



# What is Good for Nutrition?

A Save the Children Symposium

December 3, 2014 Washington D.C.

Investments and interest in nutrition have been continuing to grow since the release of *The Lancet's* Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition in 2008 and 2013, the launch and spread of the Scaling up Nutrition movement, and the increased recognition of the impact of malnutrition worldwide. On December 3, 2014 Save the Children hosted a technical symposium **'What is Good for Nutrition?'**

The one-day symposium provided an opportunity to discuss how we measure the impact of nutrition programs; the direction of nutrition programming in the future and; and highlighted some of the lessons from Save the Children's USAID bilateral nutrition programs, FHI 360's Alive & Thrive program, and the global USAID SPRING project. The Symposium proved an opportune moment for the nutrition community in Washington D.C to come together and discuss the future of programming building on the momentum of ICN2, the recently released Global Nutrition Report, and the USAID Multi Sectoral nutrition strategy. The Vice President for the Department of Health and Nutrition, Robert Clay opened the meeting, and pointed to the importance of reflecting on where the field of nutrition is now and from where we have come, its growing interest and importance, and the shift from looking at specific interventions to the more comprehensive approaches that are now being engaged in to improve nutrition. Robert reminded the audience of the need to be more vigilant about taking the advantage of this window of opportunity for nutrition, to focus on delivering results and build on the momentum of what has been learned so far.

A Key Note Address '[Growing Children, Nutrition and Expectations for Impact of Interventions](#)'<sup>1</sup> was delivered by **Edward A. Frongillo, Jr., Ph.D.**, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior in the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina. In this presentation, Dr. Frongillo presented data and innovative ideas and approaches to measuring child growth in interventions and discussion of what the Nutrition community and multi-sectoral partners should be focusing on in future design of programs.



## Key messages

- There is a need for a holistic approach to child nutrition, it's not just about stunting prevention. We ought to focus on healthy environments and well-being for children through to adolescence, and to ensure growth and development.
- Stunting may not be the most useful way to understand nutritional outcomes. It's great for measuring changes over time, and regional differences, but not always appropriate to measure nutrition outcomes in interventions.
- We need to use a broad set of ECD measures and indicators to assess impact of interventions on children.
- Growth deficits continue after the 1000 days period, but better to measure this through the Height-for-Age difference (HAD) measured in centimeters rather than Z-scores.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation embedded

The key note address was followed by an engaging panel discussion with leaders in the field of public health nutrition. Facilitated by the Save the Children Senior Director for Nutrition, Karin Lapping, questions addressed the direction of nutrition programming, the rise and role of convergence in funding, projects and partners, the presence of Nutrition in the Sustainable Development goals and how we can utilize the renewed focus on nutrition to deliver interventions at scale. The panelists were:

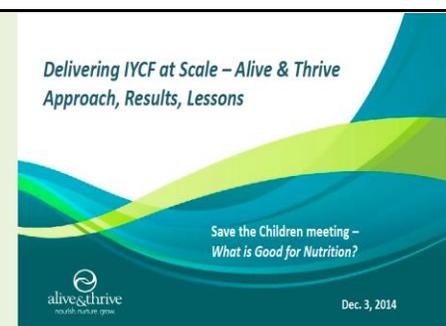
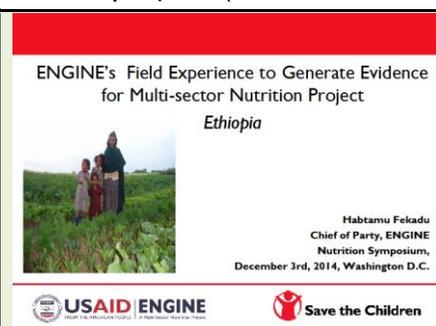
- Ellen Piwoz, *Senior Program Officer, Nutrition Division at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*
- Rolf Klemm, *Vice President of Nutrition, Hellen Keller International*
- Jef Leroy, *Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute*
- Anne Peniston, *Chief, Nutrition Division at the Bureau of Global Health, USAID*
- Leslie Elder, *Senior Nutrition Specialist, Health, Nutrition and Population Unit of the World Bank*

The panelists who covered a broad spectrum of nutrition partners and influencers, provided interesting perspectives and insight into the future opportunities and challenges that will be faced by the nutrition community. The discussion was topical and addressed a broad spectrum of perspectives, some highlights included

- The SUN movement has been a serious catalyst for discussion how we go to scale. The conversations going on in countries have clarified that there isn't a great deal of knowledge on how to get to scale.
- Nutrition is fundamental to sustainability of human capital so there is a natural synergy and place for nutrition in the gender, education, climate change and sustainable production goals of the SDGs.
- Linear growth is not very responsive, though there are many spin off benefits if we aren't shifting that goal quickly, and we need to show progress on some of the proximal indicators that programs can impact
- The nutrition community needs to agree on indicators and targets that we think will be able to monitor progress in the SDGs, and that address the outcomes we want to see.
- Convergence and multi-sector programs give us additional delivery platforms, and help us get to scale which hasn't been possible through the health system, prevention based approach.
- We have a great opportunity to build implementation science into our programs from the beginning. We need to build in the research opportunities to test what we are trying to build up and bring to scale.
- When thinking about nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific – we can think of nutrition sensitive as the ground floor, and we build the nutrition specific on top.
- There is a need to improve other sectors, like WASH, Agriculture, education whether or not they accelerate or are synergistic with nutrition.
- There is a need to help countries find ways to use resources more strategically for improved nutrition, regardless of where the funding is coming from (be it agriculture, education, health).

While there were points of difference among the panelists, it was the general consensus that we should be pushing to keep the window of opportunity open, be striving for strong evidence and data, and the group agreed on the essential nature of the multi-sectoral work. The panelists also endorsed the idea that we need to look at indicators more broadly and not rely only on stunting as the only way to measure our interventions, and promoted the idea that the community as a whole needs to speak in a clear and unified manner about what we measure, why and how.

The panel sessions was followed by four key presentations to highlight the work being done in Save the Children's USAID bilateral nutrition programs, FHI 360's Alive & Thrive program, and the global USAID SPRING project. (Double click the icon's below to access presentations)



The **ENGINE** project is a 5 year multi-sectoral project being implemented in 100 districts in 4 regions of Ethiopia. Habtamu Fekadu, the CoP for the project presented on the project experience, focusing on their approach to generating evidence through a rigorous research agenda and ENGINE's focus and success in building capacity in nutrition in Ethiopia.

Jean Baker, Project Director for **Alive & Thrive** presented on recent data from the Alive & Thrive project A multi -year initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, DFAF, and Irish. The presentation focused on the framework and design of the project and results generated from intensive nutrition specific activities that were conducted in Ethiopia, Vietnam and Bangladesh.



Peter Oyloe, CoP for the **Suaahara** Project in Nepal presented on extending multi sectoral nutrition services to Disadvantaged groups in Nepal. Suaahara, is a 5 year multi sectoral project active in 41 districts in Nepal reaching over 625,000 households. Peter presented on the approach to targeting and delivering to DAG households during the 1000 day period.



**SPRING** is a 5-year USAID flagship nutrition project dedicated to strengthening global and country efforts to advance supportive nutrition policies and scale up high-impact nutrition interventions. Lidan Du presented on the work SPRING has been doing to support the USAID Feed the Future Initiative, including the Pathways from Agriculture to Improved nutrition.

While the presentations covered a diverse series of topics, and had different implementation approaches and frameworks, there were key messages that came through strongly in the presentations.

### Some key takeaways from the presentations:

- When pushing to scale, we need to carefully design the projects. Many projects would benefit from a planning/learning year, particularly to design and establish appropriate M&E practices and targets. (ENGINE, A&T)
- Intensity of contact matters when it comes to counselling and changing behaviors. Improving the quality and scale of communication contacts is an important investment (A&T)
- Specialized delivery platforms to reach disadvantaged, remote communities during 1000 days period are required (Suaahara)
- There is a need for a coordinated effort to build the evidence base for nutrition sensitive actions and multi-sectoral programs. (SPRING)

The day's discussions, questions and presentations provided a great deal of information and food for thought to the 75-odd Symposium participants. The panelists mentioned the many exciting opportunities for nutrition programming in the future – the role of ICT, the clarity on the contribution of environmental enteric dysfunction to stunting, research outcomes on newborn Vitamin A and food supplements for mothers and the opportunity for meaningful engagement across sectors and the long horizon for nutrition and resource commitments for nutrition that are tied to future events. While the presentations highlighted what can be done, what the real challenges are and what success can look like.

### Key takeaways included

- There is a need to define and agree on indicators and targets for nutrition, not just stunting and to monitor the progress
- Nutrition isn't going to move without multi-sectoral investments, and this approach is moving forward, though we lack clarity on exactly how to do it. What multisectorality looks like, and what is effective is going to be driven by local context.
- Projects need a longer time to start up, design and refine quality interventions as emphasized by ENGINE and Alive and Thrive.
- Need to think larger than just nutritional improvement, think about happy, healthy populations leading productive lives.
- Convergence, including private sector convergence, in addition to public sectors (WASH, Agriculture, Education, Climate Change) and of organizations is in the future of nutrition programming
- the overwhelming message was - "Let's keep the Window Open"