

Improving Nutrition and Creating Sustainable Livelihoods in Ghana

2013–2018



McGill



Canada 



The Situation in Ghana

Ghana is situated along the West African coast, and despite ongoing economic growth, issues such as childhood malnutrition are prevalent. The Upper Manya Krobo district (UMKD) is an underserved rural district in Ghana's Eastern Region, which at the beginning of the project had high rates of anemia (74%) and stunting (highest in Ghana at 38%) among children under 5 years. As well, 58% of women were anemic (DHS 2009). This is highly detrimental to children's survival, as inadequate nutrition is the underlying cause of almost half (45%) of child deaths annually and is a major cause of maternal mortality and poor birth outcomes. Malnutrition also compromises children's growth and development and can have irreversible long-term effects, diminishing cognitive and physical development and hampering children's health.

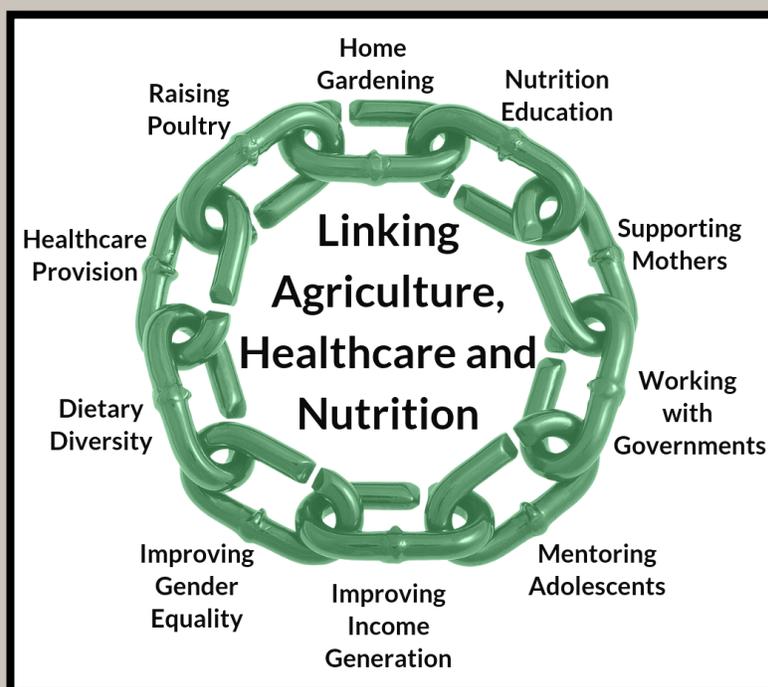


Nutrition Links—Capacity Building for Sustainable Livelihoods

To address national and district priorities, a five-year integrated project—Nutrition Links—was carried out in UMKD in collaboration with McGill University, World Vision, University of Ghana, Heifer International and other civil society partners, and various government and private institutions in Ghana. The project was implemented to build capacity for sustainable livelihoods and health by improving connections between agriculture, nutrition and health systems. This project had many integrated components with **two main objectives**:

Target #1: Improved access to district services in nutrition, health, agricultural production, small businesses, and the environment. To achieve this, Nutrition Links improved the effectiveness of district services, increased gender equity in access to and use of trainings and services, and improved district-level programs governance and management .

Target #2: Increase in recommended behaviours that support good nutrition/health, agricultural production, small business, and the environment. To achieve this, Nutrition Links facilitated home gardening, raising poultry and nutritional education in rural communities, emphasizing the impact on mothers and infant feeding.



World Vision's Role

World Vision was primarily responsible for several health system strengthening and community-based activities surrounding nutrition. Specifically, this included training adolescent girls on nutrition and hygiene, and training health staff and volunteers in infant and young child feeding (IYCF), integrated management of newborn and childhood illness (IMNCI), community-based growth promotion (CBGP), integrated community case management (iCCM). World Vision was also responsible for promoting gender equality and diversity, evidence-based decision making and the training of community members to prepare nutrient-dense meals for children under two years of age and family members, using locally-available produce.



Impact

World Vision's Reach

Healthcare



197 health workers trained on IMCI, IYCF, iCCM and CBGP



130 community based volunteers trained on iCCM and CBGP



19 communities participated in child growth promotion sessions



2,574 children weighed

Supporting Mothers



76 Mother-to-Mother support group facilitators trained



57 cooking demonstrations offered, emphasizing nutrient dense foods, especially for children under 2 years old



19 Mother-to-Mother support groups established

Gender Equality



79 facilitators of adolescent girls' groups trained



672 adolescent girls from 53 communities trained on hygiene and nutrition.



World Vision provided training on gender and diversity to:

- 33 health care workers
- 256 community leaders
- 1,571 community members on gender equality



"The Nutrition Links project has enabled us to educate them [community members], and they have also adopted it and are trying to practice it. So they have seen the education helps. This has improved access to health of the community people"

- Health Staff Member

Thanks to Nutrition Links, families in UMKD Ghana are seeing real change in a number of critical areas:

Food

- **93%** of children >6 months of age eating animal-sourced foods)
- **77%** of children ages 13-49 months meet the minimum diet diversity recommendation (4+ food groups)
- **93%** of mothers with children <6 months of age are exclusively breastfeeding (district-level data)

Income

- **87%** of women had poultry-related income-generation activities
- **85% increase** in adolescent use of savings programs in Nutrition Links communities
- **25% increase** increase in median income generated by childbearing women

Health

- **30% decrease** in percent of adolescent girls who were anemic
- **58% district-level increase** in number of children weighed at least once
- **55% district-level increase** in attendance at growth monitoring sessions (2013-2017)



Changing Gender Roles in Ghanaian Households

Mamle, 25, and her husband Tettey, 40, have three children and live in a community in the Upper Manya Krobo District in Eastern Ghana. The couple benefitted from the Nutrition Links Gender and Diversity sensitization training, implemented across the district to change attitudes and cultural norms around gender roles, equality and equity. As a result, they experienced a complete change in their family life.

In rural Ghana, it is completely counter-cultural for a man to do household chores or carry a baby on his back. According to the couple, men in their community do not help their wives with chores because it is considered a woman's duty. After participating in the Gender and Diversity training sessions, Tettey began helping out with household chores and taking care of his children. "Now whenever I am busy cooking in the morning, my husband will always help to prepare the kids for school," says Mamle.

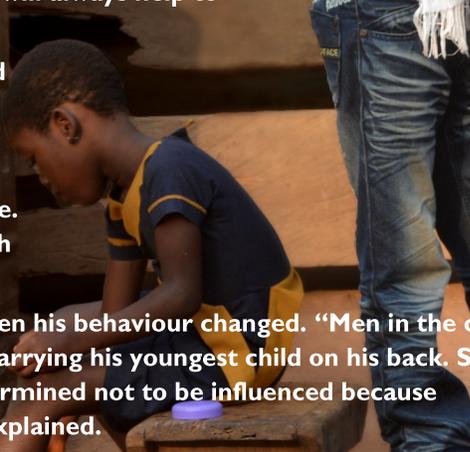
Tettey says, "Helping my wife with household chores reduces the time she spends doing the chores and it gives her time to rest." Now Mamle is not as tired as before, which enables them to spend more time together as a couple. They also have time to help their children with their homework.

Community members made fun of Tettey when his behaviour changed. "Men in the community always tease Tettey when they see him helping in household chores or carrying his youngest child on his back. Some even try to talk him out of it, but he always explains to them that he is determined not to be influenced because he knows it is the right thing to do." Mamle explained.

The area chief, Quist, used this training to spearhead change in his community. Before the training, he and his elders spent most evenings settling disputes among couples, many of which involved intimate-partner violence, but since the training hardly any disputes need his involvement. He commented that "The Gender and Diversity activity has brought peace to many homes because when a man helps his wife, she is satisfied and this reduces quarrels in a lot of homes. The woman is also able to rest, which is good for her health." The local chief modeled the messages from the training by sharing household chores with his wife Gladys, showing his changed behaviour so others can learn from him.

Tettey is one of the 1571 community members who has been sensitized through the Gender and Diversity training sessions, which are bringing change to communities.

"The Gender and Diversity program has really influenced my husband and changed the way things are done in my community."
- Mamle



Mamle, Tettey, and their three children

Lessons Learned

- **Integration of nutrition and livelihoods:** The integration of promoting nutrition with local crop and poultry production proved to be very effective at improving nutrition practices for young children, and fostered close collaboration between sectors.
- **Innovations:** Dietary consumption improved in communities thanks to innovations like creative recipes using animal sourced foods in infant porridges, the introduction of green leafy vegetables, and education on dietary modification. Additionally, solar drying was useful to improve food safety, using natural sunlight and heat to dry cooking utensils and thereby reduce the microbial load on utensils.
- **Sustainability planning:** Early on, the project established sustainability groups and committees to explore options to support the continuation of project initiatives. This allowed local government officials, project partners and community leaders to reflect on project strategies, examine the feasibility, and develop plans for the continuation of activities beyond the life of the project.
- **Working with community-based volunteers:** Volunteerism is a popular but increasingly unsustainable approach to interventions, as volunteers are putting in full-time hours in regions of high unemployment and poverty and so expect remuneration. Going forward, it is important to consider the ethical implications of using community volunteers, and to explore long-term strategies to support them.