

COUNTRY BRIEF: **MADAGASCAR**

Strengthening maternal nutrition policies and programs

Introduction to IYCN in Madagascar

From 2008 to 2011, the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Infant & Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project worked in Madagascar to strengthen programs that address the high rate of malnutrition among mothers and their young children. To help the country meet its national goal of halving the number of chronically malnourished children younger than five years of age by 2015, IYCN collaborated with both governmental and nongovernmental partners to assess gaps in coverage and quality among Madagascar's nutrition programs. This assessment revealed a great need to strengthen the country's maternal nutrition programs. IYCN worked with partners to develop a comprehensive, national maternal nutrition strategy that includes recommendations for how to strengthen these programs and advocated for adoption of the recommendations by the government and donors.

Context for nutrition programming

The 2008 *Lancet* series on maternal and child undernutrition included Madagascar, where 42 percent of children are underweight and 48 percent are stunted, on its list of ten countries with the highest prevalence of malnutrition. Women in Madagascar are some of the most undernourished in sub-Saharan Africa. Twenty-one percent of women suffer from chronic energy deficiency and 17 percent of infants are born with low birth weight, an indicator of poor maternal nutrition. Iron deficiency in children and women of reproductive age is a major public health problem, with 38 percent of pregnant women suffering

from anemia. Anemia is a dangerous condition that can lead to increased risk of preterm births, low-birth weight babies, and complications that threaten the survival of pregnant women during and after child birth.

Project activities and accomplishments

Assessed critical gaps in nutrition programming

Applying geographic information systems technology, IYCN mapped national coverage of government- and nongovernmental organization-led nutrition programs, determining where nutrition programs operated, where interventions overlapped, and where there were programmatic gaps. In collaboration with the USAID-funded BASICS project, IYCN also conducted a rapid review of essential nutrition actions—a group of evidence-based nutrition and health interventions delivered at health facilities and in communities. This review provided information on staff capacity to support the interventions at health centers, the effectiveness of community-based efforts, the availability of supportive materials, and lessons learned. Based on this work, IYCN updated a national curriculum on maternal nutrition for community volunteers, which is being further adapted by CARE.

Key findings from IYCN's mapping analysis, which were presented in a national workshop and disseminated to partner organizations, revealed that coverage of community nutrition activities has not been consistent across the country, with significant overlap in some areas and sparse coverage in other regions. The analysis also found

Addressing nutrition gaps

After reviewing IYCN's *Gap Analysis of Nutrition Coverage*, the United Nations World Food Programme staff in Madagascar realized that their food-assistance activities could be more effective if they were linked to other nutrition programs. As a result, they identified several new nutrition partners in the south of the country and were able to plan more effectively to avert their programs from overlapping with other interventions.

that implementing partners were concerned about the quality of nutrition programs, and maternal nutrition activities were poor, in terms of both quality and coverage.

Developed a strategy for improved maternal nutrition

Following completion of IYCN's mapping analysis and a national evaluation of nutrition programs, Madagascar's National Nutrition Office and partners concluded that Madagascar needed a comprehensive maternal nutrition strategy. IYCN supported the government to develop this strategy by collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders to establish priorities and key actions toward improving maternal nutrition. The project used information gathered from mapping nutrition interventions to suggest high-priority issues for inclusion in the strategy, which links maternal nutrition to multiple maternal and child health services, such as family planning and malaria prevention. Madagascar is now one of few countries to have an action plan for maternal nutrition.

Strengthened maternal nutrition programming

Although political unrest in early 2009 prevented the National Nutrition Office from officially integrating the maternal nutrition strategy into the national nutrition plan, partners are currently using it to develop new and improved maternal nutrition interventions. For example, IYCN's research motivated the Santé Net II project—an integrated bilateral project supported by the USAID mission in Madagascar—to pursue formative research on iron-folic acid (IFA) supplementation for pregnant

“The new maternal nutrition strategy gives us the missing piece in the plan to fight malnutrition. It will help us break the cycle of malnutrition and address nutrition problems for women well before a child is conceived.”

— Benjamin Andriamitantoa of USAID/Madagascar

women. IYCN worked with Santé Net II to examine the behaviors of pregnant women participating in its community-based IFA supplementation program. Using the barrier analysis methodology, the project identified factors that prevent women from taking IFA supplements regularly to prevent anemia.

IYCN then supported two consensus-building workshops to introduce stakeholders to the barrier analysis methodology and the project's maternal nutrition framework as well as to share recommendations on how to improve the IFA supplementation program. Partners are using the information shared during the workshops to strengthen nutrition programming.

Lessons learned

- Creating a separate national maternal nutrition strategy that links with the government's broader nutrition plans can help to prioritize maternal nutrition problems and bring visibility to solutions.
- When it is not possible to collaborate with government, program implementers can find ways to collaborate with a variety of other partners to move activities forward.
- Sharing assessment results with partners can inform the planning of new programs and drive new collaborations.

Looking ahead

IYCN recommends that partners use the maternal nutrition strategy to design and strengthen programs. Partners can also use the recommendations from the barrier analysis of Santé Net II's community-based IFA supplementation program to address maternal anemia in addition to applying the barrier analysis methodology to understand other key behaviors related to maternal, infant, and young child nutrition.

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.