

Infant & Young Child Nutrition Project

2010 Annual Report



PATH/Evelyn Hockstein



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IYCN USAID's Infant
& Young Child
Nutrition Project

More than one-third of child deaths in poor countries are linked to malnutrition in mothers and children. Without proper nutrition, children can suffer devastating consequences, including developmental delays, illness, stunted growth, and even death. Yet low-cost interventions exist that can largely prevent malnutrition early in life. The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Infant & Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project addresses this critical issue at its root, working to promote optimal nutrition for mothers, infants, and young children to form key building blocks for a healthy future.

During the project's fourth year, from October 2009 to September 2010, we expanded our work to four new countries, trained health workers in both emergency and everyday situations, conducted formative assessments to better understand how to address communities' specific nutrition needs, and strengthened the link between agriculture and nutrition to expand communities' options for and access to improved nutrition.



Infant & Young Child Nutrition Project

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OUR GOALS

The IYCN Project aims to improve the nutritional status of mothers, infants, and young children, and to improve HIV-free survival of infants and young children. We work to generate demand and support for the delivery of cost-effective interventions to improve the nutritional status of infants, children less than 2 years of age, and pregnant and lactating women. The design and implementation of interventions to improve practices for infant and young child nutrition and maternal nutrition are major areas of focus for the project.

A global and local approach to nutrition

Providing global technical leadership is an important part of IYCN's work. The project aims to increase global support for prevention of malnutrition and improve the impact of nutrition and global health programs. We continue to exhibit technical leadership in combating malnutrition by providing the technical foundation to develop, improve, and expand cost-effective, evidence-based nutrition interventions in high-burden countries.

IYCN works in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to support and promote maternal, infant, and young child nutrition. Within all of the countries in which we work, IYCN has influenced the delivery of health

services to reach individuals and communities with tools, information, and support to prevent malnutrition and promote optimal nutrition. We have conducted assessments to develop responsive strategies in each country, provided guidance on nutrition policies, built the capacity of health workers and community volunteers, and encouraged positive behaviors for infant and young child feeding. Our programs have strengthened health systems by improving service delivery through integration, supportive supervision, monitoring, and enhancement of referral systems. Because infant feeding occurs in the home, we emphasize community-based approaches to reach and support mothers.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Last year, we reached thousands of health workers and families with important nutrition interventions and tools.

Extending our reach. IYCN strengthened current programs in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, and Zambia and launched new programs in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, and Mozambique, bringing the total number of countries in which IYCN has worked to 15.

Training for feeding and nutrition. We trained more than 1,230 health workers and community-based workers in six countries on infant and young child feeding or maternal nutrition.

Formative research for behavior change impact. IYCN completed 12 formative research studies in seven countries to illuminate current maternal, infant, and young child feeding practices; identify barriers to changing behaviors; and assess nutrition counseling and support services. The research will help to strengthen existing programs and design new evidence-based behavior change activities.

Strengthening health systems. To promote health systems strengthening and ensure the quality of nutrition assessment, counseling, and support at health facilities, we conducted more than 1,000 exit interviews with mothers in Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia to monitor the quality of individual counseling and group health talks in facilities.

Integrating agriculture and nutrition. IYCN led global health and agriculture stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue on the intersection between agriculture and nutrition, built critical links between agriculture and nutrition programs in three countries, and developed a new tool for assessing the potential nutritional impact of agricultural interventions on vulnerable groups.

Addressing community-based nutrition. We developed innovative tools to assess and promote complementary feeding practices and to evaluate the role of household

members, such as fathers and grandmothers, to positively influence and support maternal, infant, and young child nutrition.

Encouraging the adoption of international guidelines. In Nigeria, where early consensus had favored rejecting new World Health Organization guidelines on HIV and infant feeding, IYCN summarized the evidence supporting the new recommendations and collaborated with partners to build consensus among national leadership not only to adopt the new guidelines but also to promote breastfeeding as a national strategy to maximize HIV-free survival.

Broadening our reach through mass media. In Zambia, we created and launched a series of 13 radio programs with evidence-based behavior change messages that address identified feeding problems and encourage mothers to prevent malnutrition in their children.

Emergency response in Haiti. Following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, we conducted infant and young child feeding training workshops for more than 300 emergency health workers, who offered support in baby tents, where embattled mothers sustained adequate feeding despite the stressful conditions. We also continued with planned activities, including the training of more than 320 trainers and health workers on nutrition counseling after early infant diagnosis of HIV and creating a nationally validated set of infant and young child feeding counseling cards for facility and community health workers.

Expanding nutrition support for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). In Côte d'Ivoire, IYCN collaborated with the National OVC Program to develop both pre- and in-service curricula for social workers who support families at social centers throughout the country. We also supplied more than 20 social centers with equipment necessary to promote optimal feeding practices, identify growth faltering and malnutrition, and refer children for health services.

Improving access to research, tools, and innovations. Through the IYCN website, e-newsletter, and international conference appearances, IYCN distributed more than 13,000 tools and resources to help global health colleagues strengthen nutrition programs. In addition, thousands of users from 125 countries visited the project's website to access critical research, training materials, and information about innovative programs in the field.

Highlighting the intersection between agriculture and nutrition

In June 2010, IYCN brought together nutrition, agriculture, and other global health colleagues for a workshop on the intersection between agriculture and nutrition. Dr. Tom Schaetzel, IYCN Technical Director, presented a review of 35 years of agricultural projects to identify factors associated with improved food security and nutrition, such as home gardens and micronutrient-rich crops, and factors associated with reduced food security and worsened nutritional status. As part of the workshop, IYCN debuted a new Nutritional Impact Assessment Tool that agricultural program implementers can use to assess the likely nutritional impact of interventions. More than 50 colleagues have expressed interest in helping IYCN test and further develop the tool for broader use.



Engaging with the private sector in South Africa

Through a unique public-private partnership with the J & J Group Development Trust, a private investment and management company, IYCN conducted a pilot program to integrate nutrition interventions into economic and educational development planning in South Africa's Nigel district. From October 2009 to February 2010, the project educated community leaders on nutrition and encouraged communities to integrate nutrition into their development plans. An assessment of the pilot project found that communities embraced the importance of nutrition for mothers and children and that community leaders were able to include nutrition in their plans. The pilot project can provide a model for increasing demand for nutrition services by incorporating nutrition interventions into community planning structures.

WHERE WE WORK

In 2010, IYCN expanded activities to reach 15 countries, with our strongest presence in Africa. In each country, we draw on research and innovations from programs across the globe to design and implement interventions that prevent malnutrition and promote optimal nutrition for mothers and children. In many countries, we place a special emphasis on improving infant and young child feeding within the context of HIV. In several countries, we are leading innovative quality improvement approaches that contribute to health systems strengthening, enhancing community nutrition activities, and promoting linkages between agriculture and nutrition.

To ensure sustainability and country ownership, 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 carefully track our project progress and disseminate information about successful approaches that other groups or organizations can replicate.

Here is a snapshot of IYCN's activities in our country programs.

Africa region

IYCN conducted seed activities in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and South Africa to demonstrate community-centered nutrition efforts, such as increasing community demand for nutrition services, training health workers to take malnutrition prevention messages beyond health facilities, and working directly with mother support groups.

Côte d'Ivoire

IYCN's activities focused on improving infant feeding counseling in clinics, strengthening nutrition aspects of palliative care, and increasing the availability and quality of nutrition support for OVC in the community. In 2010, IYCN built on its work to integrate infant and young child nutrition into prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services by expanding nutrition counseling to more sites in the country. IYCN improves the capacity of health workers by supporting the government to conduct six-day training workshops combined with practical, on-site training in health facilities. IYCN also launched a comprehensive package of support to reach families at social centers throughout the country by training social workers and procuring equipment for monitoring child growth and nutritional status.

Ethiopia

IYCN strengthened nutrition assessment, counseling, and support in health facilities, enhancing the quality of mother support group activities, and incorporating nutrition education into USAID/Ethiopia's Urban Gardens Program. The project conducted a service provision assessment in two regions of Ethiopia to identify gaps in nutrition services at select PMTCT sites and surrounding facilities. The data will be used to inform quality improvement activities. Based on information gathered during the assessment, IYCN organized a workshop to train health workers on infant feeding messages and counseling for HIV-positive mothers to correct misinformation.

Identifying gaps in nutrition support and services in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, IYCN completed a service provision assessment to identify gaps in nutrition assessment, counseling, and support delivered through PMTCT sites and opportunities for integrating nutrition into existing services and outreach. The assessment found that most health and outreach workers have not been trained in maternal nutrition or infant and young child feeding, or that they need refresher training. It also revealed that most facilities are lacking counseling support materials and that individual counseling is limited due to staffing shortages. Health talks reach some women in the community, but the content and quality varies widely. However, facilities have good systems for tracking HIV-positive women and/or their children lost to follow-up. The results of this assessment will inform quality improvement activities at four pilot sites.

Meeting mothers' and children's emergency nutrition needs in Haiti

After the devastating earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, IYCN joined the United Nations Children's Fund and other partners to train more than 200 emergency health workers to provide vital infant feeding counseling for new mothers as they strived to keep their babies healthy. The trained counselors offered nutrition support for mothers in baby tents located in refugee camps across the country. The baby tent coordinator in one refugee camp said the training helped her support four mothers to breastfeed again following the quake, despite common misconceptions that breastmilk is spoiled after mothers experience trauma.



Haiti

In Haiti, which faces one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in Latin America, IYCN focuses on strengthening infant and young child feeding counseling and support for both HIV-positive and HIV-negative mothers. In addition to conducting emergency infant feeding training in the wake of the devastating January earthquake, the project team trained more than 300 health workers and trainers on appropriate infant feeding counseling after an infant's early diagnosis of HIV.

Kenya

Recognizing the crucial role men and grandmothers can play in improving children's health, IYCN conducted a formative assessment in two provinces to determine how best to engage these key influencers in supporting optimal dietary choices for mothers and feeding practices for infants and young children. The results are helping to ensure that interventions with men and grandmothers are culturally appropriate.

Revealing practical infant feeding solutions in Malawi

In Malawi, IYCN conducted a study to understand key infant feeding problems and test practical solutions that can be promoted through behavior change communication programs. Results revealed that mothers could improve infant feeding by adopting new, simple practices at mealtimes. These include preparing less watery porridge, substituting fruit for biscuits and sugary drinks, adding vegetables to porridge, emptying one breast and then offering the other when breastfeeding, and feeding their children with food from animal sources more often. One mother said she did not know she could feed her 1-year-old child fruit and is now no longer spending money on unnecessary foods.

Engaging men as positive agents of change in Kenya

IYCN conducted a formative assessment in Kenya's Western and Eastern Provinces to identify how best to engage men in support of maternal dietary and infant and young child feeding practices. Focus groups revealed that men have very clear ideas of their roles as fathers and heads of household, are concerned about their families, respect people who are knowledgeable and professional, and listen to other men. The groups found that men have been somewhat marginalized by the public health system, and they have misconceptions around maternal and infant and young child nutrition. The assessment indicated that men may need different approaches and messages than women to be engaged and that a family-centered approach may be the best way to effect change.



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Lesotho

IYCN continued to provide technical assistance to Lesotho's national nutrition and PMTCT programs through February 2010. IYCN supported the development of a draft national feeding policy for infants and young children and helped to finalize and disseminate national training curricula for health workers and trainers. IYCN also conducted supervisory visits and led focus groups with community health workers to understand how the project's interventions impact community-level nutrition activities such as health talks, keyhole gardens, and cooking demonstrations.

Malawi

IYCN launched our work in Malawi in March 2010, with a focus on strengthening the capacity of communities and local governments to plan and implement integrated infant feeding and HIV activities. As a starting point, the project team helped national stakeholders reach a consensus to focus community-based activities on prevention of malnutrition and led an operational strategy workshop to support the National Infant and Young Child Feeding Policy and Strategic Plan. In addition, the project finalized formative research that illuminated feeding practices and revealed practical feeding behaviors that caregivers can perform.

Nigeria

IYCN started working in Nigeria in September 2009 to strengthen services for infant nutrition in PMTCT programs. The team took part in developing a national consensus statement on infant feeding within the context of HIV, which includes shifting the Federal Ministry of Health's emphasis toward promoting breastfeeding as a national strategy to maximize HIV-free survival. IYCN also took a leadership role in supporting the ministry to review and update national guidelines and policy documents that lay the foundation for training health workers and volunteers. IYCN completed formative research on feeding practices, which will be used by the team to develop messages, training curricula, and job aids. In addition, the project conducted a nutrition service provision assessment that the government will use to make recommendations for strengthening health systems.

Targeting key barriers and behaviors in Nigeria

IYCN conducted formative research in Nigeria to understand practices, barriers, and attitudes toward infant and young child feeding. The team found that influencing groups like fathers and grandmothers can play a positive role in supporting mothers to optimally feed infants and young children and that these groups can also act as barriers to good feeding practices. For example, they often encourage feeding herbs in water and very thin gruels to infants less than 6 months of age. The research also revealed that health care providers are concerned about how maternal nutrition impacts mothers' ability to optimally care for and feed children. They seek additional training, supervision, and support for nutrition activities. IYCN will use these findings to develop appropriate messages, training curricula, and job aids to improve feeding practices.

Zambia

IYCN is strengthening infant and young child feeding in PMTCT and other child health services through capacity building, behavior change communication strategies, and developing a supplementary food for HIV-affected mothers and children. To reach more communities with important infant feeding messages, IYCN collaborated with a private radio station to develop a radio series that aired in five languages throughout Zambia. The 13-part series of radio dramas addresses feeding problems identified by the project's formative research.

LOOKING AHEAD

IYCN will continue to provide technical leadership in maternal, infant, and young child nutrition and explore ways to strengthen and expand infant and young child nutrition programs in vulnerable countries. During the project's fifth year, the IYCN team will focus on documenting the impact of country activities, sharing lessons and results with global health colleagues, increasing access to high-quality technical resources, and promoting the adoption of innovations and good practices established by the project. The project aims to make lasting contributions to improving the effectiveness of behavior change interventions for improved infant and young child feeding; promoting HIV-free survival of children; maximizing the nutritional benefits of agricultural interventions; ensuring the quality and effectiveness of nutrition programs; and improving the quality of infant and young child diets.

ABOUT THE INFANT & YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION PROJECT

The IYCN Project is USAID's flagship project on infant and young child nutrition. Begun in 2006, the five-year project aims to improve nutrition for mothers, infants, and young children and prevent the transmission of HIV to infants and children. IYCN builds on 25 years of USAID leadership in maternal, infant, and young child nutrition. Our focus is on proven interventions that are effective during pregnancy through the first two years of life.

The IYCN Project is led by PATH and includes three partners: CARE, The Manoff Group, and University Research Co., LLC.



Creating a radio campaign to address nutrition beliefs and barriers

Infant feeding messages were broadcast to communities across Zambia as part of a 13-part radio series launched by IYCN earlier this year. The series, called *Bushes that Grow Are the Future Forest*, follows Sister Loveness, a health worker, as she travels around the country to hospitals, mothers' clubs, and markets to teach families to protect their children from malnutrition. IYCN designed the campaign to address beliefs about and barriers to infant and young child feeding as identified through the project's formative research, including misconceptions about infants' desires or needs for solid food and water and parents' misunderstandings about how a mother's diet affects her breastmilk. The radio series also addressed HIV-positive mothers' confusion around conflicting information they have received on feeding their young infants.



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For more information

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