

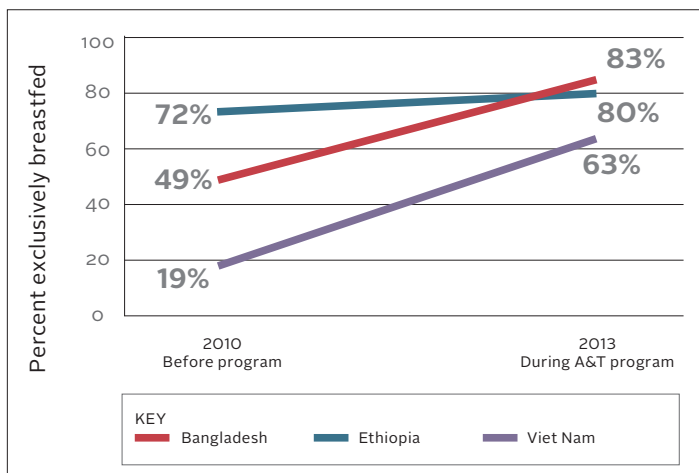


Scaling up nutrition in Burkina Faso to build a model for a resilient, thriving West Africa

ALIVE & THRIVE (A&T) is an initiative to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth and development through improved breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. The time between birth and 24 months of age offers a unique opportunity to impact the long term health and development of children. 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 contexts: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Viet Nam.

A&T is now supporting the Government of Burkina Faso to implement proven models for scaling up nutrition, with a focus on promoting early initiation of breastfeeding (within one hour of birth) and exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life (no liquids, including water). This brief describes our multicomponent approach for improving infant feeding practices to reduce newborn and infant mortality in Burkina Faso with application to other countries in the region.

Improvements in exclusive breastfeeding resulting from large scale A&T programs



Context

Livelihoods in Burkina Faso are largely dependent on subsistence agriculture, and rural populations are vulnerable to food insecurity as a result of poverty and extreme climate fluctuations. With a history of drought and famine, the country's health and nutrition services have traditionally focused on providing treatment of acute malnutrition, while more cost-effective interventions, such as breastfeeding, have not received as much attention.

In 2014, the exclusive breastfeeding rate in Burkina Faso was 50.1 percent (UNICEF 2014)¹. Although half of Burkina Faso's children are breastfed, the initiation of breastfeeding is often delayed, and exclusive breastfeeding practices are not often followed during the recommended first six months of life. While efforts are ongoing across the country to improve these practices, early and exclusive breastfeeding rates still vary greatly by region, ranging from 20.5 percent to 74.1 percent (National Nutrition Survey 2013). The national infant and young child feeding (IYCF) strategy aims to reach a national exclusive breastfeeding rate of 60 percent by 2025.

LOOKING AHEAD

The health and economic benefits of breastfeeding are huge: increasing breastfeeding rates could save hundreds of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in the global economy each year (Lancet 2016). Over the last few years, the Government of Burkina Faso has started to shift its focus on improving infant feeding practices; continuing to prioritize the prevention of child malnutrition by investing in IYCF could result in positive health and economic gains for the country.

¹ UNICEF Annual Report 2014, Country Office Annual reports [internet]. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Burkina_Faso_Annual_Report_2014.pdf

Interventions tailored to achieve scale

A&T is working with government and non-governmental (NGO) partners to develop tailored interventions that aim to make a lasting impact on breastfeeding practices across the country. Specifically, A&T is providing technical support to assist the government in the implementation of the National Infant and Young Child Feeding Scale Up Plan. Our intervention designs were informed by findings from formative research that we conducted in four regions from December 2014 – April 2015 (box 1). A&T's framework for improving IYCF at scale includes the following components:

ADVOCACY

A&T is providing technical support to the government and NGOs to monitor and strengthen breastfeeding services, and advocate for improved quality and coverage of breastfeeding support services in all districts. The overall objective is to create an enabling environment for optimal breastfeeding

TESTING OF COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION AND COMMUNICATION IN BOUCLE DU MOUHOUN REGION

In Boucle du Mouhoun, A&T is testing the feasibility of improving breastfeeding through a package of community mobilization, interpersonal counseling, and behavior change communication interventions. Interpersonal counseling includes contacts at health facilities, with community workers and volunteers, and through mother support group meetings. The community mobilization activities, which are provided by a local organization, target a broader audience of influential family and community members with the purpose of enhancing social support for breastfeeding mothers, increasing demand for breastfeeding services, and expanding information about optimal infant feeding practices. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is conducting a rigorous evaluation to document the impact of the package of interventions on breastfeeding practices.

practices through stronger policy and program implementation by government and non-government stakeholders.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

A&T is providing technical input for implementing breastfeeding support at health facilities, and is developing an evidence-based package of community-based breastfeeding counseling and community mobilization interventions to support mothers to adopt recommended practices.

MASS COMMUNICATION

A&T supports national mass communication campaigns to extend the reach of breastfeeding messages through community radio. These campaigns reinforce messages provided by health workers in direct face-to-face communication.

STRATEGIC USE OF DATA

A&T relies on data to help design, implement, and evaluate programs. We conducted formative research to inform our national communication activities and a rapid assessment to develop health facility-based interventions. A&T is also strengthening the capacity of health program managers to perform routine monitoring for improving service delivery.

Partnerships

A&T is working in collaboration with the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Directorate, Family Health Directorate, and the Community Health Promotion Directorate; UNICEF; WHO; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Africsante; Programme d'Appui au Monde Associatif et Communautaire (PAMAC); Centre Muraz; and national and international NGOs including Western University Service of Canada (WUSC), Mwangaza Action, IBFAN/APAIB, and Development Media International.

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