

## ISSUES IN RESEARCH AND TRAINING

# What Factors Contribute to the Success of Nutrition-Oriented Programmes and Projects?

## Results of a Rapid Appraisal in South Asia

The prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition among children in South Asia (measured by underweight) is the highest in the world – almost double the prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, whilst it is true that no country in South Asia has improved the nutrition situation significantly on a national scale, there are a number of smaller programmes and projects that have had strong impacts.

Based on the assumption that useful lessons can be learned from these successes, and that these lessons can be used to improve national nutrition strategies in South Asia (and perhaps elsewhere), a rapid appraisal of a selection of successful community-based programmes and projects in South Asia has been carried out, coordinated by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, in cooperation with nutrition staff in UNICEF Country Offices for Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and those responsible for the management and operation of these projects.

### What Constitutes "Success"?

A programme or project was considered successful if it fulfilled, or was very likely to fulfill, the requirement of having both a significant nutrition **outcome** and a high quality **process** (one that is sustainable). Twenty-one programmes and projects in five South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) were chosen on this basis for appraisal.

The objective of the appraisal was to find out how the outcome, and process criteria could be simultaneously achieved and to identify which factors were most important in explaining such an achievement.

Both contextual and programme factors were identified. Contextual factors include, for example, high literacy rate, national policies, presence of other programmes, etc. Managers of the programme/project can not normally influence context-factors, at least in the short-term. Programme factors are aspects of the design and implementation of the programme or project. These factors can, of course, be influenced by programme managers.

The results of the appraisals were presented and discussed in a meeting arranged by the UNICEF South Asia Regional Office, in Kathmandu, 22-23 June 1995. A consensus was reached that the following factors had been the most important for the success of the programmes/projects:

### Contextual Success Factors

- Political commitment at all levels of society.
- A culture where people, particularly women, are involved in decision making
- The presence of community organizations
- A high level of literacy
- Infrastructure for the delivery of basic services
- Empowered women
- A 'local culture' with a 'first call for children'
- Charismatic leaders in the community, who can mobilize and motivate people to do more for themselves in a genuine self-reliant way.
- The parallel implementation of poverty-reducing programmes.

### Programme Success Factors

- The creation of awareness of the high prevalence, serious consequences, and available low-cost solutions of the nutrition problem. This required orientation, rather than training, of leaders at all levels of the society.
- The initiation, promotion, and support of a process where individuals and communities participate in assessing the nutrition problem and decide on how to use their and additional outside resources for actions.
- Clear identification and definition of time-bound goals (targets) at all levels of the programme/project.
- Strengthening of the awareness and understanding of the causes of malnutrition.
- The identification and support of facilitators and community mobilizers.
- Community mobilization and participation.
- Community-based monitoring.
- Both the community and the Government felt ownership of the programme/project.
- Income-generating activities, supported by low-interest credit

arrangements for the poor, particularly poor women.

- Capacity building through training and continuing education of facilitators, community mobilizers and community members in general, particularly women.
- Good management of the programme/project
- Increased cost consciousness and capability to estimate resource requirements
- The involvement of NGOs.

The challenge is to find out how these successful programmes and projects can be made to 'go to scale', i.e. to cover the whole population of a country. Most efforts to 'scale up' successful local programmes or projects have failed. The reasons for these failures have been hotly debated in the development literature. Probably 'scaling up' is the wrong concept. In cases where successful community-based nutrition projects have accelerated nation-wide, the government has changed its policies and strategies. These changes have triggered the emergence of many similar community-based initiatives. Four steps seem to be important in this transformation.

The first is that governments and their advisors know, understand, and accept the conclusions from their own community-based projects. Secondly, governments need to develop and implement economic and other policies (health, education, water, sanitation etc.) that create local environments that are conducive for the contextual "success-factors" to emerge and operate. Thirdly, planners, designers and implementors of nutrition-oriented programmes and projects need to use the conclusions from these studies. And as a fourth step, multi-lateral, and bi-lateral agencies, international and national NGOs, and others need to promote the preparation and implementation of programmes and projects based on these principles.

(Source: Jonsson, U. (1995). *Success Factors in Community-Based Nutrition-Oriented Programmes and Projects*. Draft Report from a Rapid Appraisal of Programmes and Projects in South Asia. Presented at the ICN Meeting, New Delhi, 20-22 November 1995.)