



THE USAID MULTI-SECTORAL NUTRITION STRATEGY: COORDINATING NUTRITION-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURAL INTERVENTIONS

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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CONTENTS

Presenters.....	3
Presentation	4
Questions and Answers	10

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PRESENTATION

Julie MacCartee:

All right, we're ready to get started now. Good morning, afternoon, or evening, everyone, and welcome to our July Ag Sector Council webinar on the USAID multi-sectoral nutrition strategy, "Coordinating Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Interventions." We appreciate you joining us today from all over the world. We're excited to see so many folks joining. And if you haven't yet, please go ahead and introduce yourselves in the chat box; it's always fun to see where, what cities or what organizations everyone's joining from. So thank you in advance to those who are introducing yourselves.

My name is Julie MacCartee and I am a knowledge management specialist with the USAID Bureau for Food Security and I'll be helping facilitate today. And since this is a webinar-only event today we are set up in a nice control room here in Washington, D.C., and I'd just like to say thank you to my colleagues, Mari Pierce-Quinonez and Adam Schrecengost with the Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Project. They are behind the KDAD AV tech and USAID/Agrilinks host names that you'll see in the chat box today. So thank you very much for your help.

All right, before we get started just a couple of quick items. If you are a Twitter aficionado and you'd like to Tweet along with the event today please use the #AgEvent hashtag, which you'll see on your screen on the left there. And speaking of Twitter, we actually have another event coming up tomorrow at noon Eastern Time, a special Ask Ag Twitter chat on the nutrition strategy and generally on agriculture and nutrition links, and so we'd love to have you all join that. We'll post a link to that event in the chat box. And also another upcoming event, next week Agrilinks is holding an AgExchange on animal science research priorities, which is bound to be a great discussion, and we'll post a link to that event page in the chat box as well.

All right, we only have about an hour today, so I'm going to go ahead and get started with introduction. We have three speakers today, or two main speakers and a future chat box contributor, all of whom were members of the chemical working group that produced the USAID nutrition strategy. And first off speaking will be Michael Manske, who is with the USAID Bureau for Global Health and he is a nutrition advisor. And then next up we will have Sally Abbott, also a nutrition advisor with the USAID Bureau for Food Security. And doing some special contributions and keeping track in the chat box will be Melanie Thurber, who is a nutrition advisor with the Office of Food for Peace.

So jumping right in, I'll go ahead and pass the microphone over to Mike.

Mike Manske:

Yes. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to all of you. I'm delighted to speak to you today about the multi-sectoral nutrition strategy for USAID. And one of the things that I will highlight for you right away is that this strategy cuts across various streams of work for USAID, and the fact that it is truly multi-sectoral is something that is, I would say, extremely important about the strategy. So I'll highlight that for you right off the bat.

I will talk a little bit about what USAID has been doing over the last 50 years for those of you that are not aware. I'm actually not going to read all of these, but since the 1950s USAID through Food for Peace has been working in nutrition and we have been also contributing in many other ways in the field of nutrition for some time. You can see on the slide here – I'm trying to advance the slides; excuse me. Okay, I think I made it. And you can see some of the other work that we're contributing too, and I will highlight in particular most recently the Feed the Future and Global Health initiatives that are presidential initiatives. But you can see all the great work that's been going on and we recognize that as part of a comparative advantage for USAID in nutrition.

In addition, some of the other areas where we see ourselves as having a comparative advantage is what I had mentioned earlier, the development programming as well as humanitarian programming that allows us to enable planning and learning as well as the programming across multiple sectors. And then we have a reach in over 100 countries.

I think some of you are aware, but maybe not; I see we have a very diverse group here, and I think it's important for us to highlight some of the key challenges in undernutrition – in global nutrition, I should say. Undernutrition contributes to 45-percent of under-5 child deaths and it is composed of both undernutrition and overnutrition. We typically target the first 1,000 days in our programming, especially in development context, to serve the most vulnerable. It's the most vulnerable period and it's what we call a window of opportunity. It's important to note that malnutrition is both a cause and consequence of poverty, and this is important in the strategy. I hope all of you get a chance to read the strategy if you haven't already.

There are 34 countries that account for 90-percent of the global burden of stunting in the world. You can see here on the map, and in many of them we are working as an agency. This is a slide that is borrowed from a recent presenter, Rolf Klemm, that shows the magnitude of undernutrition in terms of mortality compared to some other events that many of you probably have heard of. And I also will mention here in the recent _____ serious some comparison of relative risk, and you can see mild/moderate versus severe malnutrition, the higher risk of death if a child is undernourished for also these various child illnesses.

I'll talk a little bit about the background of the strategy. I think it's very important to talk about how this strategy was developed. There was a link of both, as I mentioned earlier, Global Health initiative and the Feed the Future initiatives that helped bring us together, as well as it's important to note, and I see some of you are listening now, the advocacy from Civil Society, which towards USG leadership to increase commitments to nutrition, as well as commitments to the World Health Assembly targets and then nutrition for growth commitments. I should mention that the strategy continues until 2025, largely due to the World Health Assembly targets going until 2025. And I think I already mentioned the Lancet series from 2008 and 2013 focusing on nutrition. Our aim for this strategy is to guide the agency's policies and programs for nutrition in both emergency and development context with a goal of improving nutrition to save lives, build resilience, increase economic productivity, and advance development.

I'm not going to read all of this for you, but please take a moment to realize what it has taken to pull this strategy together; it's been quite a process. And I will say if you look on the left you can see the various technical working group members within USAID. For those of you that are not aware, this is quite a task for all of us to be working together across three different bureaus. And so I can't say it enough, how important that has been to be working across bureaus with our different colleagues. And to the right you can see all the feedback we've received, and I'll take the opportunity again to thank those of you who've contributed and given us comments, because it has been extremely useful and we actually read all of the comments that were sent, and many of which were excellent.

Just to try to – the strategy document itself is quite dense, and just to try to give you some nuggets of what's in the strategy, I'd like to point out the vision of the strategy, which focuses on these three areas: set and monitor nutrition targets, manage funds and programs in a rigorous manner, and focus on high-impact actions. Our goals for this strategy are to contribute to the reduction in child stunting and reduce the number of stunted children by 2 million. This is both over the next five years, the strategy will be every five years or so that we will be updating where we are going in terms of goals, because the strategy covers over a decade. And I should mention that the focus on number of stunted children is across Global Health, Bureau for Food Security, and Food for Peace. Also we're focusing in humanitarian crisis to maintain global acute malnutrition below a rate of 15-percent.

One other area of interest is really to be having better and more rigorous management of our programs, which includes concentrating resources, which we have been doing, continuing with our clear objectives and doing better and more regular monitoring of outcomes and impact in nutrition, and we have been for some time focusing on support of country ownership, the country's own nutrition plans, and continue to focus on increased impact across sectors. Sally will actually be focusing on nutrition, what we're calling nutrition-sensitive programming. I think I mentioned some of these, so I won't go over these again. These are some of the high-impact actions that I talked about. As we have been focusing on and want to keep this in mind is the sustainability of our programs. And some of these components that we're including in the strategy look at responsible private sector actions as well as the area of human resources and capacity in nutrition and political will by governments. You will see that when I present very quickly the results framework. These are some pieces that are very important to note, I think, as well as continued Civil Society engagement and our global leadership.

So as I mentioned, here is our results framework. It starts with a goal, an objective, and the four intermediate results. I will not read them all for you, and I highly encourage you to take a look and see where your organization or your work fits in. In intermediate result one there is focus on increased provision of services, high-quality services. And intermediate result two, as I mentioned, is country capacity, increasing country capacity and commitment to nutrition. IR3 is our focus on multi-sectoral programming and coordination. And finally intermediate result four is talking about our focus on our leadership in nutrition as USAID. And one of the areas I will mention is our focus on strengthen and expanding the evidence base in nutrition.

And I've been involved among several other colleagues in what we're calling the rollout of the strategy. So the strategy is not something that just is written and then sits there on somebody's shelf or what-have-you, but we're actually focusing on what the strategy means for various stakeholders. So in particular we want to have more focus on intensive nutrition programming or nutrition-intensive programming, I should say, that goes beyond just reaching beyond number of children, but really promoting change, behavior change in particular, and better quality context, reinforcement through our programs with the communities, the health system as well as agricultural extension and others. And we're trying to do a better job of tracking impact. I think I covered some of these areas, but we have four elements to our intensive nutrition programs and they're here. I think I mentioned several of them already. I will highlight the third bullet and fourth for you. The third is nutrition, focusing on nutrition-sensitive. That is a key component of the objective. I think I might have glossed over it too quickly for you, but we are focusing as our objective for the strategy on both nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific actions for the strategy.

And then the fourth bullet is a focus on improved quality and being more data-driven in our programming for nutrition. I think I mentioned some of this, but we would like to be tracking indicators for our programs in target areas with better – with thinking about different outcomes than maybe we have in the past. Some of these I think you're probably familiar with, but incorporating from more of the nutrition-sensitive side and then having various new output indicators that are tailored to measure our coverage, our programs, and some of these other areas of quality that I referred to earlier.

And I'm going to now hand this over to Sally Abbott; she's going to speak a little bit more about nutrition-sensitive agriculture for the rest of the presentation.

Sally Abbott:

Great. Thanks, Mike. Just making sure everybody can hear me okay. And so thank you, everybody, for attending this morning. I see we have large attendance and I know some of you are watching this together, so that is very heartening to know how many people are interested in this and interested in the work that we've been doing, and especially some of you that are going to be carrying out a lot of this work in the field.

We want to start with talking about what nutrition-sensitive agriculture is and what this might mean for you. I'm going to talk about both the parts of the strategy where nutrition-sensitive agriculture lays and what this implication of this strategy might be. So moving on, what we mean by nutrition-specific, Mike touched on this a little bit, is it addresses the immediate determinants of malnutrition, whereas for nutrition-sensitive interventions they're addressing the underlying and systematic causes of malnutrition. For USAID we're looking at basically based on the Lancet definition of nutrition-sensitive, which changed a little bit from 2008 to 2013, and we're talking about agriculture and food security, water, sanitation, health, early childhood development, access to health services, women's empowerment, social safety nets are a few of the areas that we're specifically talking about when we say nutrition sensitive.

Within the strategy there are a number of places where we see in the results framework a nutrition sensitive specifically mentioned. In our strategic objective it is specifically mentioned that we're not just talking about the nutrition-specific interventions, but also these underlying systematic causes of malnutrition. Specifically under intermediate result one, one of the sub-IRs, increased availability and access to

high-quality nutrition-sensitive services and commodities. Under intermediate result three we're really talking about coordination of multi-sectoral programming as well as strengthening the engagement of the private sector to improve nutrition. That also can very much include nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

And we're talking about strengthening the evidence base of nutrition-sensitive, and this is an area that we've been working in for a couple of years that we feel is very important, that we know that agriculture is important for improving nutrition, but exactly what those linkages are and what the best way to do that is something we're still trying to work on. And as we're working in nutrition-sensitive agriculture it's important to have nutrition-sensitive agriculture in the agriculture evidence base really improved and strengthened.

So one of the areas that people talk about a lot is horticulture, and one of the things that we find when people talk about horticulture is sometimes if they feel that if they're doing a horticulture project, because horticulture commodities are important for nutrition, that that alone makes it nutrition-sensitive. And we're really trying to push that to be further, to think about what a nutrition-sensitive horticulture project is, that if you're aiming to grow horticulture as a cash crop, that's great, but that might not translate into having more consumption. Tracking consumption in these nutrition foods, if that is a specific aim, can be helpful, but also that nutrition-sensitive agriculture can be increasing the production of horticulture for our cash crop and then working on behavior change, both with women and with men and with the various caregivers on how to then use that income to improve consumption.

It's important to have specific targets within activities that are specific to what you're doing. So if your goal is to improve agriculture for consumption then you would be tracking consumption. If your goal is to improve it for production for income, then you'd be tracking income as well as trying to make sure that that income then translates into more consumption of a variety of diets and tracking that as well, if that is the objective. Our goal is also to have by the end of 2015 more intensive nutrition programs in the zone of influence, and Mike touched on a little bit what we mean by that earlier.

We are looking at nutrition-sensitive agriculture differently in that we're looking at different ways of program designs, which I think you can see through the results framework, and a variety of service delivery platforms. So we're not just talking about going through a health system for nutrition, but we're also talking about using all of the contact points. If there is an agriculture group of men, we know that men are very important, as well as women on addressing undernutrition and working with a platform, if it's appropriate, or a men's group that already exists, working with seller groups, working at every sort of point of contact that we can that's appropriate, because it's not always an appropriate place.

One of the other areas that we're working in differently is really looking at food safety and mycotoxins. We know that mycotoxins are – especially aflatoxin, are affecting nutritional status and we're working on supporting how we can increase our awareness of that and our working with improving the effects of mycotoxins. We're looking at the policy level both for the SUN movement and where appropriate with countries' own commitments, including agriculture. In the process we're working with the [inaudible]

process as well. And we're working on providing additional technical guidance and when missions request it, technical assistance to our missions and their planning and designing and rollout of the strategy.

So I think that that's sort of where we are on our presentation, and I know that there were some questions that came in while I was talking and why don't we open it up for more questions and see if we can answer some of the questions that you've already addressed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Julie MacCartee:

Great. Thank you so much, Sally, and thanks to everyone who has been entering comments and questions into the chat box. Just a quick note to let you all know that this presentation is being recorded, so if you miss any portion of it you will receive an e-mail at the end about a week after this presentation with a recording, links to some other post-event products, so we'll encourage you to go back and look through or share the presentation with your colleagues if there's anything you would like to review.

And thank you all for your questions; we've had a few come in and we've been tracking them. So I'll go ahead and pose a couple of them to Sally and Mike. Let's see.

So we had a question come in from Jean Yves Ntimugura from Catholic Relief Services in Rwanda, who says, "You mentioned that you will create regular contact with mothers, but why not focus on the role of men in nutrition in the family?"

Mike Manske:

Okay, I'm going to take this. This is Mike again. I think it's an excellent question; you're actually not the first person to ask this question. And there is a part in the strategy that does talk about gender and it does take into account some of the programming that we have been doing in some countries. I think there may be even one example, if not, feel free to contact me and I can follow up with you, but in terms – when we do our programming, especially our community nutrition programs, we look at various factors that determine practices, social norms, and various determinants of why people are doing or not doing a certain behavior. And often the time – there is kind of a factor about inclusion of men. And some of the programming, I think if you look at it, there's a section that talks about social and behavior change communication in IRI. I believe it might be IRI.4, you can read a little bit about it that says we are trying to do – or trying to have more focus on having a nutrition – a behavior change strategy within our nutrition programs. And this alone should be something that takes into account these factors. I wish it was something that we would like to have develop across the board in all of our programs, and we are hoping to do that as the strategy rolls out.

Julie MacCartee:

Great. Thank you. A question from USAID West Africa from Jessica Wallach; she asks, "Could you go into more detail on ways in which the private sector can be engaged to improve nutritional outcomes?"

Mike Manske:

I think that's a great question. I would actually like to – if there's a way we can scroll back to the results framework quickly. Oops, excuse me. I don't know if I'm active, but I'm actually looking at a results framework; I'm not sure if everyone else is. There is a section I believe under intermediate results 3.3, as Sally pointed out, that does talk about that. I think we have some examples currently. In particular, USAID is working with GAIN in some countries, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and they work with private sector in particular, and we have some examples. I wish I could – some of them are not coming to the top of my head right now, but it is an area that we are certainly looking at, especially in terms of production of food and the quality of the production of food at local levels. If it's going to be, for example, like, you know, an infant and young child food that is being produced through small companies in the countries where we work, we are certainly looking at ways to have better outcomes of these programs and not just look at the kind of business side of things, if I may say.

Anyone else is free also to jump in here from our group here.

Sally Abbott:

I would also add that on the agricultural side the private sector is and always has been an important partner. If you look at distribution of seed, that's not something that necessarily can be done without small distributors or others. When you're looking at getting the new technologies out, that often is through private sector and through private sector supply chains. So I think we were talking about the agriculture and nutrition access; you may be looking at different partners in the nutrition community as traditionally used to working with, and that's something that there are – we have a Markets Partnerships and Innovations office, and that is really their area that they work in, and unfortunately none of us work in that office, so they are certainly people that we could put some people in touch with if there is interest in knowing more on our private sector engagement.

Julie MacCartee:

All right. A question came in from Elizabeth Doddsworth that I think is a common question, about whether there is evidence that growing crops for income translates into better nutrition and whether it's better to focus on behavior change and consumption. And since that's a common question, it would be great if you could address.

Sally Abbott:

I think it really depends. I agree that when you're growing crops it doesn't always translate into consumption, but it often translates into some consumption. And I think one of the things we'd be better at is helping households make the decisions for themselves of what makes the most economic sense for them. So if you're talking about there is more meat, if they're producing meat, then they may be selling that in order to buy foods that are more nutritious, having a more diverse diet. The one thing that was – if there aren't those foods available on the market then they aren't able to purchase a more nutritious diet, even with the increased income. So it's trying to make sure that they have the income, they know what the decisions are, and that is available because it's not always something that is always available without some effort and some work.

Mike Manske:

And I will just add something to that; I think that's a great point, Sally. I think you were asking if it was kind of an either/or thing or should we focus on growing crops for income or behavior change. And it's certainly to me not an either/or thing in our programs. And I guess behavior change is such a broader area that it would – the question would be behavior change to do what. And if it is to behavior change to promote peoples' consumption of a more diverse diet, that actually would be appropriate in that type of a context, where crops or different foods are being made available to people. So I just wanted to add that.

Julie MacCartee:

Great, thank you, Sally and Mike. Got lots of questions rolling in, so bear with us as we kind of – as we roll through as many as we can. A couple of quick questions. Todd Kirkbride asks, "How does USAID's strategy and programming align with GAIN or the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and its agenda?" Is that one that you all can cover?

Sally Abbott: I would say that while we were developing a strategy we had a lot of opportunities for consultation and for input. We certainly – GAIN was one of the organizations that we consulted with, and I would really encourage organizations to look at the strategy and to read it and to see where they think that their work can align the best.

Mike Manske: Yeah, and I would just add we actually had a meeting with various partners recently, and not to turn the table on you, but GAIN actually spoke about how they aligned with the strategy. And I would mention that they brought up the issue that they are also part of the history of USAID as well, which is not on the slide, but I just thought I would add that. Uh-oh, somebody can't hear.

Julie MacCartee: All right, and another hopefully quick question, what approaches have worked for tracking stunting rates during the life of projects? This is from Mirette Ohman.

Sally Abbott: So we have in Feed the Future we have a robust monitoring evaluation system which includes stunting as an indicator. And one of the things that I think is important to note is that we don't expect every single project to be tracking stunting. We expect the project as a whole, as a program to have an effect on stunting, and that if it's appropriate that a project-specific outcome is to track stunting or to change stunting and affect stunting, then that may be something that that project will check to see what their impact alone is. But as a whole, population-based surveys are expensive, they aren't something that necessarily you're not just seed-changing and stunting every year, so it's something that you really need to think about when we're doing a population-based survey to look at stunting and whether or not it makes sense for a project in and of itself to do it or if it's something that we should be doing for the whole program through the population-based surveys we do with Feed the Future, through the demographic and health surveys, through the mixed surveys and other options.

Melanie Thurber: Hi, this is Melanie. Just to add on to what Sally was saying, there are certain indicators that can be tracked throughout a project, such as exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding and other, depending on your project, activities that could lead to a decrease in stunting. And so we would encourage on an annual basis or an outcome basis to look at during the life of your project some of those pathways in the design of your project that you think are going to be influencing the stunting rates.

Julie MacCartee: A question from Kathleen Kurz at the Malawi Mission. She says, "Here in Malawi we are integrating nutrition objectives into this USAID Feed the Future project that we're working on, FTS INBC. With the agriculturalists and nutritionists striving to improve maternal and child feeding, care, and growth, as well as legume productivity and competitiveness. There are not, however, very many Feed the Future projects integrating nutrition and agriculture simultaneously. So what are the plans going forward?"

Sally Abbott: I think that really is a mission-specific and a project-specific question. It depends on what makes the most sense for the project and for the situation. We know that some projects, the outcomes that they are striving for it wouldn't make sense to integrate nutrition. We know that some projects there could be more opportunities, and that's something I think that we really need to go through one project or one country at a time and look at what makes the most sense for that situation.

Julie MacCartee: Great. And Eunice Bonsi is asking whether and how you intend to work with the existing nutrition innovation lab and the horticulture innovation lab to collaborate and focus more on the sensitivity interventions.

Sally Abbott: So unfortunately I am not with our Agriculture Research and Policy Office, but I can say that certainly the nutrition and innovation lab is a partner that we consulted with during the development of the strategy, they're working on the evidence base around nutrition and agriculture, and they're specifically working with some of the missions, in Nepal and Uganda specifically. We also have nutrition components in the other innovation labs and as new innovation labs come online or as they get renewed there is more of a commitment and focus to have nutrition be a part of what they're doing.

Julie MacCartee: Great. A question just came in from Carol Jenkins, who asks about if you have any thoughts on how to get extremely poor households to consume level of animal-based products. Many keep their animals as a safety net to meet emergency needs, but might not consume them on a day to day.

Mike Manske: I think that's an excellent question. It's something that I think we grapple with. I hope that all of you can hear me; there's a siren in the background, but it will soon dissipate. I wanted to mention that none of us here are livestock experts, however, you may be familiar with some of these settings, or pasture-less settings where animal source foods are more available, and there are some instances where USAID programs have looked at getting milk and milk products available for children, especially in some of these pasture-less settings. I have some experience with that in the Somali region of Ethiopia.

I'm hoping I answered your question. I need someone – could you just repeat the question, make sure I answered it correctly?

Julie MacCartee: Sure. It was about how to get extremely poor households to consume some level of animal-based products when they're typically keeping animals for emergency needs.

Mike Manske: Yeah, and just to say that in this particular project, which is – this was prior to when I was working at USAID, but it was a project that OFDA supported, it was called Milk Matters. The focus was to not just target those households that had animals, but also thinking about the poorest, which often did not have livestock. So that is a challenge. It is typically a challenge, but they are often sharing – there's a lot of sharing that goes on, and these are the type of considerations that really need to be taken into account in the types of programming, and I think it's an excellent question.

Sally Abbott: I just wanted to add that we at USAID, one of the things the strategy has done is brought a lot of us that work on these various areas together. As you saw from the slide, the number of bureaus and offices and divisions that are working on were quite large. We had 25 people meeting every week to come up with a strategy, and I think one of the outcomes that doesn't really come across on paper is how much more collaborative we're being. And so while one of us can't answer a question, we know who to go to that does answer the question. You know, there was somebody that did work in livestock that was involved in the strategy development there, it was somebody from our Agricultural Research and Policy team on the strategy that works with the

innovation labs, and we have those connections and we have a strong will to work across the bureaus, which I think will help with our thinking going forward.

Julie MacCartee:

Thank you both. And thank you, Melanie, for jumping in when needed. Let's see, I can tell that some of the folks online have clearly read the nutrition strategy, so that's really fantastic. Again, we encourage you all to take the time to look through the strategy piece by piece.

A question from Amanda Pearson from Harvard. She asks, "Within the USAID nutrition framework, intermediate result three is to increase multi-sectoral programming. What is USAID's guidance on how to coordinate among siloed ministries at the country level? For example, how to encourage ministries of ag and ministries of health to work together at the outset to improve nutrition?"

Mike Manske:

Yes, wow, what an excellent question. It's not an easy answer, and I think sometimes we have some systems that are in place to do that, but it's not often USAID has control over that and the missions. One thing I will point to that we are actively involved in is the scaling of nutrition movement known as SUN, in case you're not aware. I recommend you going to the website and learning more about it. There is a system in place that convenes key people in ministries within governments where we're working. It's not, of course, just a USAID effort; it's a global effort. Many other donors are also involved. And typically what happens in these countries where there are these SUN catalytic meetings and also focus on having – on developing national plans for nutrition, it requires efforts across ministries. So as we are recognizing that within USAID, we need to work across our silos, the same thing needs to happen in the countries, and there are some good instances where ministry of health and ministry of agriculture and even others, possibly ministry of finance, because the focus is on having costed plans, not just nutrition plans, but they're actually budgeted, and so these people do have to work together.

And USAID and its partners do get involved in SUN-related activities. USAID is a donor convener in I believe six countries for SUN. But this is definitely a mechanism that we try to work with. But really an excellent question.

Julie MacCartee:

Thank you, Mike. And I just wanted to quickly call out a comment from Carol Jenkins from USAID Malawi in response to the previous question about the animal products. And she just says, "It would be most useful to get some examples from non-pastoral areas about animal consumption. We have difficulty getting people to eat eggs, and milk consumption is very difficult in some cultures." So she would greatly appreciate lessons learned in the future kind of as a collection.

Mike Manske:

Right.

Julie MacCartee:

All right, a question from Michael Viola, who asks, "What specifically is being done so that activities within nutrition results are required in the implementation plans and results frameworks of agriculture projects without such specific activities or requirements?" He's worried that nutrition-sensitive development, which is critical, will not, based on his experience, be taken seriously and considered as important by – traditionally by implementing partners.

Sally Abbott: So I think one of the things that we're doing is looking for looking at what the projects that are in design now or projects that are just starting can do and making sure that projects are working together. Sometimes there are projects that are more being deliberately designed. If you look at what we're doing in the Sahel, we have one project that's focusing on a number of areas, but specifically designed to have agriculture or to have livelihoods, to have nutrition outcomes designed together, either in the same project or having coworked plans done together. So we're not trying to say that every project that's done is going to have very specific nutrition goals, but that we're looking at it holistically of all the investments and pushing projects to go further than they have before.

Mike Manske: Hello. One of the things – I'm sorry. One of the things I would like to add on that, and I think it really just added to what Sally said, is that I think I mentioned that while I was presenting – we're developing something that's called – or in hope that you're going to hear about it soon, nutrition intensive programs. And it will take into account what is typically economic growth or agriculture funds and supporting larger nutrition programs, but making sure that our nutrition programs – I don't know if we need to call – they're taking into account these nutrition-sensitive aspects, so a nutrition program would not be considered intensive or the idea of what we're hoping to achieve if it doesn't take into account these aspects of agriculture, wash, etcetera.

Julie MacCartee: Great. Thank you. Karen Latham, who is joining from CRS in Guatemala says, "We would like to know if you have studied different ways to set up field teams and community organizational models that contribute to the integration of agriculture and nutrition health interventions in the field and with participant families?"

Sally Abbott: Can you repeat that?

Julie MacCartee: Sure. It was – I'm just repeating, "We would like to know if you have studied different ways to set up field teams and community organizational models that contribute to the integration of ag and nutrition interventions in the field and with participant families?" I think we'll throw it over to Melanie.

Melanie Thurber: So I think the important part here is not necessarily to set up field teams or community nutrition committees that are only focusing on one thing, but layering agriculture and nutrition activities or targeting to the same population. So if there is some sort of community committee that is already existing or some group that is already existing within a community, to make sure that that group is consistently targeted for both the nutrition and the agriculture messages throughout different approaches and allow them to reach out to their other support networks within the community to disseminate those messages or have activities. But the important thing would be to layer both types of activities, including economic growth activities, with the same populations for the reduction of stunting in those vulnerable groups.

Julie MacCartee: Thank you, Melanie. And thanks to all of our presenters we're flying through these questions, getting through a lot of them. Thank you all for proposing these questions as well. We have about ten more minutes, so we'll keep going here.

Beatrice Rogers from the Tufts Friedman School up in Boston says, “The focus on evidence-driven programming is welcome, but is there a provision for building in evaluation designs at the time the programs are initiated so that impact can be attributed to the intervention?”

Sally Abbott:

Hi, Bea. So this certainly – that certainly would be an idea. And I think that there are a number of projects that we have where evidence and evaluation designs are put in the programs at the beginning. I can think of a couple that I know of; I’m fairly certain the one in Ethiopia has done that and some of the ones in Nepal and Uganda. But it’s not something that all of the projects have the capacity to do. We have an evaluation policy at USAID. I think that’s something that we really are trying to stick to as far as when things are new and innovative, that we are having an evaluation at some point in time, that where possible we’re having as rigorous a model as possible, but sometimes that isn’t feasible in field and isn’t feasible with the realities of program implementation.

Julie MacCartee:

All right, Judy Payne with USAID here in D.C. is asking about whether you have or know of any examples of behavior change being used to overcome cultural traditions that did not reflect good nutrition practices. Are governments taking up this effort? Are there any good examples that you know of?

Mike Manske:

I’ll just take this; I think this is a good question. There are some examples, and in terms of actually – there are some good examples in the programs where we do, where behavior changes programs are effective and we increase rates of exclusive breastfeeding, immediate breastfeeding, higher dietary diversity or a minimum acceptable diet, and there are plenty of examples of that. I think the bigger question that you touched on at the end is how it then kind of translates into uptake with governments and their focus on behavior change. It’s an area that I must say is potentially challenging in that there is not always the same understanding of what behavior change means. Also it can mean various things in the governments where we would work, so I would mention – and it is an area of intermediate result too; this is a focus on capacity for us.

There is some good examples. One country that comes to mind is Bangladesh, where they actually have within I believe the ministry of health a network or a working group that focuses on behavior change. And they are ministry people. So that’s one good example that comes to the top of my head.

Julie MacCartee:

And a follow-up question to that question just came in, asking from Cynthia Donovan, asking what is the evidence that behavior changes are more or less effective if all household members are engaged in commercial programming, men, women, and children?

Mike Manske:

I think it’s a great point on all members of the household, because in most of the places where we work this is not just an individual thing, or the focus is often on the dyad of the mother/child, but we recognize that – and that’s why it’s called “social and behavior change,” that there are larger factors at play here in terms of change. And I think I mentioned earlier about some of these social norms and that type of thing that we try to address through community mobilization efforts. Also, you know, going on, but just the kind of interpersonal communication as well as mass media.

In terms of good examples, there are some good examples, and I'm going to make a plug for some activities that we're working on within USAID to be developing a list of some of these great examples. Some are in USAID, but others are also coming from outside, including Gates Foundation has done some excellent work that I'm sure those of you have heard about in their Alive and Thrive programs, and then there's others coming from private sector. And this is an effort within USAID where we're working to collect more of that. There was also recently a population level behavior change summit that was held a year ago that was cohosted by USAID and UNICEF, and we came together and talked about these things and looked through evidence. And a lot of people are trying to find – a lot of people like yourselves, academics and also practitioners, are doing a great job in working with us and helping pave the way for those gaps in evidence and helping try to find a roadmap for where we also need to continue looking for evidence.

Julie MacCartee:

Great. Thank you, Mike. And to our participants, you can see that there are some polls on the screen. Thank you very much for filling those out; we always appreciate your feedback. If you have additional feedback beyond what's captured in these polls, please feel free to enter it in the chat box or to e-mail AgriLinks@AgriLinks.org or my e-mail is JMacCartee@USAID.gov. We always appreciate your feedback on how we can improve these seminars going forward.

We have just a couple more minutes, and a question had come in from Aurelie Attard Espinoza from Chemonics International in D.C., who asked, "Could you tell us a bit more about the important gender considerations and the nutrition strategy and share some best practices from programs that have successfully integrated gender into activities?"

Sally Abbott:

So I want to just – I think that's an incredibly important question. I think that gender is something that across the strategy we tried to look at. One of the areas specifically around agriculture and nutrition, we know that women's empowerment is incredibly important, both for looking at women's time, looking at women's consumption. And I want to point out that we have a couple of technical briefs at the spring project prepared for us that are linked to on the AgriLinks page, or on this page, I think, and we have a specific brief that has on women's empowerment, that gives country examples of what has been done. And we also have a brief on agricultural nutrition for own consumption and agricultural nutrition for production. And I would encourage people to look at those; there are a couple of sort of vignettes in each of them that look at country examples on how each of these areas has tried to be addressed.

Julie MacCartee:

Thank you, Sally. And a basic clarifying question from Reena Borwankar, "Is there an operational definition for the word 'integration' in the strategy or something that you're adopting in your rollout for that word, integration?"

Mike Manske:

I don't believe so. One of us is actually frantically looking to see if there are some definitions and that sort of thing at the end. I welcome you to propose something to us. I think we have various ways that we do integrate, but in terms of an operational definition, I don't believe that we have one yet.

Julie MacCartee: All right. Well, we've done a pretty good job of combing through all of these questions, I believe. Let's see. I think just as a last point, quickly touching upon some of the basics of the nutrition ag linkages, one commenter says, "The biggest challenge with changing cash crops with consumption is the opportunity cost. Often a family has to get to a certain tipping point before they will consume." Do you have any comments on that about that as an important consideration? About whether, you know, the tipping point of getting cash crops to consumption?

Sally Abbott: I don't know that there is a tipping point. I think that that is something that is such a specific to the situation that what we really need to do is build the ability for households to make the decisions, rather than looking at sort of one tipping point that it needs to happen.

Julie MacCartee: Sure. I think that makes sense. Well, we're coming up on our 10:30 ending time. Do you have any final comments or even requests from the participant group that has joined today?

Sally Abbott: I would just thank you all for your attention, and I encourage you both to look at the strategy and the technical briefs and send us any additional comments that you have through this webinar.

Mike Manske: Yeah, and I would just thank you again for your efforts that has contributed to this strategy, and also all of your comments, and as Sally said, your interest. I think that we had over 120 people attending this and then some of you were with one another, so maybe more. And this is really great and encouraging for us. So thanks for your interest.

Julie MacCartee: Great. Thank you so much to Sally, Mike, and Melanie and to our tech team here in the room. And the biggest thank you to you, our attendees, for joining us today for our Ag Sector Council seminar. We really appreciate your attendance, your tough questions, for putting our presenters on the spot, and we hope we were able to answer as many as we could. But we always encourage you to continue the conversation on Agrilinks.org through the event page or through simply contacting us.

We'll be taking a hiatus in August, no Ag Sector Council seminar in August, but we'll be coming back in September, so please keep your eye out. And please join us for future events. Thank you very much.

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