



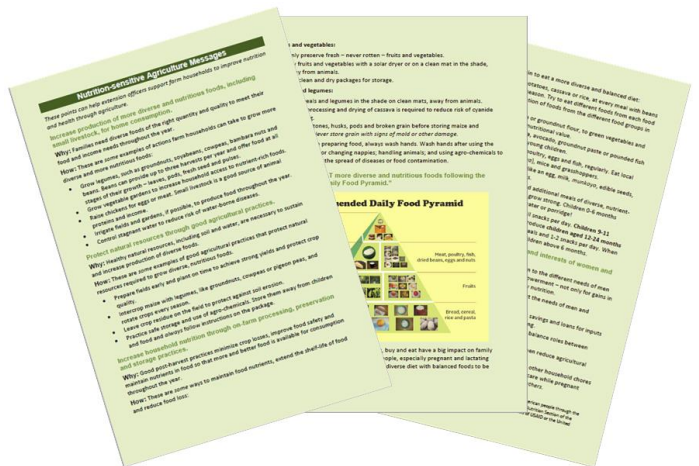
ONE VOICE

Harmonizing Nutrition Messages for Zambian Households

Naomi has three children under five. Now 20 years old, Naomi started her family while other girls her age were starting secondary school. While living with her children and their father in rural Zambia, Naomi participates in several nutrition, agriculture, and women's empowerment projects that target young families like hers. One project recommends that she feed her children foods from four of seven food groups, while another stresses her children should eat foods from three of three food groups every day. Naomi wakes up before dawn, works all day long in the fields and around her home, and often cannot provide her family with enough maize and they often still go to bed hungry. Like most rural Zambians, foods other than maize are a rare luxury, and the inconsistent messages people get from projects make proper nutrition choices seem even less attainable.

In the absence of national policy related to nutrition-sensitive agriculture, INGENAES brought together organizations implementing nutrition-sensitive agriculture to address the potential confusion caused by variations in nutrition messaging. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture seeks to enhance agriculture's contribution to nutrition and

promises to improve the dietary diversity of Zambians, which would reduce childhood stunting. Government and donor commitment to the Scaling Up Nutrition movement spurred the government to act, so under the First 1,000 Most Critical Days Program (MCDP), the Ministry of Agriculture aims to make sufficient, high-quality food available and accessible for diversified, healthy diets.



Nutrition-sensitive agriculture messages given to extensionists

Zambia does not have a set of Food Based Dietary Guidelines, which could serve as a policy and educational tool for national food and nutrition priorities. However, the MCDP developed a list of priority actions that are essential to achieving better nutrition during the 1,000 days from a child's conception through the first two years of life. Although planners hoped that agricultural extension services would help promote these actions, they do not align with their regular duties.

Who is in charge of what? The vitamin A supplementation guideline falls under the responsibility of health professionals, but diversifying production to address market opportunities and household consumption needs are extension's responsibilities.

Through a process of workshops and consultations, the Ministry of Agriculture and INGENAES sought to determine and clarify what tailored messages could increase the impact of agriculture on household nutrition. INGENAES gathered representatives from the public, private and NGO sectors to ensure messages aligned with the Ministry's "Food and Nutrition Section Operational Guidelines" as well as global recommendations for improving nutrition through agriculture.

After INGENAES tested the messages with different audiences and clarified the language to confirm anyone from extension officers to farming households would understand the messages. In the end, collaborators prioritized five core messages accompanied by detailed descriptions and illustrative small steps households can take to adopt the recommended practices.

The five messages now appear in the Planning and Resource Guide for Agricultural Extension Officers, which is an annual publication that extensionists turn to for information on agriculture production and participatory extension. The resource helps them plan daily activities and guides supervisors in monitoring and supporting their staff.

The collaboration between INGENAES and the Ministry collaboration goes beyond the messaging improvement, with basic nutrition content now taught in the preservice training of future extensionists. The Ministry's eleven Agricultural Technical Institutes train future agricultural practitioners, and the integrated nutrition training will further equip future extension professionals to promote practices that support nutrition. By building the capacity of government actors to establish nutrition-sensitive agriculture actions and equipping the next generation of extensionists with skills to make food systems more nutrition-sensitive, we have reason to hope that Naomi's family will soon receive less confusing information they can act on to eat right and grow strong.

Additional Resources

- Chilufya, W. (2015). *Unlocking Zambia's Agricultural Potential for Nutrition Development*. Oxford, UK: Nutrition Exchange.
- FAO (2015). *Key Recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture and Food Systems*. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4922e.pdf>. (retrieved 28 March 2017). Rome, Italy.



Women and men prepare a nutritious meal at a cooking demonstration in their village.

Cover photo and collage: Women and men take part in nutrition-sensitive cooking demonstrations in their village © AgReach 2017

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