

USAID'S INFANT & YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION PROJECT

# Good nutrition, healthy futures

Our solutions for preventing malnutrition of mothers, infants, and young children worldwide

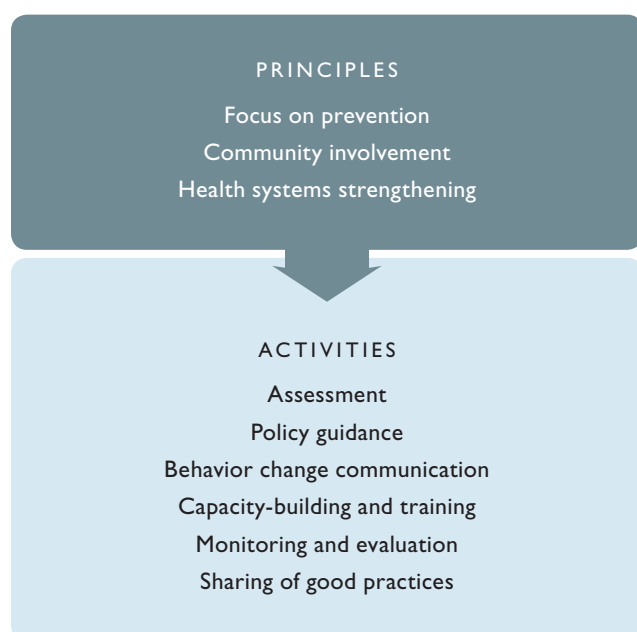




Every day, children in the developing world struggle to get the nutrition they need. Staying well-nourished early in a child's life can pave the way for a strong, healthy future. Malnourished infants and young children can suffer from severe illnesses, stunted growth, developmental delays, and death. In more than one-third of child deaths in developing countries, maternal and child undernutrition is an underlying cause.

The Infant & Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project works around the world, with our strongest presence in Africa, to design and implement interventions to prevent malnutrition during the first thousand days—the critical time from before pregnancy through a child's second year of life. IYCN's country activities draw on evidence and innovations from programs across the globe. In each country, local staff with strong experience managing nutrition programs are *nested* within the offices of IYCN partners—providing cost-effective and locally appropriate solutions. Starting with a number of core elements, we tailor our work to the needs of individual countries and collaborate closely with country partners.

#### IYCN'S APPROACH



## COUNTRY SOLUTIONS

We focus on influencing the delivery of health services to reach individuals and communities with tools and information about nutrition. To ensure sustainability, we work within existing health systems to provide guidance on nutrition policies, build the capacity of health workers, and encourage positive behaviors for maternal, infant, and young child nutrition. We assess health systems, monitor and evaluate interventions, and share good practices for preventing malnutrition.

## IYCN PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

### Focusing on prevention

Ensuring appropriate nutrition early in life is critical for good health and future productivity. By emphasizing prevention of malnutrition, our programs contribute to reduced morbidity and mortality, improved school performance, and increased productivity later in life. IYCN supports families, communities, and countries in using optimal nutrition practices based on international recommendations. An important focus of our approach is to maximize HIV-free survival by supporting HIV-positive mothers to safely implement optimal infant and young child feeding practices.

### Involving communities in addressing malnutrition

Infant and young child feeding happens at home, not in health facilities, so IYCN focuses on solutions that start at the community level. We begin by supporting health care providers and equipping them with the skills they need to support caregivers in optimally feeding their children. We train a wide range of community workers to understand mothers' current practices, constraints, and beliefs around feeding their children and to counsel them on the best ways to meet their children's nutritional needs.

We also help communities support mothers' decisions and overcome challenges and barriers to providing optimal feeding by engaging families through mother support groups, male groups, and grandmother groups. To enhance follow-up in the community and increase utilization of health services, we strengthen two-way referral systems between health facilities and communities.

### Strengthening systems to improve services for mothers and children

IYCN strengthens health systems to build a supportive environment for nutrition counseling. We work with partners and health workers to integrate nutrition into child health, antenatal care, maternity, HIV treatment, family planning, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) programs. Importantly, we collaborate with government to introduce supportive supervision procedures to enhance health workers' skills.

Using a quality improvement approach, the project identifies areas where improvements can be made in facility- and community-based nutrition services and organizes service providers to create solutions and assess progress in introducing improvements.

## OUR ACTIVITIES

IYCN's contribution to country nutrition programming focuses on six key elements: assessment to tailor our contribution to the local situation and needs; policy guidance to lay the foundation for coordinated action; development of social and behavioral change communication strategies, materials, and tools; capacity-building to boost human resources supporting nutritional improvements; monitoring and evaluation to improve management and assess impacts; and sharing of good practices to expand the global impact of nutrition programs.

### Assessing the need

To develop responsive, effective strategies, we work with each country to assess the situation and identify needs for nutrition programs. We focus on identifying gaps in service provision where IYCN can contribute to national needs, and on barriers and facilitators to optimal nutrition practices. The results of these assessments help to inform strategies, training curricula, policy guidance, and materials.

In Malawi, we conducted qualitative research on infant and young child feeding practices to identify feeding problems and nutrient shortfalls. Investigators then offered mothers tailored solutions for improving their infants' nutrition, such as substituting fruit for biscuits or sugary drinks. IYCN and partners used the findings to develop a national strategy for improving feeding practices and to create social and behavior change communication and training materials targeting specific caregiver practices.

### Offering clear guidance on infant feeding in Haiti

In Haiti, health workers lacked clear guidance and faced conflicting messages on both broad-scale and HIV-specific infant feeding, resulting in potentially harmful information for mothers. To help health workers effectively support their patients, IYCN worked with the Ministry of Public Health and Population to draft national guidelines to improve nutrition for infants and young children. With the support of more than 100 partner organizations, the IYCN team created a guide that offers consistent messages on infant feeding for both HIV-positive and non-HIV populations. In July 2009, the Ministry of Public Health and Population began introducing the guide to health workers across the country.



Nicole Racine

### Providing policy guidance

In order to create an enabling environment for nutrition programming, we collaborate with ministries of health and other partners to incorporate current international nutrition recommendations into national policies and guidelines.

For example, in Madagascar, IYCN collaborated with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders to develop an evidence-based maternal nutrition strategy that complements the government's broader nutrition plans and addresses the specific nutritional needs of women. In Côte d'Ivoire, IYCN assisted the government to complete a pocket-sized guide for health workers focused on nutritional care and support for orphans and vulnerable children.

### Changing behaviors and mobilizing communities

Social and behavior change communication activities are a key component of IYCN's strategic approach to achieve sustainable improvements in maternal, infant, and young child nutrition. Improving key practices requires change at the individual, household, and community levels and in services for mothers and families. IYCN ensures that consistent and accurate messages are reinforced at each level through community-based techniques such as integrating key messages into mother support groups and drama performances. We also create communication materials, such as take-home brochures for mothers and families, to encourage the adoption of positive behaviors.

In Zambia, the project supported the Ministry of Health to create and broadcast a 13-part radio series as part of a social and behavior change communication strategy. The program aimed to improve infant and young child feeding practices and address common barriers to exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding for children, identified through the project's formative research. In Haiti, IYCN supported the Ministry of Public Health and Population and partners to create key messages and develop counseling cards, take-home brochures, and a game to assist community health workers in supporting caregivers, grandmothers, fathers, and other community members to improve child feeding practices.



PATHEVELYN HODSTEN

### Training health workers and building capacity

After collaborating with governments and partners to adopt improved policies, identify key behaviors, and develop messages, we collaborate with stakeholders to incorporate updated national guidelines into training curricula and job aids for everyone from health workers to community volunteers. We also enhance referral systems, supervision, and monitoring to improve the performance of health workers.

In Zambia, for example, IYCN supported the Ministry of Health to create three provincial training teams that independently conduct infant and young child feeding trainings with health workers. This approach maximized the number of health workers trained and helped to ensure national capacity for infant and young child feeding. In Lesotho, IYCN collaborated with the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare, Agriculture, and Education to train more than 1,000 health and community workers on maternal and child nutrition.

### Monitoring activities and evaluating impact

By emphasizing monitoring and evaluation, we ensure a results-based approach to influencing behaviors and improving infant feeding practices. The use of data for management increases the effectiveness of our interventions and improves decision-making by program managers.

For example, our user-friendly supervision tools in Zambia helped program managers observe and review counseling sessions and collect data during exit interviews with mothers. The government used the information to make improvements in infant feeding counseling and support.

### Identifying and sharing good practices

Sharing of lessons learned from each country helps a wide range of global and country partners enhance the impact of their programs.

In Kenya, we discovered a need to increase community infant feeding support, particularly by involving men and engaging grandmothers. In response, the project designed activities to increase male engagement and improve nutrition support from grandmothers. After evaluating the activities, IYCN plans to offer evidence-based approaches to other countries to improve community support for mothers.

#### Building capacity of agriculture extension workers in Ethiopia

IYCN trained agriculture extension workers and staff from Ethiopia's Urban Gardens Program to integrate maternal, infant, and young child nutrition messages into existing agriculture activities and gave cooking demonstrations using nutritious foods produced by program beneficiaries. Agriculture extension officers now support caregivers to improve their children's nutrition in addition to helping families generate income from their gardens.

Learn more about IYCN activities at [www.iycn.org](http://www.iycn.org).