IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION SERVICES TO IMPROVE IYCF PRACTICES

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINE:

DELIVERING COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION SERVICES TO IMPROVE INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING PRACTICES IN NIGERIA
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Background

Alive & Thrive (A&T) is a global initiative to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth and development through improved breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. Good nutrition in the first 1,000 days, from conception to two years of age, is critical to enable all children to lead healthier and more productive lives. A&T is managed by FHI 360 and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the governments of Canada and Ireland. In Nigeria, Alive & Thrive aims to enhance child health, nutrition and cognitive development outcomes and save lives through a sustainable national program of optimum breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices in children.

Based on results in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Vietnam, A&T developed a comprehensive approach that requires working as a team in partnership with multiple agencies to operationalize four key program components on a large scale. The A&T approach is based on the socio-ecological model that recognizes the importance of influential family and community persons and policy makers in changing social norms and behaviors. See figure 1. This approach, which has now been adapted for 2 states in Nigeria, resulted in large scale behavior change and rapid impact on IYCF indicators. The approach requires careful coordination across the various program components and continuous adjustments in the interventions based on feedback from field implementation. The four components are:

1) Advocacy among influential leaders and institutions, including policy makers, opinion leaders, and health systems managers to ensure that resources, policies and laws encourage and support IYCF

2) Interpersonal communication (IPC) directly with mothers starting during pregnancy and antenatal health visits and continued up to the child’s two years of age; and community mobilization (CM) to build support for mothers through family and community influential persons, e.g. fathers, grandmothers, local health service and medicine providers, and religious, traditional and community leaders and elders

3) Mass communication to reinforce the above by repeatedly reaching the various key audiences through radio, traditional methods, TV advertising, and mobile phones

4) Generation and strategic use of existing or new data throughout the program cycle for supporting advocacy, and to make program decisions on program design and mid-course corrections.
Goals and Objectives

The goals of the community mobilization component of the A&T program include:

- To achieve improvements in knowledge/beliefs/social norms about IYCF among fathers, grandmothers, traditional/community and religious leaders etc.
- To reinforce early initiation of and exclusive breastfeeding as the new norm in project communities
- To generate demand from mothers and family members for the key breastfeeding behaviors

The community mobilization activities will aim to address barriers in practicing optimum breastfeeding behaviors, establish an enabling environment to foster behavior change and influence shifts in community norms relating to breastfeeding. To achieve this, the implementers need to gather the support of those who are already established in the community and have the most interaction and influence with the target populations.

Main activities

To achieve the above objectives, the following activities should be considered:

1. Development and implementation of a **CM plan** for reaching high coverage of key community and family influential persons with relevant messages tailored to each type of influential persons, to support breastfeeding in their areas.

2. Strengthening and improving the **skills and performance of community mobilizers** to deliver CM interventions in support of optimal breastfeeding behaviors in their defined catchment areas. Improving
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Skills and performance of community mobilizers will include quality improvement approaches and establishing performance improvement cycles throughout project implementation (refer to figure 2).

Figure 2: Performance Improvement Cycles

Operational Steps

✓ Rapid assessments in each intervention LGA to collect data on breastfeeding practices using A&T approved protocols and tools
✓ Mapping of intervention communities
✓ Sequencing and positioning influential groups for maximum impact to enable improved early Initiation, exclusive breastfeeding
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✓ Clear roles agreed with each influential group to reflect community dynamics of social norms
✓ Working through existing structures and platforms to conduct well planned events, meetings and individual follow ups, as well as repeated contacts per influential and ensuring high coverage.
✓ Provide key messaging and tools addressing barriers identified in in each LGA- approved by A&T
✓ Establish a functioning organizational structure to effectively start-up, manage, monitor and support delivery of the CM activities at high coverage with quality. Key components of the structure include:
  ▪ Supervision (who, when, where how) and monitoring tasks (records, indicator, frequency, compiling and used by/for whom/for what)
  ▪ Clear roles and communication lines and formal interactions for updates, data, etc. at each level of contractors’ staff and A&T state teams.
✓ Plan and use performance improvement approaches to support community workers to provide CM at high coverage and with quality throughout the period of field implementation including recognition of good performance.
Sample Community Mobilization plan for reaching high coverage of key community and family influential persons with relevant messages tailored to each type of influential persons, to support IYCF in their areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who are the influencers?</th>
<th>Pregnant Women</th>
<th>Mother with 0-5 month old infant</th>
<th>Mother with 6-23 month old children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional leaders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote ANC attendance amongst community members and groups.</td>
<td>• Encourage family members and mothers to support/practice EBF.</td>
<td>• Encourage continued BF to 24 months.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sensitize community members on the benefits of EI.</td>
<td>• Sensitize community members on the benefits of EBF.</td>
<td>• Encourage caregivers to feed children a diverse diet, including meat/eggs and fresh fruits and vegetables every day.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sensitize community members on the dangers of prelacteal feeds, including holy water/zamzam.</td>
<td>• Sensitize community members on the risk of introducing other liquids and foods, including water and holy water/zamzam (e.g. diarrhea).</td>
<td>• Encourage husbands to purchase nutritious foods for young children and pregnant/lactating wives when needed, especially animal source proteins</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disseminate EI messages to all community members (fathers, grandmothers) and groups for men and women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious leaders and religious groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disseminate messages on EI to all congregation (fathers, grandmothers, mothers).</td>
<td>• Encourage family members and mothers to support /practice EBF.</td>
<td>• Encourage continued BF to 24 months amongst congregation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Incorporate EI messages into their existing activities such as food demonstrations, outreaches and evangelism.</td>
<td>• Sensitize congregation on the benefits of EBF.</td>
<td>• Encourage caregivers to feed children a diverse diet, including meat/eggs and fresh fruits and vegetables every day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide group talks to promote regular ANC attendance, facility delivery and EI amongst pregnant mothers and families.</td>
<td>• Sensitize congregation on the risk of introducing other liquids and foods (e.g. diarrhea).</td>
<td>• Link pregnant mothers with SG for peer support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Advocate with family members and pregnant mothers to support and practice EI and to avoid prelacteal feeds including holy water/zamzam.</td>
<td>• Link pregnant mothers with SG for peer support.</td>
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