



Applying innovative and proven approaches to improve infant and young child feeding practices in Nigeria

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ALIVE & THRIVE (A&T), FUNDED BY THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION AND MANAGED BY FHI 360, is an initiative to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth and development in infants through improved breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. A&T uses a four-component framework to do so: (1) policy/advocacy; (2) interpersonal communication and community mobilization; (3) mass communication; and (4) strategic use of data.

In its first five years (2009 to 2014), A&T demonstrated that innovative approaches to improving feeding practices could be delivered with impact and at scale in three country contexts: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Viet Nam.

- More than 11 million mothers of children under 2 years of age were reached through interpersonal communication and/or mass media.
- 80 percent exclusive breastfeeding rates were achieved in Bangladesh and Ethiopia program areas. In Viet Nam, where initial levels were lower than 20 percent, the rate tripled.
- A&T is applying and adapting tested, proven approaches and tools in Burkina Faso, India, Southeast Asia, and now Nigeria to scale up infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF).

In Nigeria, A&T will work with the Government of Nigeria and other key stakeholders to increase and improve IYCF in metropolitan Lagos and in rural and urban Kaduna State. A&T's four-component framework will be applied in both

areas. Advocacy efforts will also be initiated with public and private sector partners at the national level.

This brief describes A&T's multicomponent approach for improving infant and young child feeding practices to reduce newborn and infant mortality in Nigeria.

Context

The overall nutritional status of children in Nigeria has slightly improved over the last decade; nevertheless, the country still has among the world's highest child mortality rates and some of the lowest rates of recommended IYCF practices. The exclusive breastfeeding rate for 0-6 month olds—a practice that can significantly reduce child deaths—has remained unchanged in Nigeria since 2008 at 17%.¹ Additionally, only 10 percent of children age 6-23 months nationwide are fed adequately and appropriately based on recommended IYCF practices.²

INTERVENTIONS TAILORED TO ACHIEVE SCALE

A&T's proven framework has the potential to make a significant impact on sub-optimal infant and young child feeding practices in Nigeria (see figure 1).

ADVOCACY

A&T will work with its public and private sector advocacy partners and networks to raise awareness of the impact that IYCF practices have on health and economic well-being. The aim will be to reach a broad audience of opinion leaders with compelling and actionable information to create an enabling

^{1,2} Nigeria DHS 2013

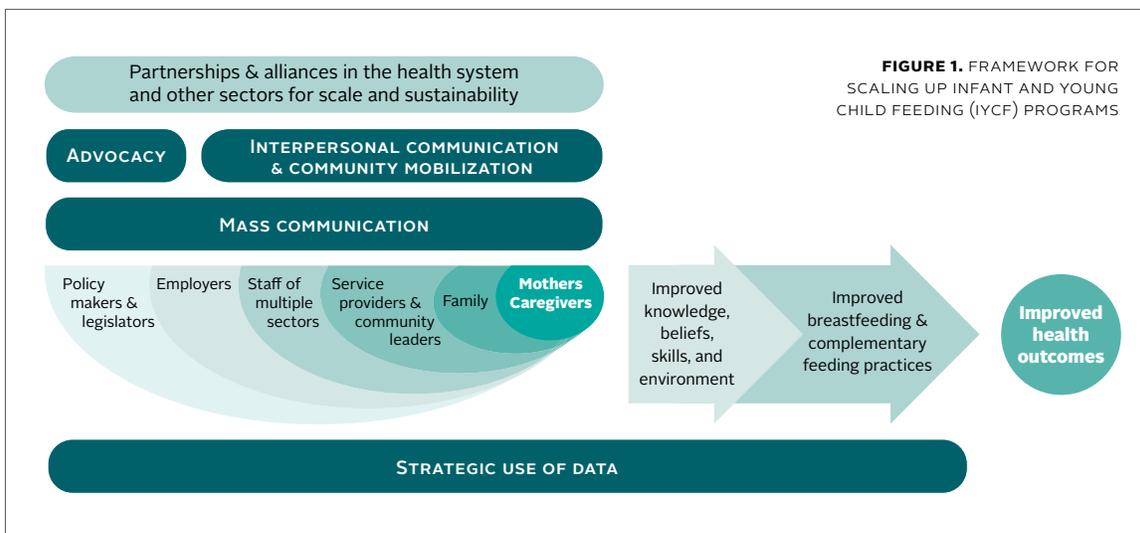


FIGURE 1. FRAMEWORK FOR SCALING UP INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING (IYCF) PROGRAMS

environment—at the national, state, and community levels.

A few illustrative examples include advocating for:

- Rollout and implementation of the Nigeria National Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition.
- Stronger implementation and awareness of the existing Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.
- Expanded maternity entitlements at the federal and state levels in the public and private sectors.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

A&T’s interpersonal communication (IPC) and community mobilization components will build on existing IPC messaging and materials used in Nigeria and center on face-to-face conversations and activities between frontline workers and mothers or family members at the household, community, and facility levels in the public and private sectors. IPC interventions can help mothers adopt recommended infant feeding practices while community mobilization activities reinforce IPC with mothers and shift social norms, lending credibility to messages given by frontline workers and volunteers.

MASS COMMUNICATION

A&T works with government and media sector specialists to develop high quality broadcast programming that reinforces IYCF messages that are already being delivered through IPC and community mobilization efforts.

In Nigeria, A&T will also explore digital media and Nigeria’s flourishing film industry to promote and model recommended behaviors and address perceptions of social norms.

STRATEGIC USE OF DATA

Formative research

To assess mothers’ knowledge, self-efficacy, perceptions of social norms, beliefs about the outcomes of the recommended behaviors, and to identify their current practices, A&T will work with research specialists to design and conduct surveys, household observations, trials of improved practices, and in-depth interviews. We will also interview family members, front line workers, and others who influence mothers’ beliefs and behaviors to understand community barriers, and the quality, quantity, and timing of health care and IYCF information and services available to women.

Routine monitoring data

A&T will conduct a baseline and endline survey to measure the impact of its efforts on IYCF practices. We will also work together with national and state authorities to strengthen existing community health information systems (HMIS) to collect data to improve program quality and promote evidence-based decision making.

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