

Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia

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WORKING TOWARDS #ZEROHUNGER AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN THE GAMBIA

Delivering As One

Within the framework of the “Delivering As One” (DAO) principle, UNICEF and WFP conducted a survey designed to identify cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) cases in the project intervention sites for enhanced prevention and management of acute malnutrition. The exercise was conducted together with the government implementing partners namely the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the National Nutrition Agency and the National Disaster Management Agency in more than 1,500 villages using digital tools. This facilitated timely data collection and analysis for prompt decision making and data usage.

All the three implementing UN agencies namely, FAO, UNICEF and WFP, have since utilized the results to provide the much needed assistance to the vulnerable populations across the project regions. More than 1,600 households with children with SAM/ MAM received quality farm inputs (mainly cowpea, rice seeds and fertilizers) as well as technical assistance from FAO. Both UNICEF and WFP have used the findings to reach almost 3,460 vulnerable children for the treatment of Severe and Moderate Acute Malnutrition (SAM and MAM).



Mothers of children identified through UNICEF and WFP screening receiving inputs from FAO

Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Malnutrition on the Decline in Project Intervention Regions

- REPORT

Moderate and Severe Acute Malnutrition affect many children in The Gambia, particularly children born from food insecure households, and to parents with limited knowledge of required infant and young child care practices. Such children are usually malnourished, have repeated episodes of illnesses and fail to grow to their full potential.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are jointly supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the prevention and treatment of Acute Malnutrition. To ensure that all children vulnerable to malnutrition are screened and treated in a timely manner, a continuous nutrition surveillance and screening process is paramount. This project has provided technical support to the National Nutrition Agency using Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measurements for identification of malnourished children.

In May 2018, a mass screening exercise to identify children with Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) was conducted in the North Bank, Lower River, Central River and Upper River

Regions of The Gambia. In addition to the screening, an assessment of Vitamin A supplementation coverage of children aged 6 - 23 months and 24 - 59 months was incorporated into the survey. The real-time data was collected using telephone tablets, via the "ONA" application - a web-based data capturing and analysis software.

The screening was conducted by Community Health Nurses and the NaNA Nutrition Field Officers. Prior to the screening, data collectors were retrained and tested to ensure their competence. The tablets were also tested for effective data synchronization and retrieval.

During screening, WFP provided supplementary feeding rations to children with MAM and SAM without complications were treated at community level with Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) by UNICEF. The health workers in the intervention areas were notified for necessary follow-ups.

In May 2018, a total of 63,862 children (34,269 boys and 33,061 girls) were screened of which 3,235 were moderately malnourished and only 232 children were severely malnourished. The region with the least cases of SAM was Lower River Region (16 cases), while CRR recorded the highest prevalence of 104 SAM cases. In comparison to the previous screening, the malnutrition cases seemed significantly dropped. This is a positive sign, and reflects a reduction in the risk of morbidity and mortality in these project regions. However, sustained efforts are required to maintain and improve on this positive trend.



A child being screened for MAM/ SAM

Task Force Meeting on Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) Wraps Up in Bwiam

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing technical and financial support to the Government of The Gambia, through the EU-funded Post Crisis Response to Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in The Gambia, for the implementation of the Integrated Management of Acute Mal-nutrition (IMAM). The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) are the key partners for the implementation of the IMAM programme, and have set up a Task Force Committee that meets regularly to discuss the implementation status of this child welfare service delivery programme. The second quarter joint Task Force meeting was held in Bwiam from 29th June to 1st July 2018.

The IMAM approach combines the different aspects of the infant and child care services, including the management of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) to be provided in a more coordinated manner. The IMAM Task Force convergence draws technical staff, key responsible officers and programme staff from the MoHSW and NaNA to provide updates on the various activities they have been engaged in, and share lessons learnt, best practices, and bottlenecks.

The meeting featured a presentation from the Directorate of Health Promotion and Education, on the School Based Engagement on WaSH promotion: Child Hygiene and Sanitation Training (CHAST). This was a pilot project on hygiene and sanitation at the Kunkujang Nursery School, supported by a Swedish philanthropist. The initiative has provided hygiene education to parents and teaching staff of the school, and resulted in a safe and clean environment for the children at the school.

The National Nutrition Agency also led a presentation on the updated results of the management of Severe Acute Malnutrition, through inpatient facility care in major health facilities, and outpatient treatment in minor health

centres across the country. The presentation highlighted the improved care for children provided by health staff, despite the numerous unfavorable conditions and competing priorities they experience in their work. Some of these challenges include the untimely delivery of drugs and supplies to the facilities due to unavailability of transport, staff turnover and transfers, lack of trained staff on IMAM protocol, inaccurate and late reporting of the monthly update to the Regional Health Directorate for compilation.

They also gave insights on the WFP and UNICEF joint mass screening for MAM and SAM, conducted in North Bank, Lower River, Central River and Upper River Regions. Preliminary results were shared - showing a gradual decrease in the prevalence of malnutrition in the said regions. The lessons learnt, challenges and way forward/future planning especially for screening was also discussed.

The two-day engagement provided an opportunity for the various actors of the IMAM programme to meet and discuss the progress and challenges. During the sessions, the participants got into groups to work on the challenges identified. This interactive session provided solutions or actions to be taken to remedy the problems highlighted as a way forward.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, The Director of Health Services, Mr Mamadi Cham expressed delight, adding that it was his first time attending such a useful technical meeting on IMAM under his Directorate. He challenged the health staff to go back and work on improving on the weak areas, and promised to follow up on the actions and recommendations. He thanked staff for the excellent work they are doing, despite all the challenges in the health sector.

The Deputy Director of NaNA, Mr Malang Fofana also spoke at the closing session and hailed the fruitful collaboration between the National Nutrition Agency and Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the long-standing partnership with UNICEF on the SAM treatment services. He urged participants to be committed to the actions they have tasked themselves with.

Double Protection for Vulnerable Families During the Lean Season Thanks to The EU



21-month-old Kabiru holding a sachet of nutritious food provided by WFP

As the lean season begins, WFP reaches out to families to protect children and women from hunger and malnutrition.

At Jiffarong Health Centre, about 150kms from the capital city, Banjul, a toddler on his mother's back catches my attention. 21-month-old Kabiru cannot wait to get home to devour a sachet of his monthly WFP supply of nutritious paste-like baby friendly food filled with protein, iron and vitamins. It's his breakfast after breastfeeding and he seems to love it!

Kabiru is one of 30, 000 children in four out of the six regions of The Gambia who will not go hungry during the lean season. This period, also commonly referred to as the hungry season is when the previous year's harvest is virtually depleted and farming families are waiting for the next harvest. This is the most difficult time of the year for one in two Gambians (48.6 percent) who live below the poverty line of less than 1.25 USD a day.

It is especially true for children like 20-month old Ousainou and his one-month old little sister Yassin at Medina Sancha, not far from Kabiru's village in Lower River Region. Under the age of 2 years, Ousainou already has another sibling (Yassin) who now takes up most of their mother Isatou Ceesay's attention. She struggles to care and feed them both, in addition to her other children.

With WFP's double care and support for women and children, Isatou and her family will not only be food secure but she can raise healthier babies. Thanks to the European Union, WFP gives monthly rations to children under 2, and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers.

"WFP's preventative measures during this period, if taken correctly will help Ousainou to avoid falling into malnutrition during this lean season. At his first visit a month ago, when WFP and partners screened children in more than 1500 villages and communities, he was at risk, explains Gabriella, Peace Corps volunteer working with WFP. "The food that WFP is giving to my son has been very helpful. I can now safely breastfeed my baby without having to worry about what my Ousainou will eat. His health has improved and that makes me happy", explained Isatou.

This support also encourages mothers to regularly bring their children to outreach clinics where they get vaccinated ensuring that children receive comprehensive protection for a healthy growth. The regional health teams operate mobile clinics that are held on the same day as the monthly food assistance to children. This makes life for the mother much easier and saves them more time to attend to their families.

As a result of this joint effort, progress is being registered in the fight against malnutrition. According to preliminary findings of this year's malnutrition screening exercise the number of children who were found to be malnourished has reduced. Out of a total of 67,329 children who were screened in four out of the six regions of The Gambia 3,235 were found to be malnourished.

Made possible with EU funding, WFP is working towards its commitment to support The Gambia Government reach zero hunger and malnutrition through effective partnership.

2018 Status of Malnutrition: Facts & Figures

Ahead of the June to October lean season, when more than 300,000 people are predicted to be under stress due to too little food to eat, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in collaboration with UNICEF and government partners visited more than 1,500 villages and communities and screened all children under 5 by measuring their Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC).

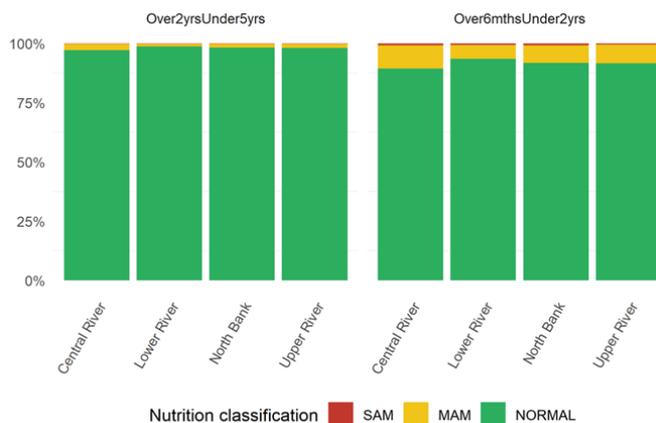
A total of 67,329 children were screened across four out of the six regions of The Gambia. Up to 3,235 were found to be malnourished. This shows the Global Acute Malnutrition rate (GAM) of only 5 percent. With systematic screening in all the regions and timely treatment of cases, the results would be even better for reducing malnutrition.

Nutrition Classification (%) of Children (Over 2yrs) By Region

Region	MAM	NORMAL	SAM
Central River	2.6	97.3	0.2
Lower River	1.2	98.8	0.0
North Bank	1.5	98.4	0.1
Upper River	1.8	98.2	0.0

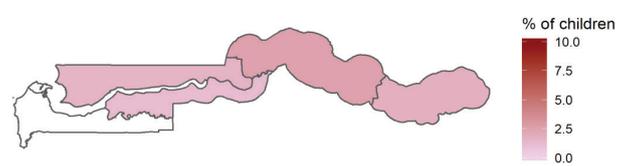
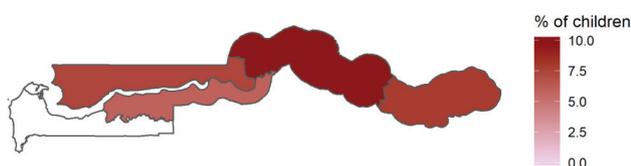
Below is the graphical representation of the Nutritional Status of Children by Age

Below is the Nutritional Status of Children by Age Group and Region:



Proportion of children (Under 2yrs) with MAM by Region

Proportion of children (Over 2yrs) with MAM by Region



Increasing Households' Yield and Income, Reducing Malnutrition Through Farmer Field School

Farmer Field School

In a bid to scale up the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach which started in 2017 with the training of 75 farmers and agricultural extension agents, some three hundred smallholder farmers were trained in the farmer field school concept and methodologies through a series of workshops from 18th March to 17th June, 2018. 60 people attended the five-day training programmes in each of the five agricultural regions where the project is being implemented. The training jointly organized by the Regional Agricultural Directorates and the Project Team was facilitated by Jennifer Hire, an international Farmer Field Master Trainer hired by FAO through the “Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia” project.

The 375 trained FFS facilitators were also supported to set up a FFS demonstration school in their respective communities where they would also train 30 farmers. They have also been provided with the required inputs (seeds, gardening tools and stationery) to facilitate their work. The FFS also received

technical backstopping provided by the agricultural extension agents and the project team during the course of the capacity building activities.

Promoting the Adoption of GAPs

An assessment of the 75 FFS established in 2017 shows that more than 1 in 4 (88%) have successfully promoted 3 out of 4 Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) in vegetables production. 15 from each region, have established a demonstration school in their respective communities to promote compost making, bed demarcation, appropriate spacing and mulching. They also trained a total of 2,430 farmers who are now practicing Climate Smart Agriculture and producing 100 percent organic vegetables.

Furthermore, a recent Baseline Survey has shown that the FFS approach has helped to narrow the farmer–village extension worker ratio from 1:2100 to 1:614. The study shows that the active farmer population in the country is 319,201 whilst there are a total of just 145 village extension workers.

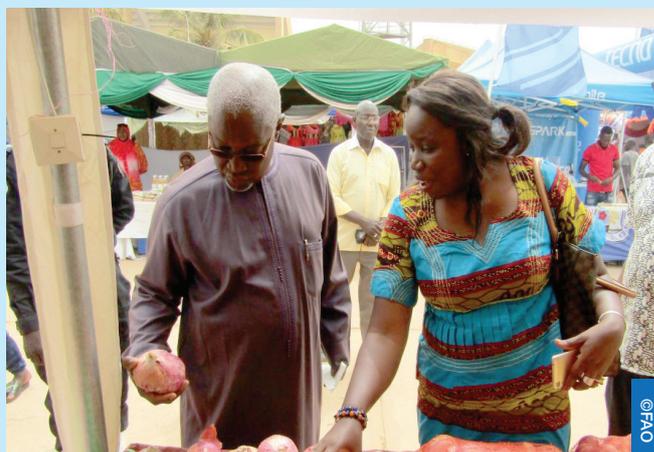
Towards improving market access, networking

The European Union funded “Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia” project facilitated the participation of Farmer Field School Facilitators in the 2018 Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s International Trade Fair held at the Independence Stadium in Bakau from 24th March to 15th April. The initiative gave the farmers from NBR, CRR, LRR and URR a platform to showcase and market produce from their demonstration plots. As the project promotes organic farming, all their produce was 100 per cent organic.

Fatoumatta Jallow Tambang, Vice President and Minister for Women’s Affairs accompanied by Omar A Jallow, Minister for Agriculture, visited the FFS stand shortly after the official opening of the event. They were impressed with the quality of the produce on display at the stand.



Vice President Tambajang, inspecting stalls of FFS facilitators



Minister for Agriculture inspecting stalls of FFS facilitators

Building Livelihoods Resilience for Zero Hunger

In 2017, the rice fields in Jahally Pacharr in the Central River Region South and Sukuta in the Central River Region North were severely affected by flashfloods, drought and pests (hippos and birds). These challenges coupled with inadequate ploughing and post-harvest equipment further exposed the farmers to aggravated hunger, malnutrition, poverty and a high rate of youth migration.

The Gambian Government and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close partnership with The Gambia Red Cross Society (GRCS) responded with a six-month community participatory development intervention dubbed Cash for Work. The intervention enabled the farmers to remain within their communities and work together to fix some of the critical gaps in their fields, put food on the table as well as provide for other basic household needs. More than half of the funds received were spent on food commodities procured from local businesses whilst the balance was used to service debts, provide for other pressing needs such as shelter, pay school fees, medicaments and clothing, according to the farmers.

Omar A Jallow, Minister for Agriculture, Atila Lajos, EU Ambassador to The Gambia, Perpetua Katepa Kalala, FAO Country Representative and other senior officials from government, NGOs, farmer-based groups and a cross section of the CRR community graced the ceremony marking the official close of the Cash For Work Scheme on 2nd May 2018 at Jahally, CRR South. The climax of the event was the handing over of power tillers and rice threshers to the farmers through the Ministry of Agriculture.

On behalf of the beneficiaries, Haruna Gassama, President of the CRR Rice Growers Association, thanked, the Government, FAO and EU for transforming their lives through the intervention.



FAO Country Representative handing over power tillers and rice threshing machines to the farmers through the Minister for Agriculture whilst the EU Ambassador looks on

PSC visits project sites

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) for the European Union funded “Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia” led by its Chairman, Cherno Omar Barry, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in January 2018 visited the project intervention sites across the country. The field mission accorded the committee entrusted with the responsibility for the overall management of the project an opportunity to gather firsthand information on its implementation status. The team also assessed the quality of the services being provided and made on the spot decisions. At Kuntaur Health Centre, the team recommended that an assessment be conducted to ascertain the quality and safety of the borehole which serves as the main source of water supply for the facility.

Mitigating illegal migration

According to the people of CRR, the intervention has helped reduce the high rate of youth migration from the area to the Greater Banjul Area and abroad. They noted that the initiative has even attracted ‘unemployed youth from the region residing in the urban areas to come home and work.

Buba Njie, 21 of Brikamaba explained that the project has prevented him and of some of his age mates from migrating illegally to Europe.

He said: “Because of hardship and lack of employment, four of us were planning to embark on the illegal journey to Europe through the ‘back way’ around August 2017. As we were about to set off, we got news that FAO, Department of Agriculture and Red Cross will implement a project which will create employment opportunities for the youths. Three of us were convinced in the end to stay here and participate in the project. Unfortunately, the fourth colleague who decided to embark on the journey died on the way [he sobs]. Today, thanks to the cash for work, I am able to provide for my family. I bought fertilizer which I applied on my rice field and I am expecting a good harvest. I also bought a bicycle which I use to go to the farm. This intervention has also promoted unity amongst the farmers in this region”.



Buba Njie posing for a photo with his bicycle

Smallholder Farmers Transforming Agricultural Extension Services, Livelihoods in Rural Gambia Through Innovation

Farmers' limited access to technical support due to a weak agricultural extension system has been identified as a major contributing factor to the adoption of poor farming practices resulting in low agricultural productivity. An FAO led intervention under the project titled "Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia", funded by the European Union is helping to change the trend.

A network of 375 farmers trained by the project to promote the Farmer Field School approach is harnessing the power of smartphones and social media to enhance the sharing of experience and knowledge on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). Mustapha Jaiteh, a youth farmer at Busura, Central Baddibou District in the North Bank Region (who now serves a Master Trainer performing extension duties in his district) created the WhatsApp Group (+2203424054). The interactive platform provides an excellent environment for knowledge sharing and timely dissemination of technical information and best practices to the farmers. Managed by the founder, the platform helps foster a lively exchange among farmers, extension agents, policy makers and other relevant actors in the agriculture value chain. Through this initiative, FFS facilitators are constantly showcasing their field work: land preparation, crop production, pest/disease management, processing and marketing approaches. The platform also enables the extension agents (including the FFS facilitators), technical staff of the Department of Agriculture and FAO to communicate to the farmers instantly both in English and the local languages.

Commenting on the WhatsApp group, Sariyang Jorbateh, Deputy Director General, Department of Agricultural Extension services said: "The FFS WhatsApp group has become a virtual platform for farmers to communicate any subject of their interest. It encourages the use of a dynamic approach which triggers quick decision making by all responsible parties to end food insecurity in the households".



Mustapha Jaiteh with his motorbike

Alignment with other interventions

The FFS facilitators' network provides a unified approach in disseminating the farmer field school concept and methodologies in the country for the achievement of the desired impact. The intervention builds on the gains made by the Farmer Field School initiative introduced by the Department of Agriculture in 2015 through support from the Technical Assistant component of the FASDEP Project implemented by FAO.

Farm Field School facilitators showcase work at Europe Day Youth Fair 2018

On 9 May, three youths who serve as Farmer Field School facilitators shared their work and the impact of EU support on their lives and livelihoods at Europe Day Youth Fair 2018. Their participation in the event was supported by the "Post-Crisis Response to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in The Gambia" project.



FFS facilitators sharing their work with the audience



FFS facilitators with EU Ambassador and his wife

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