

Summary: Key Steps for Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection

January 26, 2017

World Bank, Washington DC

See slides and video recording on www.securenutrition.org/

Key takeaways:

- ▶ **Targeting:** Safety Net programs cover up to 1.9 billion people worldwide and represent an opportunity to target vulnerable populations, many of whom also suffer from malnutrition.
- ▶ **Messages:** Improvements in social and behavior change programming within nutrition-sensitive social protection programs can improve nutrition impact, but require investment and coordination.
- ▶ **Services:** Providing access to health and nutrition services, including as part of conditionalities in transfer programs, will not yield nutrition impact unless the services are also sufficiently strong and the service providers properly trained.

Overview: On January 26, 2017, SecureNutrition and the World Bank Group hosted well-known author and IFPRI Senior Researcher Dr. Harold Alderman to outline the logic for prioritizing nutrition-sensitive programs in the current development landscape. He discussed how safety nets—which support some 1.9 billion people worldwide—can help achieve global nutrition and poverty targets. The presentation was attended by over 130 individuals. World Bank Group Vice President Keith Hansen chaired the session and opening comments were made by the Russian Federation Executive Director Andrei Lushin. Discussants were Michal Rutkowski (Sr. Director of Social Protection, Labor, and Jobs) and Soji Adeyi (Director of Health, Nutrition, and Population). Program presenters were Francesca Lamanna (Sr. Economist), and Maddalena Honorati (Sr. Economist).

Mr. Keith Hansen opened the session by remarking on the synergy between social safety net programs and nutrition, citing the World Bank's focus on investing in the Early Years campaign as a means of bringing multiple practices together for stronger collaboration. He remarked that safety net programs are one of the biggest platforms for contributing to improved livelihoods and eliminating poverty, as well as the cornerstone for human capital investment.

Mr. Andrei Lushin then spoke on the prioritization of food and nutrition security in Russia's foreign aid agenda, including sustainable food systems. They work in collaboration with FAO, WHO, and the World Bank, as well as other partner agencies, with SecureNutrition Knowledge Platform being one of the key partners.

Dr. Harold Alderman presented the key next steps in making social protection programs more nutrition-sensitive. These included (1) improved targeting of young children; (2) linkages with behavior change communication; (3) inclusion of food fortification; and (4) better mechanisms for scaling up. His full presentation can be found by clicking here: <http://www.securenutrition.org/resource/key-steps-nutrition-sensitive-social-protection>.

First, social protection programs have often not achieved tremendous success in reaching nutrition outcomes in terms of child growth. This is largely because of the need to better target and reach pregnant mothers and young children in the first 1,000 days. Peru is often used as an example where the conditional cash transfer program (*JUNTOS*) was adapted over time to target families with very young children, now seen as one of the factors that reduced stunting rates by half over a ten-year period.

Second, social protection programs which have linked with behavior change communication, education, and other means of addressing the demand for improved nutrition outcomes have had a good impact on child growth. Examples from Mexico and Nepal both found significant impacts on nutrition outcomes when behavior change communication was used in combination with food supplementation.

Third, in Gujarat, India, fortification of flour, oil, and other staples were used in all meals, which improved iron intake. School feeding programs can also be a major vehicle for iron fortification and anemia prevention. They can also help address the growing problem of obesity in low and middle income countries as a platform for training caregivers on nutrition and obesity prevention.

Maddalena Honorati, a Senior Economist working in Armenia, talked about the *Family Benefit Program* reaching over 100,000 poor and socially vulnerable households, with children age 0-5 years and pregnant women. Three areas of focus are (1) social case management, (2) intersectoral collaboration to make the social safety net program more nutrition-sensitive, and (3) country diagnostic work to identify basic causes of malnutrition. Armenia's social safety net program leveraged an existing social worker workforce and designed a training package for raising awareness around nutrition practices, optimal feeding behaviors, and early detection of malnutrition. In addition, new data on measuring malnutrition were used to inform decisions on where to focus their efforts. Ministry officials, speaking via video conference from Armenia, described the strength of the multisectoral collaboration between ministries as one that grew from a need to care for children. Once these sectors came together with a collective voice, they were able to successfully change policies and see improvements in nutrition outcomes in children. They found that the safety net program was the ideal vehicle for reaching the most vulnerable populations.

Francesca Lamanna, Senior Economist working in Mexico, discussed the *PROSPERA* (formerly *Progressa* and *Oportunidades*) program, designed by the Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the health and education sectors. One of the central aims of this program was to invest in poverty reduction and to break the income intergenerational cycle of poverty by implementing conditionalities such as visiting health care facilities. The program serves 28 million beneficiaries (6.8 million families) and even with budget restraints in the country, has continued to be funded with success. Some of the lessons learned from *Progressa* included readjustment of the supplement to better meet caloric needs and increase the appeal of the product. The product was rebranded with more attractive packaging and, for children, the use of nutrient Sprinkles. The product also addressed the need to reinforce behavior change messaging and improve nutrition counseling for better impact. The program is now moving into the early childhood development (ECD) space with interventions to address stimulation and the full ECD package.

Contributions from World Bank Global Practice leaders – **Michal Rukowski** from Social Protection and **Soji Adeyi** from Health, Nutrition, and Population – highlighted the “lasting affair” between food and nutrition security and, thus, that nutrition and social protection are also intertwined. Both pointed to

the need to look closer at behavioral and cultural aspects of nutrition and social protection to improve programs.

A question and answer session included statements on: (1) how to better understand the cost-effectiveness of nutrition-sensitive social protection programs, especially given how cost-intensive BCC can be; (2) decisions and programmatic implications of in-kind food transfers vs. cash transfers; (3) private sector solutions to social safety net programs; and (4) data availability on food fortification or supplementation combined with cash transfer schemes. To the question on cost-effectiveness, the goals with nutrition-sensitive social protection programs are both equity and improved nutrition. Equity does not fit well into cost-benefit analyses; therefore, it is difficult to assess. However, the cost of designing messages might be reduced through use of widely available media including cell phones. Long-term effectiveness of innovative messaging needs to be better understood, but the concept is in place. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that pilots are designed to fit into existing resources at larger scale. In Mexico, using platforms such as mobile phones for BCC lowered costs drastically by keeping operating costs down. In Armenia, existing platforms were used to reduce costs of BCC to make the program more cost-effective. In terms of the question of in-kind vs. cash transfers, context is extremely important as this can sometimes lead to price inflation. The ongoing debate around food vs. cash transfers can be addressed by ensuring that food transfers are fortified in order to meet nutritional demands, but ultimately, food distribution will not always please broad populations. This, again, relates to the need for context-specific approaches and understanding that one program or approach does not fit all contexts. Public-private partnerships can be useful in packaging and marketing the services. For example, government subsidies and marketing approaches for fortified foods using existing supply chains, so that, ultimately, all non-fortified foods are crowded out of mainstream markets. As far as data on food fortification or supplementation in social safety net programs, there are some explorations in this space, but not a lot of data available currently.

The session concluded with the hope that those working on social protection and nutrition programs can continue to have constructive dialogue to share experiences and outcomes on how best to improve nutrition-sensitive social safety net programs.

Questions? Contact securenutrition@securenutritionplatform.org