



Agriculture-Nutrition Field Note

Integration and Coordination in Guatemala

A Program Example from the Agriculture and Nutrition Global Learning and Evidence Exchange Landscape Analysis

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JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) • Helen Keller International (HKI) • International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) • Save the Children (SC) • The Manoff Group (TMG)



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About SPRING

The Strengthening Partnerships, Results and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project is a five-year USAID-funded Cooperative Agreement to strengthen global and country efforts to scale up high-impact nutrition practices and policies and improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes. The project is managed by the JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., with partners, Helen Keller International, the Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute. SPRING provides state-of-the-art technical support and focuses on the prevention of stunting and maternal and child anemia in the first 1,000 days.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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SPRING Project

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
1616 Fort Myer Drive, 16th Floor
Arlington, VA 22209 USA
Phone: 703-528-7474
Fax: 703-528-7480
Email: info@spring-nutrition.org
Internet: www.spring-nutrition.org

INTRODUCTION

Despite worldwide efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015, 165 million children remain stunted and 870 million people are chronically undernourished. *The 2013 Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition* points to a growing consensus that combating the global burden of malnutrition will require collaboration across development sectors.

Recognizing the potential gains that can be made through better coordination, USAID's Bureau for Food Security and Bureau of Global Health commissioned the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project to lead a series of practical and program-driven Agriculture and Nutrition Global Learning and Evidence Exchange (AgN-GLEE) events in Uganda, Guatemala, and Thailand between December 2012 and March 2013.

To inform the agendas of the AgN-GLEEs, SPRING conducted a landscape analysis. Its purpose was to review and synthesize current Feed the Future investments being made by USAID, extracting key data and patterns from project documents and telephone interviews with USAID Missions. In addition to completing landscape analysis reports for each of the 19 Feed the Future countries, SPRING also conducted several field studies. These qualitative exercises were designed to gather, analyze, and summarize one or more practical activities being carried out by either a USAID Mission or a Feed the Future implementing partner that demonstrated potential for supporting nutritional outcomes within the country's Feed the Future defined zone of influence.

This field note highlights the work of the Guatemala Mission to coordinate programming within the Feed the Future zone of influence with the goal of achieving improved nutritional outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Guatemala Multi-Year Feed the Future Strategy aims to sustainably reduce poverty and hunger and adopts a value chain approach to achieve inclusive, market-led agricultural growth. Complemented by improved access to health services, potable water, and comprehensive hygiene and nutrition education, the Feed the Future activities are expected to improve nutrition for women and children in the targeted population.

Guatemala's Feed the Future zone of influence is the Western Highlands region of the country, constituting the five departments of Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, San Marcos, and Totonicapán. Feed the Future activities are a core part of Mission-wide efforts to develop a truly integrated and multi-sectoral development program for the Western Highlands. A coordinating framework, the Western Highlands Integrated Program (WHIP), has evolved over time. Through WHIP, USAID can engage implementing partners, community leaders, and the Government of Guatemala to ensure that the various activities and efforts are yielding the maximum benefits.

Key implementing mechanisms in the Western Highlands include the **Rural Value Chains Project (RVCP)**, the **Community Nutrition and Health Project (Nutri-Salud)**, two multiyear Food for Peace (FFP) programs (**SEGAMIL** and **PAISANO**), and a **Local Governance Strengthening Project**, among others.

Also, regional initiatives are in place, such as the **Food Security Participating Agency Service Agreement**, which aims to improve agriculture-led growth. This initiative assists farmers and Guatemalan governmental institutions in meeting sanitary and phytosanitary standards for agricultural exports in the Central American nations of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and in the Dominican Republic.

TARGETING AND GEOGRAPHY

The above-mentioned activities co-locate their efforts to enhance results. All focus on the five departments of the Western Highlands. Further, Nutri-Salud and the RVCP implement their activities in the same set of 30 municipalities within these five departments. PAISANO and SEGAMIL operate in 18 of the 30 municipalities. The local governance project is also present in a number of these 30 municipalities (and also is focused on the five Western Highlands departments).

A key reason for focusing on these 30 municipalities was to carry out a strategy that combined available resources with population needs. Specifically, the intention was that Nutri-Salud have a wide enough scope to potentially reach every individual residing in the selected municipalities. The Mission initially determined that resources were sufficient to reach approximately 1.5 million people. This estimate was based on government survey data, proposals provided by USAID technical offices, the presence of ongoing USAID projects, and an International Food Policy Research Institute study. It was also decided that RVCP would operate in the same 30 municipalities, albeit with a subset of the population. Thus, implementing mechanisms were awarded with the understanding that Nutri-Salud and the RVCP would each work in the same 30 municipalities.

The RVCP works with smallholder farmers and groups, including women and farmers graduating from the FFP projects. The activity provides agricultural technical assistance and support to market-led development of the coffee and horticultural value chains. Nutri-Salud and FFP focus their efforts on women and children under the age of five with nutrition, health, and hygiene activities and with social and behavior change communication (SBCC). Food for Peace activities also engage small farmers with home horticulture interventions that promote consumption and sale of produce.

Project Name	Award Date	Project Timeframe
Rural Value Chains Project – ANACAFE	May 31, 2012	2012–17
Rural Value Chains Project – AGEXPORT	May 23, 2012	2012–17
Nutri-Salud	June 1, 2012	2012–17
PAISANO	August 1, 2012	Up to six years
SEGAMIL	August 1, 2012	Up to six years

INTEGRATION STRATEGY

The USAID | Guatemala Mission strives to coordinate the delivery of value chain activities, direct nutrition activities, and FFP interventions through well-defined partnership mechanisms. The Mission has led an ongoing process of coordination internally between offices and across activity and government partners, and

has made integration “a policy and not a goal.” Listed below are key steps taken by the Guatemala Mission to develop and formalize its coordination mechanisms.

Mission Coordination

- **Creating the WHIP.** The Western Highlands Integrated Program working group was created in May 2011. It combines staff from all technical offices to promote collaboration and information sharing to strengthen activity coherence and effectiveness. Initially weekly meetings were held with any interested technical staff members who were available. The Mission director was brought on board, and documentation, referred to as an “Executive Correspondence,” was written to institutionalize the meeting structure and coordination mechanisms. This correspondence explains the organization and purpose of the WHIP. The communication was initially addressed to Mission staff, but is now being translated and shared with partners as well.
- **Defining the purpose.** The purpose of the WHIP was clarified as: to ensure collaboration among USAID technical offices and program resources and partners; to coordinate activities within Guatemala, USAID Washington and other USG agencies; to monitor achievement of results; and to report on overall program progress.
- **Institutionalizing a Mission core group.** The Mission created a standing committee known as the WHIP Core Technical Working Group. It includes representatives from the Economic Growth, Health/Education, Food Security, Democracy/Governance, Planning and Program Support and Acquisitions and Assistance¹ offices. The WHIP Core Technical Working Group is expected to report quarterly to the Mission director on the status of integration, the work of interdepartmental coordination teams, and any analytical work.
- **Seeking results.** Staff members at implementing partner organizations who demonstrate successful examples of coordination and collaboration will receive congratulatory letters from the Guatemala Mission director, with copies sent to USAID/Washington. These letters are intended to foster friendly competition among implementing partners in a way that highlights the types of collaboration expected under Feed the Future. The Mission hopes that implementing partners will also consider these accolades during staff evaluations.
- **Motivating coordination through cross-objective budgeting.** The Mission strategically built financial coordination and oversight into the WHIP by allocating \$1M and \$800K from the Economic Growth Office to finance local governance and nutrition activities, respectively. The Economic Growth Office, which is home to the Feed the Future initiative, tracks and reports on the use of these funds by the other offices, making the Health/Education office and the Democracy/Governance office accountable for their respective Economic Growth Office budget allocations. These offices must contribute activity updates to Economic Growth Office performance reports.

¹ Staff from the Planning and Program Support Office and the Acquisitions and Assistance Office are expected to participate only as needed.

- **Coordinating procurement.** The procurement instruments for the RVCP, Nutri-Salud, and FFP awards were all designed at the same time and with considerable interactions among teams in multiple technical offices. Evaluation committees for awarding grants were made up of staff from different offices.
- **Creating a common language.** The new procurement documents contained identical language on principles such as “linking value chains with nutrition and dietary diversity,” “behavior change for improved nutrition,” “sustainability through local governance,” “leveraging private sector resources,” and “coordination with other USAID partners.” This was meant to create shared values and commonly understood concepts and objectives among activities.
- **Working with projects in the Western Highlands.** The Mission is in the process, as of April 2013, of hiring a USAID staff member to live and work in the Western Highlands as a permanent representative to advance integration among activities and staff.

Activity Coordination

- **Establishing department-level committees.** The Mission supported a pilot department-level coordination committee in Quiche, where two of the implementing partners had extensive experience on the ground and the partner and the local government already had a strong relationship. Over the course of a series of meetings, all partners presented their activities and potential coordination approaches within the department of Quiche. The partners elected a lead partner agency and an individual representative to be the coordinator. A letter of understanding that formalized the agreement to integrate field activities was signed by all partners in Quiche and by the Mission director early in 2013. The same process is being rolled out in the other Feed the Future departments, and in April 2013, Huehuetenango held its first departmental-wide meeting.
- **Coordinating activity implementation.** WHIP meetings discussed the need for all partners to map where they work within each municipality to coordinate and harmonize efforts, to avoid working with the same households unless appropriate, and to design the content of their interventions to complement the others’ efforts. For example, partners in Quiche held two mapping meetings as a part of their departmental-level coordination. The Mission director suggested holding meetings in the rest of the departments in which activity implementers present geographic target regions using Geographic Information Systems and Google Earth. Also, implementers of Nutri-Salud and of FFP activities recognized that they had excessive overlap and worked, in November 2012, to divide the communities where each implementer would work within their municipalities. A referral system among implementing partners of different activities is still in development. Currently, participant referral among activities is ad hoc, with partners stressing communication among staff members as crucial.
- **Contracting and subcontracting across FFP and Feed the Future.** Often, primary implementers on one activity are subcontractors or subgrantee on others. For example, Save the Children is the primary implementer of one of the FFP awards, and is a subgrantee under the RVCP. INCAP, a partner under Nutri-Salud, has been hired by the RVCP to work on integrating nutritional outcomes into the value chains work. Mercy Corps, a partner under Nutri-Salud, also manages IMARE, a value chains project with the Economic Growth Office. While this situation had some initial challenges, it ultimately resulted in strengthened relationships, deeper understanding among all parties, and improved accountability. This unique degree of collaboration among implementing partners in Guatemala, as well as among different USAID offices, can help ensure continuity of the work, strengthen the network of partners, increase the

comparative advantages of the prime contractor for each activity, and enhance the contribution of a given activity to the portfolio as an integrated whole.

- **Streamlining measurement.** The activities share common Feed the Future indicators, and each includes additional custom indicators that are relevant to their agriculture and nutrition activities. One example of a project indicator measured by all projects is “Number of people trained in child health and nutrition through USG-supported health area programs.” Households reached by more than one project will be flagged by the Mission to ensure that they are not counted more than once. Population-level indicators across the five departments are being collected externally, and two baseline studies are being conducted: one by MEASURE Evaluation for Nutri-Salud and the RVCP and another by ICF International for the FFP programs. Both are collecting data on similar indicators; however, the divergent timing of awards did not permit conducting only one baseline survey. The Mission has been working to ensure that the two baselines are coordinated and that data collected can be used to inform all activities operating in the Western Highlands.

CHALLENGES

In its endeavor to create a truly integrated program in the Western Highlands, the Guatemala Mission continues to address a number of challenges. For example, initially, staff members were reluctant to attend weekly coordination meetings. Furthermore, some supervisors did not understand the need for the meetings and were hesitant to let their staff participate. The process of institutionalizing the WHIP, including creating a WHIP Core Technical Working Group within the Mission, has alleviated these concerns, helping to build consensus and buy-in among leadership and technical officers.

Occasionally, goals or values differ. Even when they are aligned, different implementers have different ways of working, different types of relationships and levels of experience within the communities, and different target beneficiaries. Department coordination committees and the WHIP Core Technical Group are helping strengthen relationships among implementers and foster the communication and understanding needed to overcome these differences.

Finally, changes in leadership or staffing over the duration of an activity could lead to loss of buy-in from new individuals who have not been involved in building relationships and determining goals. This last challenge is the reason behind the institutionalization of the internal processes through the creation of WHIP Core Technical Working Group. The Mission is encouraging the implementers at the department level to set up similar working groups.

CONCLUSION

The success of Feed the Future programming in Guatemala hinges on the sustainability of these integration and coordination mechanisms at the central and field levels. It also hinges on support for dynamic staff members at all levels to achieve integration and coordination goals. Current leaders in the Mission and in implementing partner organizations have shared commitments to coordinate and integrate the design and

implementation of Feed the Future agriculture and nutrition activities. The Mission took the lead by restructuring itself internally to create the WHIP before requiring that partners better integrate health and nutrition activities at the field level. Multiple mechanisms, such as the WHIP working group, memoranda of understanding, shared funding streams and indicators, and technical working groups help to ensure close collaboration and integration.

Takeaway lessons identified by the Mission include the importance of cross-funding to require technical offices to work together; coordinating meetings between all implementing partners to enable them to share information and build relationships; inserting binding language into procurement documents to ensure common goals; and fostering regular communication among stakeholders within the Mission and across implementing partners. The complexities of coordinating within USAID offices, as well as among more than a dozen partners, coupled with the challenges of managing a multi-sector activity in complex environments from long distance, cannot be overstated.