development sectors, including nutrition. Further, nutrition and nutritional concerns fit "hand in glove" with OAR's stress on agricultural diversification. Simply put, whether consciously or unconsciously sought, any success in diversifying national agricultural production and consumption will, "ipso facto," have an impact on nutritional status in The Gambia. The only question remaining is whether that impact will be beneficial or harmful. It is not a recommendation nor is it OAR's desire to support large-scale nutrition interventions in The Gambia at this time. However, OAR can and should address nutritional concerns within the scope of its strategy and with a comparatively small allocation of time, money, and effort. The detailed recommendations found elsewhere in this report can generally be combined into two broad recommendations:

- the provision for nutritional expertise in the design of future OAR-assisted projects, and
- The small-scale, but valuable, support of nascent nutrition units in the Ministries of Health and Agriculture to increase the GOTG's absorptive capacity sufficiently to deal with nutrition effectively on a national basis and to serve as a foundation for future activity that may be required by the fruition of OAR's country strategy.

One potential problem that may be faced at some point in the future in support of the first general recommendation above might be the lack of available nutrition expertise when needed in design. Although it may be best to bring in a "third party" from outside The Gambia to provide assistance in project design, it is entirely possible that it would be reasonable to ask the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Unit to advise in this regard, assuming no direct conflict of interest. If feasible and acceptable to both OAR and the Unit, this could provide the additional benefit of saving on the expenditure of AID funds. For this purpose, the OAR may wish to request central funding to provide for an annual review and assessment of the nutritional situation as it relates to the

OAR nutritional strategy. Such a review offers the benefit of an outsider view on a consistent basis to assure that developments in Gambian nutrition are supportive of the country strategy.

In summation, the recommendations presented in this report support the general direction of OAR's country strategy. Nutrition-related activities lie within the absorptive capacity of the GOTG and the administrative capabilities of the OAR. The conclusions echo Mr. Adams' findings of last year that improving the nutritional impact of OAR's country strategy will be most benefitted by: "...A step-by-step approach that requires that each step to be initiated only as a logical extension of earlier steps. To move too slowly or not at all would clearly jeopardize the proper realization of this potential ... to move too quickly and too ambitiously could, as has happened in other nations, lead to the rapid development of an ill-conceived and poorly planned program that would require endless foreign funding for its maintenance or face collapse upon withdrawal of that funding. Undertaken expeditiously but thoughtfully, AID/Banjul has the opportunity to join the GOTG in the creation of an effective nutrition program that could well serve as a model for other sub-Saharan African nations and the developing world as a whole."\*

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\* An earlier recommendation in that same report appears to have been overtaken by events. It was suggested that AID and OAR consider the implementation of a national food consumption and nutritional status survey to provide accurate, scientifically acceptable data for the entire nation. During this consultation, a joint FAO/WHO team arrived in Banjul. They have been given the specific mandate to design and implement a national survey and to follow this by assisting in the organization of a nutritional surveillance system. As a result, the earlier recommendation in this regard should be suspended, at least until the FAO/WHO effort has been completed and their results are available.

## VII. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a list of each of the major recommendations made in this report for OAR's consideration.

## Recommendations

1. Encourage Save The Children Foundation to liaise more effectively with MOH Nutrition Unit.
2. Project Concern should seek re-writing of PHC manual lessons on nutrition with help of the MDH Nutrition Unit.
3. Every effort should be made to encourage the smooth integration of Mass Media activities into MHD's Health Education Unit.
4. The OAR/CRS/GOTG joint meeting on the pre-evaluation assessment's recommendations should be held as quickly as possible.
5. CRS should consider replacing some or all of the rice component of its ration with maize, sorghum, or millet.
6. Extension of CRS grain mills/deccorticators should be encouraged.
7. Lacking the joint meeting (#4) and substantiation of need, OAR should refuse to increase PL 480 recipients.
8. OAR policy regarding the CRS program should be clarified, communicated clearly, and stood by firmly.
9. MFP nutrition consultants should be hired by OAR with the assistance of AFR/TR/ARD (nutrition).
10. DOA's female Assistants and Demonstrators should be treated only as agricultural extension agents, not home economists.
11. Agro-Forestry design should continue to stress the importance of selecting nutritionally beneficial tree crops for introduction.
12. PL 480, Title II, Section 206 should consider a diversification of imported commodities beyond rice.
13. PL 480-generated funds available for development projects generated by sales should be used for nutrition support.
14. If possible, AID should provide a small amount of money as a petrol allowance for MHD's Nutrition Unit. *will come to AID for aid*
15. Short-term participant training in a third country should be provided for the Nutrition Unit's candidate.

16. OAR and AID should be prepared to provide centrally-funded technical assistance upon request/justification of MHD's Nutrition Unit.
17. A maize processing factory should not become the primary focus for nutrition activities in MOA/DOA.
18. Provision should be made for nutritional expertise in the design of future projects concerned with a diversification and related areas.
19. Efforts in support of nutrition units in MOH and MOA should concentrate initially on an increase in absorptive capacities in advance of larger-scale efforts.
20. Provision should be made for an annual review/assessment of OAR and GOTG nutrition and nutrition-related activities through use of central funds.

## INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

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