

Improving nutrition outcomes across sectors: four multisectoral guidance documents to integrate nutrition policy and programming objectives

In 2021, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) commissioned DAI's **Technical Assistance to Strengthen Capabilities (TASC)** project to produce four interlinked guidance notes detailing the latest evidence on how to improve nutrition programming and policies.

Improving How to Reach Those Most-at-risk of Malnutrition

How to Promote Better Nutrition Through Social Assistance

Aligning Food System Activities with Healthier Diets for Low-Income Households

Monitoring and Evaluation of Nutrition-Relevant Programmes

The four notes, summarized in this brief, will be used to support staff and/or implementing bodies who are planning or engaging in nutrition relevant interventions across a range of sectors.



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SUBMITTED BY DAI IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Guidance Note 1: Improving How to Reach Those Most-at-risk of Malnutrition

Purpose and use

This guidance supports FCDO to identify population groups that are most nutritionally at-risk within a country, and better address the nutritional needs of at-risk groups through programmes, platforms, and interventions. It includes options to support at-risk groups to improve their diet and access services, while mainstreaming gender and social inclusion. It includes options to improve diet and access to nutrition services, while mainstreaming gender and social inclusion. Strategies for implementation across a range of sectors are provided, including agriculture, child protection, education, health, social protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

Key points within the guidance note

Who are the most nutritionally at-risk?

1. Children, adolescents and women in deeply rural, remote and/or physically isolated settings
2. Children in urban/peri-urban slums and informal settlements
3. Children and adolescents with disabilities
4. Children and women from pastoralist / agro-pastoralist and nomadic groups
5. Children and women from marginalised ethnic groups (e.g. tribal groups, indigenous groups)
6. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees.

The guidance also explores how poverty, access to services, gender norms, climate change, conflict and agriculture drive malnutrition within at-risk groups.

What works? An essential step towards identifying and prioritising nutritionally at-risk groups within a country is to conduct a scoping exercise or rapid situational analysis to examine disparities between sub-populations and/or geographic locations.

Effective strategies often involve combined interventions with intersectoral and multidisciplinary partners, meaningful beneficiary engagement, and collaboration between government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector.

Strategy options presented across different groups and sectors include:

- Social and behaviour change interventions
- Women's empowerment interventions
- Parenting or care group models
- Cash transfers; Food transfers
- Sensitisation and/or capacity building of service providers to better serve members of at-risk groups
- Strengthening linkages/referrals to various services or markets
- Use of mobile phone technology
- Disability-inclusive strategies

Monitoring, feedback and accountability between programme implementers and members of at-risk groups helps ensure that implementation is contextually appropriate and conducive to transformative, sustainable nutrition improvement. This entails reviewing programme results frameworks and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems; building in opportunities for beneficiary feedback; and tracking outputs and outcomes of different sectors in relation to those at-risk groups.



Recommended Citation: Technical Assistance for Strengthening Capabilities (TASC). 2022. *Improving How to Reach Those Most-at-risk of Malnutrition: A Guidance Note*. London: DAI for The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Guidance Note 2: How to Promote Better Nutrition through Social Assistance

Purpose and use

This guidance identifies how to use social protection programmes to target those most at risk of malnutrition, improve diets and address other nutrition determinants. It also synthesises the latest evidence on how social protection programmes can improve uptake of and access to nutrition services.

Key points within the guidance note

How can social protection programmes support nutrition aims?

Social assistance programming can reach nutritionally at-risk populations, including those living with disabilities, and address underlying determinants of malnutrition through:

1. *Improving food security (food access, availability, utilisation, and stability)*
2. *Improving caregiving resources at the maternal, household and community levels*
3. *Improving access to health and nutrition services*
4. *Contributing to a safe and hygienic environment*

Social protection programming should not be implemented in isolation, but rather in coordination with other sectoral programmes.

What works?

- **Cash transfer programmes** – especially when they target women and are linked to social and behaviour change communication, health and social services can reduce malnutrition. Cash transfers can support preventive health practices, promoting healthcare services and increasing food expenditure.
- **Commodity vouchers and targeted distribution of fortified foods and specialised nutrition products** can also improve nutrition. Restricted commodity vouchers, which provide a pre-determined food basket, have had greater impact on dietary diversity than in-kind food transfers. Vouchers and transfers have also been effective in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) for improving dietary diversity and reducing acute malnutrition in young children.

Strengthening programme implementation & delivery

The guidance sets out key actions and considerations along the project cycle. Examples include: identifying existing opportunities to promote **linkages and referrals** between social assistance and other sectoral programmes to improve nutrition at the design stage and using social assistance information systems to inform programme design and implementation decisions and improve nutrition at the programme implementation stage.

Strengthening policy implementation & delivery

The guidance identifies key opportunities for **advocacy and policy action**. Examples include: engaging different stakeholders around the benefits of social assistance programmes that meet the needs of nutritionally at-risk groups; and ensuring financing commitments are transparent, offer long-term value for money and include adequate funding for monitoring.



Recommended Citation: Technical Assistance for Strengthening Capabilities (TASC). 2022. *How to Promote Better Nutrition Through Social Assistance: A Guidance Note*. London: DAI for The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Guidance Note 3: Aligning Food System Activities with Healthier Diets for Low-Income Households

Purpose and use

This guidance supports organisations and practitioners involved in food system activities to design programmes and conduct policy engagement to enable the world's most vulnerable people to eat more diverse, healthier diets, while also meeting climate and/or economic objectives. It aims to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of food system activities in achieving development goals, and make healthy diets more appealing, available and affordable.

Key points within the guidance note

Who should be prioritised? Focus on low-income households, with special attention to women, children, and persons with disabilities. Identify specific constraints in achieving and maintaining healthy diets, including financial insecurity, limited skills in preparing nutritious foods and gender and cultural constraints.

How can you improve healthy diets? Through improving nutrient intake, increasing dietary diversity, and reducing intake of foods high in unhealthy fats, sugars, and/or salt and ultra-processed foods.

How do food systems impact healthy diets?

1. *Economic factors: having a sufficient income and assets to afford and prepare a healthy diet*
2. *Food environments: food quality, location, price, promotion and food education*
3. *Knowledge and skills: knowledge around healthy diets, nutrient content foods, skills and literacy to navigate food environments, and ability to prepare healthy foods*
4. *Social and cultural factors: norms and values around healthy diets including social networks, gender norms, psychological capacity, self-esteem or mental health factors that impact the ability to maintain a healthy diet*

Nine entry points for improving the food systems

1. *Support the adoption of crop production practices which improve dietary diversity of producer households and beyond, while also benefiting economic and climate objectives.*
2. *Maximise the nutrition, economic, and food security benefits of animal production for low-income households, whilst adapting to and mitigating climate and other environmental impacts.*
3. *Test and monitor investments in infrastructure and business models that link producers of perishable, nutritious foods to markets serving low-income households.*
4. *Leverage benefits and manage risks of cross-border trade with healthy diets in both exporting and importing countries, while advancing economic objectives.*
5. *Focus investment into food processing and manufacturing towards enhancing convenience, nutrient quality, safety and marketing of nutritious foods for which there is demand from low-income consumers.*
6. *Mobilise demand for nutritious foods from low-income consumers and reduce demand for ultra-processed foods.*
7. *Incentivise, support, and monitor innovative digital solutions to improve access and affordability of nutritious foods for low-income consumers.*
8. *Incentivise and support innovative financing solutions to support healthy diets for low-income consumers in a commercially sustainable and scalable way.*
9. *Build capacity for designing and implementing agricultural and food policy for healthy diets while managing co-benefits and trade-offs towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

The guidance also provides approaches on how to create an enabling environment receptive to food systems interventions.



Recommended Citation: Technical Assistance for Strengthening Capabilities (TASC). 2022. *Aligning Food System Activities with Healthier Diets for Low-Income Households: A Guidance Note*. London: DAI for The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Guidance Note 4: Monitoring and Evaluation of Nutrition-Relevant Programmes

Purpose and use

This guidance was developed to strengthen monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of nutrition-related investments and ensure vulnerable groups are not left behind. **A Nutrition Monitoring Indicator Database** accompanies the guidance, with details on standard indicators and links to additional useful resources. Use of the guidance note and indicator tool during project design and implementation can help programme implementers advisers harmonise monitoring approaches.

Key points within the guidance note

The guidance centres on monitoring outcomes of nutrition-related sectors including health; water, sanitation, and hygiene; agriculture; food systems; and social protection.

What works?

Initial Considerations

Programme monitoring systems need to be established during the programme design phase. When setting up a monitoring system:

- Consider what resources are available.
- Consult other actors, including from other sectors, to determine what data already exist, or if any data collection is planned that is relevant to your programme area.
- In emergencies and FCAS, consider practical innovations to support sustained collection, interpretation, analysis, and management of nutrition-related data for nutrition-relevant programmes.

Choosing what to Measure

Quantitative data approaches often form the core of any monitoring system. However, qualitative data can be extremely helpful to round out information gaps. Service coverage rates are often used as summary measures of programme performance, but there are many other measures that can be useful, such as:

- Availability of essential commodities delivered by programmes (e.g. food commodities, deworming medicines, vitamin A supplements)
- Factors that determine access to and use of services (e.g. women's empowerment/decision making, different treatment of children with disabilities compared to other children)

With increasing rates of overweight/obesity, and associated conditions such as non-communicable diseases, the guidance also explains how programmes can monitor 'double-duty' interventions that prevent and manage all forms of malnutrition.

Target Populations

Depending on the nature of your programme and the types of results you are trying to achieve, the focus of your M&E may be on specific target groups or populations including children (under five years); adolescents (10-19 years); women of reproductive age (15-49 years); pregnant and lactating women; mother/caregivers; households; and communities.

Monitoring Advocacy & Technical Assistance

Advocacy, influence and technical assistance are a key part of development and humanitarian support. Advocacy work can be monitored by looking at changes in policies, funding, and processes, such as development of new policy proposals and/or increased or sustained funding levels for policies and programmes.



Recommended Citation: Technical Assistance for Strengthening Capabilities (TASC). 2022. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Nutrition-Relevant Programmes: A Guidance Note*. London: DAI for The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).



About TASC

Technical Assistance to Strengthen Capabilities (TASC) is part of the broader Technical Assistance for Nutrition (TAN) Programme, funded by UK Aid. TAN is a mechanism to provide technical assistance to Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) country governments and build capacities towards advancing multisector nutrition agendas, in line with the SUN Movement principles and roadmap.

The objective of the TASC Project is to provide:

- 1 Technical assistance to governments in the SUN Movement and to the SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS) to catalyse country efforts to scale up nutrition impact (Component 1) in 60+ SUN Movement countries.
- 2 Technical assistance to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to maximise the quality and effectiveness of its nutrition-related policy and programmes, to support evidence generation and lesson learning, and to develop nutrition capacity (Component 2).

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