

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world has set a goal to cut hunger in half by 2015 as part of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To achieve this goal, current efforts must be expanded greatly. The urgency is nowhere more critical than in sub-Saharan Africa, where a crisis of hunger and poverty is being compounded by HIV and AIDS. In this region, more and more people lack access to the food they need to lead full and productive lives.

To address the hunger problem, the *Agriculture-Nutrition Advantage* project was implemented over a three-year period, from 2001 to 2004, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The strategy of the project was to cultivate a network of leaders and advocates in sub-Saharan Africa who would promote an approach to combating hunger that is effective but rarely used in practice: linking agriculture and nutrition, while also accounting for gender. The decision to promote this approach was based on the premise that agriculture and nutrition communities are missing opportunities to reduce poverty, hunger, and malnutrition by failing to combine scarce resources, act collaboratively, and incorporate gender analysis throughout their work. Because hunger and malnutrition have multiple causes – each addressed by technical specialists and institutions from different sectors that rarely work together – the project sought to bridge sectoral gaps.

Those working on hunger generally agree – and evidence shows – that such a linked approach does reduce hunger and malnutrition. However, without leadership in promoting this approach, different sectors continue to work in isolation. The leadership strategy was borne out of the need for committed and credible leaders to advocate for greater use of this effective, yet underutilized approach. Toward this end, skilled, knowledgeable, and well-placed teams of

advocates from relevant sectors and institutions were organized in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, and the United States. The team members built on existing in-country networks and used the project’s conceptual framework to identify areas of opportunity to strengthen agriculture and nutrition linkages and address relevant gender issues in their countries.

Agriculture-Nutrition Advantage team members emerged as leaders and strong advocates for an agriculture and nutrition linked, gender-informed approach to fighting hunger. They developed plans of action and collected evidence that illustrated the effectiveness of this approach. They brought community members together with technical specialists and, in one case, political decision makers to apply this approach at the grassroots level. They integrated the approach into organizations and used the evidence they collected to advocate for greater use of the approach in targeted policies and programs.

Conclusions

By creating a leadership network involving a wide range of actors and institutions, the *Agriculture-Nutrition Advantage* project achieved a remarkable degree of success within a relatively short time. The following conclusions can be drawn about the leadership strategy and how to implement a linked, gender-informed approach within policies, organizations, and communities.

- ▶ **Leadership Networks.** A leadership network is a powerful strategy to promote the adoption of an agriculture-nutrition linked, gender-informed approach in reducing hunger and malnutrition. The country teams were able to bring the project approach to the attention of development practitioners and policymakers in large part because the members were recognized leaders, represented different types

of organizations and agencies, and had access to decision makers and communities. The leadership networks pooled their personal and professional assets, learned from each other, engaged other influential experts and, in the end, were able to influence diverse audiences.

- ▶ **Evidence-based Advocacy.** The teams achieved change not only because they were widely respected, but also because they used evidence from their own case studies, from empirical data, and from the literature to make their case, and could present their case in a compelling manner to strategically chosen audiences. By framing the evidence in the context of national priorities, the teams showed how a linked, gender-informed approach could enhance the effectiveness of key policy initiatives and community actions.
- ▶ **Power of Participatory Processes.** The teams' successes also stemmed from their ability to use participatory processes to promote the project's approach. Such processes provided opportunities to involve stakeholders, ranging from technical specialists to policymakers, in policy and program development, and in decisions regarding allocation of resources. In addition to the technical and political perspectives, input from communities helped put a human face on the benefits of using a linked, gender-informed approach.
- ▶ **Action-oriented Solutions.** The leaders went beyond the "why" to the "how" by providing decision makers and other actors with specific measures they could take to use a linked, gender-informed approach. As a result, policymakers and community members were able to quickly consider the suggestions and take action, leading to changes in a relatively short time.

- ▶ **Capacity Strengthening and Learning.** The project's annual workshops strengthened the team members' knowledge of agriculture and nutrition linkages, skills in using gender analysis as a planning tool, and leadership and advocacy skills. The workshops created the space for members to ask questions of, seek assistance from, and share information with other team members. The multi-disciplinary nature of the teams, including gender specialists, and the team members' experience working with communities provided more opportunities for learning and applying their enhanced knowledge and skills.

- ▶ **Gender Knowledge and Skills.** As a result of the *Agriculture-Nutrition Advantage* project, network members improved their understanding and use of gender analysis as a research and planning methodology. Using practical, hands-on learning was critical to moving the members from knowing about gender in the abstract to their more concrete understanding of the role gender plays in the hunger problem and potential solutions.

To achieve the goal of cutting hunger in half by 2015 and realizing all citizens' rights to be productive, healthy, and well-nourished, we must build on the momentum that was created by the *Agriculture-Nutrition Advantage* leadership network and continue to expand the use of successful efforts – particularly those that can show quick results, such as the agriculture-nutrition linked, gender-informed approach.