

NUTRITION SECTOR UPDATE



In Mozambique, a USAID/OFDA-supported program trains community health volunteers to screen for malnutrition and provide caregivers with resources for improving nutritional deficiencies. Photo by Teri Smith/USAID

Using Reliable Data to Reduce Food Security Disaster Impacts

The frequency and severity of food security disasters have continued to rise throughout the past decade, resulting in higher hunger and malnutrition rates among vulnerable populations. Due to resource constraints and a lack of access to health care, nutrition needs often go unreported. Conducting reliable surveys is essential for assessing the severity of a crisis and tailoring response efforts to meet affected populations' needs.

With more than \$1.6 million in USAID/OFDA assistance since FY 2013, Action Against Hunger/U.S. (AAH/USA) manages Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART), an interagency initiative designed to collect reliable nutrition and mortality data. USAID/OFDA supports AAH/USA to raise awareness of SMART and increase nutrition assessment coordination and partnership building among host governments, enabling relief agencies to make informed decisions regarding emergency nutrition assistance.

SMART methodology has become the standard reference tool within the Nutrition Cluster, the global coordinating body for humanitarian nutrition activities, comprising UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders—not only to collect nutrition assessment data during emergencies but also to prevent and prepare for nutrition-related emergencies. By collecting data prior to and following crises, host governments and humanitarian agencies are better positioned to build community resilience to food security disasters.

Sector Overview

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is a leader in supporting emergency nutrition response in international humanitarian crises. According to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), hunger and malnutrition are rampant among displaced populations. In particular, a disproportionate number of children in emergencies face severe acute malnutrition (SAM), a life-threatening condition defined by very low weight, as well as visible wasting and fluid retention.

USAID/OFDA supports community-based programs that combine the strengths of clinical and at-home care to address nutritional deficiencies.

USAID/OFDA partners aim to build awareness and capacity to prevent and treat malnutrition through community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programs, infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E) programs, and improvement of emergency nutrition information collection and analysis to better inform response efforts.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, USAID/OFDA provided approximately \$74 million to support nutrition activities, including global and regional nutrition initiatives and nutrition interventions in more than 20 countries.



A USAID NGO partner manages a nutrition site in South Sudan. Photo by Meghann Perez/USAID

Nourishing Conflict-Affected Children in Yemen

In Yemen, insecurity and protracted displacement have exacerbated high levels of poverty and left millions of people food-insecure. The 2016 UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen reports that approximately 2 million acutely malnourished children and pregnant or lactating women need treatment, and an additional 1 million children require preventative services. An estimated 320,000 children are at risk of becoming severely acutely malnourished and facing a mortality rate nine times that of their peers.

In FY 2016, USAID/OFDA provided more than \$7.7 million to WHO and NGO partners to reduce mortality of malnourished children and lower persistently high levels of acute malnutrition. USAID/OFDA partners are collaborating with local NGOs to conduct nutrition surveillance, maintain fixed and mobile treatment centers, provide therapeutic foods, establish stabilization sites for life-threatening cases of acute malnutrition, and train community workers to identify malnutrition symptoms and make treatment referrals. Through its partnerships, USAID/OFDA aims to build the capacity of health care providers in Yemen to address SAM cases, while training community members on addressing nutritional deficiencies at home so as to reduce the need for professional care.

Developing Life-Saving Therapies to Close Care Gaps

Since FY 2014, USAID/OFDA has partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to develop and test an alternative protocol combining existing treatments of SAM and moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). If children battling MAM do not receive adequate support, they may progress toward SAM or experience serious growth stunting; both are life-threatening conditions. WHO considers MAM a public health priority. Unfortunately, the majority of CMAM programs are only able to offer SAM treatment due to severe logistical and resource constraints, resulting in a high likelihood that MAM cases go untreated.

USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$780,000 since FY 2014 to support an expert task force to develop a combined treatment based on dosage and growth data from therapeutic programs in several countries, including Kenya; IRC is currently testing the new therapy to prepare it for wider use. By developing a single protocol differing only in dosage for treating both MAM and SAM, USAID/OFDA partner IRC aims to increase both the quantity of children reached and the quality of care provided to those with nutritional deficiencies.

Leading the International Community to Improve Health Outcomes of Babies and Young Children

With \$800,000 in FY 2016 USAID/OFDA assistance, Save the Children/U.S. (SC/US) is leading an effort to educate humanitarian partners on safe ICYF-E practices by conducting impact evaluations of ICYF-E programs and leading a series of regional and national trainings to improve the quality of feeding and nutritional interventions. As a key part of the organization's leadership in advancing the humanitarian community's ability to address IYCF-E needs, SC/US developed a toolkit containing practical approaches for incorporating lessons learned and recent medical advances into program plans and implementation. USAID/OFDA is supporting SC/US to transform the toolkit into a video training to reach wider audiences.

USAID/OFDA is also supporting SC/US to strengthen breastfeeding interventions during emergencies, including addressing breastfeeding difficulties among lactating mothers, administering lactation counseling services to new mothers who want to start or restart breastfeeding, and conducting assessments of breastfeeding prevalence. SC/US efforts not only aim to improve outcomes for beneficiaries, but also to provide valuable new information to the humanitarian community on best practices for improving incidence and quality of breastfeeding as a mechanism of nourishing infants and children in emergencies.