



COUNTRY BRIEF: GHANA

Promoting appropriate complementary feeding practices through a social marketing strategy

Introduction to IYCN in Ghana

In 2010 and 2011, the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project provided technical assistance to the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to promote appropriate complementary feeding practices and encourage increased use of high-quality, fortified complementary foods to curb malnutrition among children 6 to 23 months of age. Working in nine districts of Ghana's Brong Ahafo region, the project used a social marketing approach to engage households and communities through radio spots, radio discussions with community health workers and community leaders, and use of social and behavior change communication materials. These behavior change techniques aimed to increase knowledge and application of appropriate complementary feeding practices among low-income households caring for young children.

An IYCN literature review found that the diets of young Ghanaian children are typically plant-based and include little or no iron-rich animal-source foods needed to prevent anemia among young children. In addition, foods used for complementary feeding fall significantly short of recommended iron densities, especially among the diets of children 6 to 8 months of age.

In 2010, a GAIN study found that there was a need for a fortified, instant cereal that could offer caregivers in Ghana an affordable way to enhance their children's nutrition. To meet this need, GAIN identified Yedent Agro, a local, private-sector food manufacturer, to develop a high-quality, fortified complementary food for children under five years of age. Subsequently, GAIN partnered with PATH and IYCN to design a social marketing strategy aimed at building demand for such a food and improving complementary feeding behaviors among the target population.

Context for nutrition programming

When children in Ghana become old enough to eat foods other than breastmilk, at 6 months of age, many are not fed in a way that supports their health and growth; only 46 percent of children 6 to 23 months of age are fed according to international infant and young child feeding recommendations.¹ These poor feeding practices lead 28 percent of children under five years of age to be stunted and 14 percent to be underweight.

"We are thinking of ending malnutrition in children in line with Millennium Development Goal 4. If we don't feed them well we cannot achieve this. That is why this [IYCN] project is very important and timely for the Regional Health Directorate."

—WS Supiimeh, Regional Health Promoter

¹ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Measure DHS. Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2008. Accra, Ghana: GSS; 2008.



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Project activities and accomplishments

In Ghana, IYCN supported GAIN, and collaborated with the Ghana Health Service (GHS), health management teams at the regional and district level, and Yedent Agro to improve feeding practices for young children 6 to 23 months of age.

Increased understanding of complementary feeding practices

The project first conducted a literature review of infant and young child feeding practices and anemia control and iron supplementation activities in Ghana to identify gaps in information. The review revealed caregivers' inadequate knowledge about appropriate foods to give young children and common perceptions that contribute to malnutrition, such as a cultural belief that children should not eat animal-source foods. As part of the literature review, IYCN also created an inventory of training curricula, job aids, and social and behavior change communication (BCC) materials that have been or are currently being used. The project disseminated findings from the literature review to the National Nutrition Partners Consultative Committee at its bimonthly meeting.

IYCN then conducted a baseline survey of 270 caregivers to understand current knowledge and practices related to complementary feeding. To determine changes in caregiver behaviors as a result of the intervention, GAIN plans to conduct an endline survey at the end of 2012.

“I was part of the data collection process and listening to the preliminary results gives me a sense of ownership; also the results show what is happening in the district and it shows us the work we are doing in the districts. We’ve learnt a lot here. We are going back to educate the mothers on what they are not doing well and encourage them to continue the good feeding practices.”

—*Technical officer, Vivian Dapaah District*

Selected results of baseline survey with 270 caregivers

Reported complementary feeding practices	
Caregivers who followed the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommended practice of starting complementary foods at 6 months	38%
Caregivers who gave fortified complementary foods to their children aged 6 to 9 months two or more times per day	58%
Caregivers who gave their children aged 6 to 9 months porridge thick enough to stay on a spoon	27%

Developed social marketing strategy to support optimal complementary feeding

Based on findings from the literature review and baseline survey, IYCN collaborated with GHS and employed Lintas, a local social marketing firm, to develop a social marketing strategy for promoting improved complementary feeding of young children. The strategy included training 196 community health workers on appropriate complementary feeding practices using locally available and affordable foods; training 137 community leaders to use BCC materials, including posters and leaflets; and airing radio spots that included discussions about community issues affecting complementary feeding practices on eight local radio stations. IYCN worked closely with District Health Management Teams in the region to target low-income households in rural and peri-urban communities to implement training and behavior change communication activities.

As part of the strategy, IYCN developed and pre-tested key messages on complementary feeding and collaborated with USAID’s Behavior Change Support (BCS) Project to incorporate the messages into a radio series and BCC materials designed for a broader, national behavior change communication campaign aiming to improve maternal and child health. IYCN helped launch the campaign, *Healthy Eating for Good Life*, during an event in October 2011. During the event, key stakeholders in the region pledged their support for improved infant and young child feeding. With the support of GAIN, GHS, the BCS Project, and Yedent Agro, the campaign will continue through the end of 2012.

From October 2010 to December 2011, the project:

- Aired 855 radio spots with key messages on complementary feeding on *Radio BAR, Omega FM, Success FM, Jerryson FM, Chris FM, Adarz FM, Star FM, and Royals FM*. An additional 340 spots are scheduled to air in January 2012.
- Distributed 5,860 posters with key messages.
- Distributed 19,428 flyers with key messages.
- Trained 196 health workers and 137 community group leaders in appropriate complementary feeding practices and the use of BCC materials.
- Reached around 2,500 community group members with appropriate complementary feeding messages through trained group leaders.

Partnered with public and private sectors to carry out social marketing strategy

A key component of the social marketing strategy was a public-private partnership with Yedent Agro, a local, private-sector food manufacturer. IYCN supported GAIN to facilitate collaboration between GHS and Yedent to promote the use of the new fortified complementary food—an instant cereal fortified with daily requirements of vitamins and minerals for children 6 to 23 months of age. It is expected that the food will be affordable to most caregivers in the target area.

IYCN engaged GHS and Yedent in a working group to coordinate social marketing activities with Yedent’s product marketing activities and to plan and monitor joint activities. In addition, members of Yedent’s marketing team participated in IYCN’s training workshops on complementary feeding to increase their knowledge in this area.



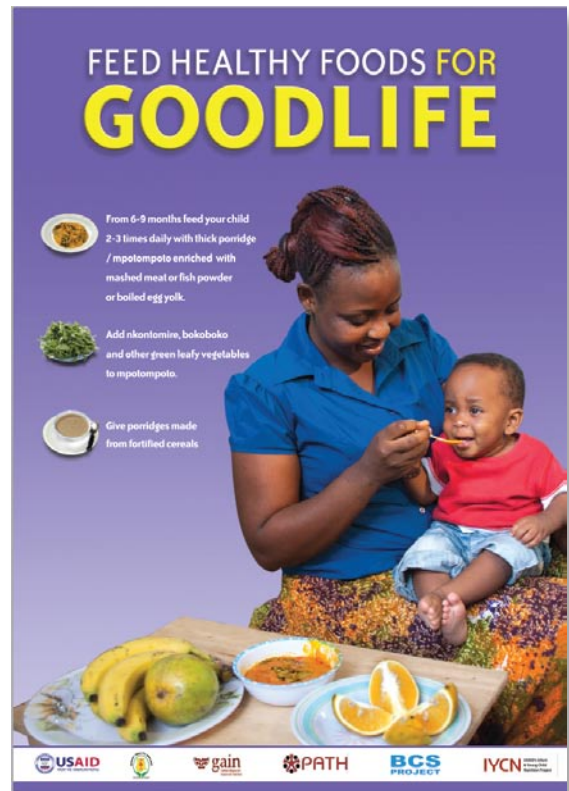
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“This project is a good start of what we want to see in the community; that the caregiver is empowered to be in charge of the health and good development of their children. What I would also like to see is strengthening the skills and competencies of the health providers so that [they] would be able to help caregivers do appropriate feeding especially for the children under two years.”

—Mrs. Wilhelmina Okwabi, Deputy Director of Health Services (Nutrition)



“I learned a lot of things here. You see my son likes the breastmilk and the only other thing he will eat is porridge; so I am going to read this leaflet so that it will guide me on what to feed him. You see he is my firstborn so his health is important to me.”

—Nursing mother

Lessons learned

- *Engaging District Health Management Teams is integral to success.* IYCN and partners engaged district heads early in the process. As a result, they demonstrated strong support for the activities and they are poised to monitor the community-level activities to ensure effective rollout, dissemination, and distribution of BCC materials.
- *Partnerships can help to expand reach.* By collaborating with the BCS Project and leveraging a national behavior change communication campaign, the project was able to expand reach of the complementary feeding messages. Although the social marketing strategy targets the Brong Ahafo region, radio spots and BCC materials will be spread across the country as part of the *Healthy Eating for Good Life* campaign. Local partners at the district level, such as World Vision Ghana, also carried messages into districts outside of the project’s target area.
- *Job-aids are necessary in communicating behavior change messages.* Health workers in the target districts welcomed posters and leaflets that contained key messages and were grateful for them. It certainly made work easier for them. Since the orientations, community workers have displayed posters on walls in vantage points in all the communities and caregivers discussed the contents of the leaflets at community meetings.



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Stakeholders from the national, regional, and district levels, and other partners collaborated to develop the intervention.

Looking ahead

After the project completes activities in December 2011, GHS will continue to implement the social marketing strategy and the District Health Management teams will monitor and support community-level activities. Once Yedent releases its fortified complementary food in June 2012, it will integrate its advertising of the product into the *Eating Healthy for Good Life* campaign. GHS will conduct an endline survey in order to determine changes in behaviors as a result of the intervention. Toward the end of 2012 an end line survey will be conducted to measure the impact of the project. IYCN hopes that the findings will help guide future nutrition programs in the region and across the country.

Available resources

- Literature review and rapid assessment on infant and young child feeding, anemia control, and iron supplementation in Ghana (2011)
- Complementary feeding poster (2011)
- Three food groups poster (2011)
- Complementary feeding leaflet (2011)
- Baseline study report (2011)

Visit www.iycn.org/Ghana

ABOUT THE INFANT & YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION PROJECT

The Infant & Young Child Nutrition Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The project is led by PATH and includes three partners: CARE, The Manoff Group, and University Research Co., LLC. For more information, please contact info@iycn.org or visit www.iycn.org.