

SPOTLIGHT

CAPACITY BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



A group of Itasy region farmers and school teachers work together to plant a moringa tree nursery. The group was brought together by a USAID and Peace Corps training to increase food security and nutrition in Madagascar.

Sarah Fowlkes,
Peace Corps

Capacity Development

Continued long-term support for the development of human and institutional capacity is a vital component of sustaining the results of USAID's investments well beyond the end of USAID assistance. Capacity building has been an important element of USAID's nutrition work through short-term, in-service and pre-service training, and academic degree education, for millions of local health professionals, farmers, community health workers and other key nutrition-related personnel in USAID-supported countries. In addition, USAID has invested considerable resources in trainings and continued learning opportunities for employees, and has facilitated nutrition capacity building and cross-country learning and exchange for entire regions, particularly Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Personnel Training

In 1969, the Agency held its first nutrition in-service workshop for over 65 employees from USAID headquarters and field offices, along with other U.S. Government staff and some external experts.¹ The workshop helped identify and unify nutrition priorities and programming across USAID and develop recommendations for USAID headquarters and country offices to improve program implementation. Multiple similar in-service workshops followed in later years to further refine these priorities and programmatic recommendations, to share the latest research and knowledge on nutrition and to help countries share experiences and best practices for nutrition programming.^{2,3} Following these early in-service workshops, USAID has continually prioritized keeping staff skills current with in-service trainings, and these trainings have expanded to often include participation from implementing partners and country government staff. An example is the Global Learning and Evidence Exchange conferences on multi-sectoral nutrition and agriculture for nutrition held from 2013-2016, which aimed to bring together USAID staff from headquarters and country offices, along with experts and other practitioners in nutrition and related fields, to share and learn from one another's experiences, identify gaps in programs and strengthen USAID's collective approach to multi-sectoral nutrition programming.

In addition to in-person trainings, USAID has supported the creation of many training manuals and curricula, including online learning courses, to help staff expand their knowledge and stay abreast of the latest nutrition research and programmatic best practices. Through creating online learning courses, USAID has

made nutrition information available to anyone anywhere for free, thereby greatly expanding the reach of the Agency's capacity building efforts.

Degree Training and Fellowships

Long-term training in which participants obtain advanced degrees in nutrition has also been an important USAID investment. In 1972, with funds from USAID and other donors, MIT created a new sub-discipline in nutrition studies comprised of applied courses on nutrition policy, planning and programming in developing countries. The new sub-discipline was soon offered at other universities, including Tufts and Cornell, where it continues to be taught. Senior nutrition officials in country governments, international agencies, USAID and its implementing partners have been among the many graduates of this sub-discipline.

Sponsoring fellowships that allow young professionals to gain international nutrition experience while working at USAID began in 1975 with Nutrition Planning Fellows—U.S. nutrition staff that were trained and then sent abroad to assist nutrition planning in low- and middle-income countries—and it remains an integral component of the Agency's nutrition programming. Starting in 2015, USAID has offered these fellowships for national nutrition staff from USAID country offices through a program dedicated to the work of Dr. Martin J. Forman, who established and directed the USAID Office of Nutrition for its first 20 years. They offer country staff a professional development opportunity through temporary rotational assignments, including structured learning components, at USAID headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Building Country Capacity

Enhancing countries' capacities to address their own nutrition needs underscores all of USAID's investments in nutrition. Examples of USAID's long history of enhancing country capacity can be found throughout this History, but the following are some more recent examples of the Agency's efforts to enhance countries' abilities to identify nutrition issues and develop, implement and evaluate successful nutrition programs. From 2010 to 2018, the USAID-funded Feed the Future Nutrition Innovation Lab has enhanced institutional and human research capacity in Nepal and Uganda through graduate-level trainings, short courses and conferences.⁵ Managed by Tufts University, the innovation lab also partnered with a medical school in Malawi to create the country's first clinical dietetics program in 2016.

Building country capacity for nutrition is also an important component of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, a global initiative that brings together government, organizations and individuals to work collaboratively to end malnutrition, of which USAID is a key participant and donor. Established in 2010, SUN focuses at the country level to help countries build an enabling social, political and economic environment to foster improved nutrition. As of 2018, 60 countries had signed on as members of the SUN Movement, committing to increase their resources for nutrition and to scale up coverage of women and children with essential, high-impact nutrition interventions.⁶ High-level government stakeholders from each of these countries are engaged in SUN, as are in-country staff from many development organizations, including USAID. USAID's involvement in global movements like SUN highlight the Agency's continued commitment to strengthening local capacity and accelerating the progress of country-led programs to improve nutrition for women and young children.

Organizational Capacity

USAID's long history of strengthening the nutrition capacity of U.S. private voluntary organizations began between 1969 and 1973 when the Agency provided small grants to six agencies to increase program effectiveness and develop new, innovative nutrition programs in 20 countries.⁷ In 1985, this was followed by another Agency grant-giving effort, the ongoing, competitive Child Survival and Health Grants Program for U.S. private voluntary organizations. The program supports field implementation with technical assistance and collaboration through the CORE Group, a community health coalition of more than 70 non-governmental organizations and affiliates in 180 countries. The partnership has strengthened organizational capacity of 58 U.S. private voluntary organizations, as well as governments and civil society organizations in more than 60 countries. The CORE Group has also published nutrition-specific tools and approaches for program design, research, implementation and evaluation, in addition to many resources on knowledge management and learning.⁸

Knowledge Management

From the outset, USAID has invested in widespread information dissemination to relevant audiences using innovative formats to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning. Knowledge management is a central component for USAID's work on nutrition and is reflected in each nutrition-related program, action and investment. It is therefore impossible to cover the breadth of USAID's work on this topic, but the following paragraphs offer examples of some key actions USAID has taken to expand knowledge management and learning for nutrition.

In 1968, USAID financed the establishment of the League for International Food Education, a technical nutrition consortium of U.S. scientific societies that responded to field inquiries on food technology and nutrition.⁹ The League's print newsletter on global nutrition research and program experiences was the primary source of reliable and readily available technical information for field staff and country partners in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁰

In 1979, USAID assisted the American Public Health Association in creating the Clearinghouse on Infant Feeding and Maternal Nutrition, to increase access



An instructor at Ebony State University in Nigeria demonstrates key maternal and child health and nutrition practices for nursing students as part of their pre-service education.

Karen Kasmauski/MCSP

to information by health practitioners and decision-makers in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.¹¹ This became a comprehensive information center on health and education programs, women and development, communications, education and knowledge management. For more than 15 years, this Clearinghouse also acted as a resource for USAID's partners to learn about the Agency's past efforts and results.¹²

Since the 2000s, USAID has required knowledge management systems in its programs. These systems generate, capture, organize, share and use knowledge and evidence to inform the global community and scale-up nutrition policies, programs and systems across multiple regions and partners. To extend its reach, USAID also uses newer computer technology such as websites, webinars and electronic newsletters to expand the reach of these knowledge management and learning resources. For instance, since 2011, USAID, as part of the Feed the Future initiative, has been supporting an online platform for agriculture, development and food security professionals to share content, connect to one another and learn from each other. USAID has also expanded efforts to ensure that internal staff worldwide have access to key job-related nutrition knowledge and resources, including through the creation of an Agency-wide internal nutrition resource center. As USAID's multi-sectoral nutrition programming continues to evolve, so does its approaches to knowledge management, learning and adaptation and to building country capacity, with the long-term goal of helping countries better address the nutritional needs of their populations.