

## SPRING-MEAS Webinar Series | Webinar 1

### The Making of a Messenger: Engaging Extension and Advisory Service Providers in Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture, Part 1: Focus on Malawi

October 29, 2014

Additional questions from webinar participants and answers from the panel are below:

<b>Q - Ly Sereyrih: What if the DAES is not well-functioning?</b>
A - VICKIE SIGMAN: The DAES faces a number of challenges which constrain its effectiveness. Several challenges were highlighted in the presentation: coverage, capacity, conditions of service, and incentives as well as coordination of nutrition-related activities and insufficient investment in DAES. Further details on these challenges are provided in the report. These challenges need to be addressed to facilitate the smooth and effective functioning of DAES. Farmers and other extension clients receive fewer services than they should when DAES does not function effectively.
<b>Q - Aaron Buchsbaum: What are some of the opinions/perspectives of district level ag folks on having their extensionists regularly engaged by NGO projects?</b>
A - VICKIE SIGMAN: As you likely imagine, the opinions and perspectives of agricultural extension agents at the district-level vary with respect to having agents regularly engaged by NGO projects. Generally, for those who directly benefit (through different types of support), perspectives are somewhat more positive than for those who do not benefit directly. Perhaps more importantly, several management staff at the district-level (and at higher levels) mentioned the difficulties of managing field-level staff when field staff receive different benefits and incentives.
<b>Q - Charlie Jordan: Are <i>mindandadas</i> are like farmer field schools?</b>
A – VICKIE SIGMAN: They may have a few similarities (action and learning occurs on farmer fields) but more generally, they do not have a set schedule of meetings with set curricula to be covered which includes specific experimentation, and thus are unlike Farmer Field Schools (FFS), at least in the traditional sense of FFS.
<b>Q - Anushree Shiroor: Could you please tell me us more about the content of nutrition education in this programme?</b>
A – VICKIE SIGMAN: The content varies to some extent depending on who is delivering messages to whom. In collaboration with the Government, SUN develops messages for various target audiences. For details please see - <a href="http://scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/malawi/resources">http://scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/malawi/resources</a> .
<b>Q - Siddick: Can you provide more clarity in gender role linking nutrition and agriculture programme?</b>
A – VALARIE RHOE DAVIS: This is a good question as gender is perceived to play a nexus role in linking

agriculture and nutrition. The ag-nutrition pathways identify women empowerment as a pathway. In particular, I see 1) women's control over income earned through agriculture for purchasing nutritious foods or nutrition-sensitive services and 2) labor time allocated to agriculture productive activities and domestic care practices, as key gender considerations in linking agriculture and nutrition.

**Q - Tiffany Freer: When you say 'peanuts for home consumption' does this involve training in processing or creating RUFs?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: I understand the project mentioned is providing some training to women in processing. One of the project's documents mentions making peanut flour and dried cooked peanuts. There is a more commercialized operation in Malawi making RUFs with peanuts as one of the ingredients.

**Q - Christen: What is the ratio of women to men lead farmers?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: Both public extension and NGOs are aware of the need to more fully address gender issues including recruiting more women lead farmers. One project reported between 24% and 38% of lead farmers in various components of the project (milk producer groups, care group promoters, etc.) were female. Further details on ratios were not available at the time of the assessment.

**Q - Heather Danton: What are nutrition-sensitive training topics and how do extensionists actually translate this into their work at the different levels they may be interfacing (e.g. with growers, suppliers, farmer groups, etc.)?**

A19 VICKIE SIGMAN Public sector agriculture extension staff who receive nutrition-related training are typically trained in crop diversification, the six food groups required for good nutrition, food preparation, processing, storage, and preservation, and cooking demonstrations as well as in other specific SUN-developed messages (see <http://scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/malawi/resources>) Agents incorporate this in their everyday work with their clients, primarily farmers and farm families.

**Q - Siddick: What strategies and processes were followed in coordinating the different stakeholders?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: The Government and SUN have a coordination structure for the 1000 days program which aims to coordinate all stakeholders. However, coordination is weak and needs to be strengthened. Ministries also have their own coordination structures, also weak, and at different levels which exacerbates the difficulties of coordination.

**Q - Walter: Could we hear about the work burden on the extension officers and how that is being overcome? It is a serious problem in Ethiopia.**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: If the question is asking about the overall work burden of extension officers, this is also a challenge in Malawi. The ratio of farmers to agents is reportedly very high, anywhere between 2,000 - 4,000 farm families per agent. There is no evidence to suggest all farmers are being reached and served by extension. Better transportation, using more ICT, and training more lead farmers, are put

forward as strategies to address the burden of work.

**Q - Solomon Gamene: How could we manage any possible competition between productivity and nutrition messages?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: I may not understand the question/concern fully. If competition in terms of extension agent time is at issue, then it should be made clear that agricultural extension agents' priorities will focus on production, post-harvest processes and processing, and marketing but this does not mean they cannot incorporate nutrition messages into this priority work. Nutrition messages that complement these other priorities are likely to be the most readily incorporated.

**Q - Mowdou 2: Do we know if the extension officers deliver good quality trainings and services?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: Opinions on this are likely to vary widely and may depend on which extension officers are under discussion—public, private, or civil society sector extension officer—and what training and services are being provided. In my experience in Malawi (as well as in many other countries), the large majority of extension officers in these three sectors do the best they can with the resources they have. Often they work in very difficult situations. Not all, but many are committed to delivering high-quality training and other services. In Malawi, the assessment did not look specifically at extension officer performance.

**Q - Siddick: Were there any differences identified in Malawi in programmes executed by male and female extension workers?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: The report has some additional information on women's participation in delivering, accessing, and using extension services. However, we did not have sufficient time to carefully assess differences in programs executed by male and female extension workers.

**Q - Jeannie Harvey: Can you talk a bit more about bringing the care groups and farmers groups together? Are there a lot of the same people in both groups? Do extension agents work with both groups, between the groups?**

A – VICKIE SIGMAN: As mentioned during the webinar, I have fewer details on this system than I would like. The primary linkage is through the Care Group Promoter. The Promoter is recruited from the membership of NASFAM (the farmer organization). The Promoter is then trained in nutrition and subsequently trains groups of women (in clusters). Each cluster has a Care Group Volunteer who takes a leadership role in the group. Promoters are "encouraged" to go back to their farmer organization and share the information and knowledge on nutrition on which they have been trained. Women in clusters are "encouraged" to join farmer clubs. Unfortunately, I do not have details on what being "encouraged" entails. When asked if all members of the household groups (the clusters) are also members of farmer clubs, the project response was: not necessarily.