

## NOURISHING LIVES & BUILDING THE FUTURE: THE HISTORY OF NUTRITION AT USAID



Courtesy of Alan Berg



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In the late 1960s, when the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) began to invest in nutrition, work on nutrition in an international context was just beginning, with little known about the causes, consequences and solutions for undernutrition.

Since the 1960s, there has been much improvement in global nutrition. As documented in this history, USAID has played a leading role in the progress made; USAID's unique and pioneering role in research to answer questions and implement solutions has brought better nutrition where needed, especially for mothers and children. Through close collaboration with partners, host-country governments and the global nutrition community as a whole, USAID has worked at the intersection of this complex dynamic in research, implementation, training and assessment to save lives and improve the future for millions of the world's most vulnerable citizens.

This resource features chapters on USAID's support for specific nutrition focus areas, vulnerable populations and interventions, and highlights some of the Agency's key contributions and groundbreaking work in different areas over the past 50 years. The following is a snapshot of some of these results.



### SELECT GLOBAL ACHIEVEMENTS ACCOMPLISHED WITH USAID'S SUPPORT

Over the past three decades:

- More than 100 million children have escaped the devastating and lasting effects of undernutrition.
- The prevalence of underweight and stunting among children under 5 has halved.
- Exclusive breastfeeding—the single most effective preventive intervention to reduce child mortality—has increased substantially, on average, across USAID-supported countries.
- The development and distribution of several million tons of cereal-soy fortified blended foods has enriched the diets of millions of mothers and children.
- Vitamin A supplementation has averted an estimated 1.25 million child deaths.
- Household consumption of iodized salt has increased by more than sevenfold, protecting infants and the unborn from brain damage.



### MATERNAL, INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION

- Early recognition of breastfeeding's significance for child survival has translated to lives saved and improved long-term outcomes for countless children.
- Research and promotion of the Lactational Amenorrhea Method, an effective, short-term family planning method for breastfeeding women has offered an additional option for women to time and space their families.
- The scale up and institutionalization of community-based treatment for acute malnutrition has helped thousands of malnourished children recover.



### MICRONUTRIENTS

- Breakthrough research revealed that vitamin A deficiency contributed to child mortality in addition to child blindness, leading to increased support for vitamin A supplementation to improve child survival and health.
- Assistance to scale up food fortification with micronutrients in more than 30 countries has contributed to widespread fortification in low- and middle-income countries.
- Micronutrient supplementation efforts have produced major increases in global coverage.



### HIV, FOOD AND NUTRITION

- A highly successful approach combining nutrition assessment, counseling and support has been applied in more than 20 countries, fostering stronger, more comprehensive health systems.
- HIV activities have been implemented as part of 41 food assistance programs to provide both food and nutrition support to people living with and those affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Key research and technical input has helped inform global guidance on infant feeding, nutrition for breastfeeding mothers and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.



### MULTI-SECTORAL NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY

- Programmatic research documented the many ways that national economic policies can impact the income and diets of poor households, and showed that income alone could not solve undernutrition.
- Early investment and work on biofortification has led to the development of more vitamin A, iron and zinc rich crops and has increased household production and consumption of these foods.
- Leading the U.S. Government's efforts to reduce global hunger and food insecurity through the Feed the Future initiative has helped millions of families around the world escape hunger and poverty.



### RESEARCH AND MEASUREMENT

- Early research identified the devastating causes and consequences of malnutrition, including death, leading to an increased global focus on approaches to prevent malnutrition.
- Critical research on sustainability, cost-effectiveness and governance has supported successful implementation of evidence-based nutrition interventions.
- Support for national surveys that collect data on nutritional status has deepened the understanding of health, population, nutrition and household issues and has informed programming, policies, funding priorities and research.

These and other improvements in nutrition globally have preserved human capital and prevented millions of deaths and life-long disabilities, and they show that coordination and commitment across diverse stakeholders can drive action and produce results. Yet, these improvements also highlight that there is still much to do to achieve the globally agreed upon nutrition goals. Scaling up the coverage of evidence-based nutrition interventions is vital to continuing progress to reduce malnutrition and to sustaining existing gains, as is finding innovative solutions to the new and evolving issues that enter the nutrition landscape and leveraging existing resources for greater impact. As a leader in global nutrition, USAID continues to work across sectors to support research, policies and programs to improve nutrition. These efforts foster healthier, more productive and prosperous individuals, communities and systems and support countries on their journeys to self-reliance.

#### LEARN MORE:

<https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/nutrition/nourishing-lives-and-building-future-history-nutrition-usaid>