

## How Harmonized is National Guidance on Addressing the Dual Burden of Malnutrition? A Policy Review of USAID Priority Countries

**INTRODUCTION:** A growing number of countries are facing a dual burden of malnutrition, across nearly every region of the world. The food insecurity is often one of the causes of many forms of malnutrition. Malnutrition and food insecurity are also directly related to several non-communicable diseases (NCDs), like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Coordinated policy action to effectively address malnutrition, NCDs, and food security is critically needed, but policies are usually crafted separately by separate sectors. As a result, contradictions can arise and synergies can be missed.

**METHODS:** Double-duty actions, defined by the World Health Organization as actions that address multiple forms of malnutrition, can provide the biggest impact on reducing the dual burden. To examine whether existing nutrition, NCDs, and food security policies have harmonized guidance and include double-duty actions, we undertook a qualitative policy review. We selected all 29 maternal and child health (MCH) and nutrition priority countries named by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2017. Using a systematic Internet search and email requests to each country, we sought all prevailing policy documents for topic areas of nutrition, NCD prevention, and food security (if available). The searches were cross-checked with the several global policy databases, and conducted in English, Spanish and French. Documents reviewed included plans, policies, and strategies that outlined a strategic direction for the country. We did not review operational guidelines or protocols. The countries with all three policies were selected for a more in-depth review and the results compiled in Microsoft Excel.

**RESULTS:** The review provided several new insights. First, national policies related to nutrition, NCDs, and food security are often not up-to-date or available in the public space. Among policies we found, only eight of 29 countries had up-to-date policies for all three topic areas. Second, the deeper dive into those eight countries revealed that none included all six double-duty actions in all three policies. Finally, the review revealed that, in several cases, contradictions in guidance for these actions could negatively impact implementation.

**CONCLUSION:** We conclude with recommendations that, if followed, will improve the harmonization of policies and increase the prioritization of double-duty actions. Findings from this review can be used spur greater discussion among government stakeholders in the areas of nutrition, NCDs, and food security on how to maximize investments across the malnutrition spectrum using greater policy alignment and enhanced accountability. As countries review and renew the various national policies, focusing on double-duty actions to address the dual burden of malnutrition is an opportunity to stretch scarce resources to meet multiple goals.

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