



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Learning from Program Interventions

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Title: Realigning Agriculture to Integrate Nutrition (RAIN) Project

Rationale for the RAIN project

It is widely recognised that chronic malnutrition must be tackled through holistic and integrated programming including cross-sectoral actions in health, agriculture, education, and water and sanitation.

There is a need for innovative models and global evidence on effective, scalable and sustainable ways to prevent chronic malnutrition.

Description of the Project

Concern and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have recently embarked on a partnership to design, implement and rigorously evaluate a project aimed at preventing stunting in young children in Mumbwa District, Zambia.

The project will support interventions targeting mothers and children during the critical period from conception until 24 months of age, roughly equivalent to the first 1000 days of life. Like many traditional food security interventions, the RAIN project aims to do this by effectively improving food availability and access. The RAIN approach differs, however, in its focus on the realignment and integration of the agriculture and health sectors to achieve nutritional outcomes.

Agriculture, health, behavioural change and women's empowerment interventions have been selected based on their strong evidence base or, alternatively, where expert opinion endorses their use. Essential components include promotion of homestead production of nutritious crops or small livestock, intensive behaviour change communication for improved infant and young child feeding, gender-appropriate technology and support, and referrals for appropriate health care.

The project is designed to prevent undernutrition in children below two years of age and will primarily target 3,870 households. It will be implemented in four wards of Mumbwa District, Central Province, Zambia from January 2011 through December 2015.

Key Features and innovations of the RAIN Project

1. **Empowerment of women.** It is well recognised that women, as food producers and primary caretakers, play a key role in influencing the nutritional outcomes in their children. Empowerment of women will therefore be a cornerstone of the approach and a key outcome of the envisioned system change.
2. **Supporting small farmers to diversify cropping systems, particularly homestead production systems.** Agricultural activities will aim at improving availability of, and access to, micronutrient-rich plant and animal source foods at the household level and improving food production techniques. This is important to meet nutritional goals and a focus on non-staple crops by agriculture extension will be an innovation of the project.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation** The rigorous evaluation component has been designed to detect the project's impact on child stunting. Operations research will be undertaken to understand the impact pathways that are most critical to achieving that impact. In this way, the project will contribute to the essential but scant evidence currently linking agricultural interventions to a reduction in stunting. The partnership between IFPRI and Concern Worldwide will combine the organizations' expertise in scientific rigour and on-the ground implementation to improve the learning opportunities.
4. **Coordination between different sectors.** The RAIN project will be implemented by Concern Worldwide, in partnership with local NGOs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the Ministry of Health. The project will work in line with relevant national and district policies and facilitate a shift in how under-nutrition is conceptualised and addressed across the sectors. Building on this common understanding, we aim to foster coordinated planning, implementation and monitoring by key actors across the sectors at community, district and national level. This approach is innovative and key lessons will be disseminated on the process.

Conclusion

The project will offer evidence and guidance to practitioners on effective inter-sectoral approaches to improve nutrition. This will be used to improve policies and practice to leverage agriculture and health to improve nutritional outcomes on a wider scale.

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