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Strengthening Partnerships, Results,  
and Innovations in Nutrition Globally

# Systems Thinking in Action: The Kyrgyz Republic

March 29, 2018

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This presentation was made possible by the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-11-00031, the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project.



# The Kyrgyz Republic

- Former Soviet republic
- Majority-Muslim
- Middle-income country with **high rates of literacy and health facility utilization**



Persistent **stunting** among children under five (18 percent) (DHS 2012)



High rates of **anemia** among children under five (43 percent) and women of reproductive age (35 percent) (DHS 2012)



# SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

- Began in 2014, when USAID Kyrgyz Republic mission invited SPRING to...
  - improve the nutritional status of women and children
  - use a multi-sectoral approach, working in partnership with the Feed the Future value chain project, Agro Horizon
- Conducted a situation analysis, stakeholder consultation, baseline survey, and formative research



# SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

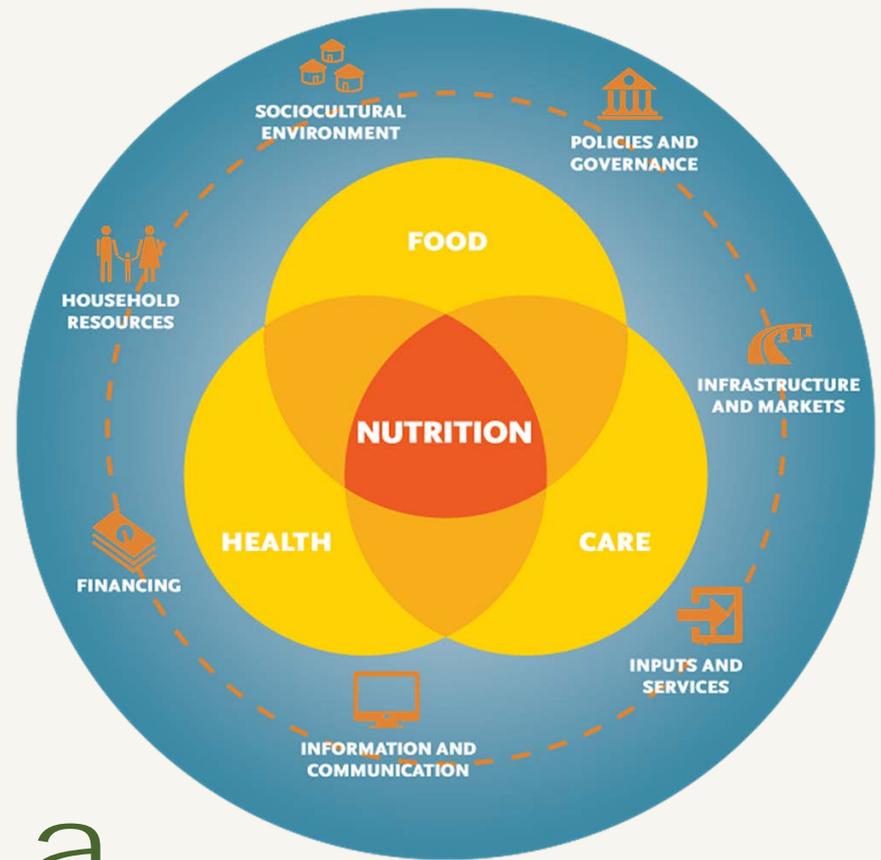
- Based on findings of a lack of awareness around nutrition and limited health worker capacity
- Designed an approach that...
  - worked closely with **government and civil society counterparts**
  - focused on increasing the uptake of **11 evidence-based practices**
  - through **policy change, health capacity strengthening, and social behavior change communication**





# Mapping of the Systems Framework for Nutrition

- SPRING's Systems Framework was not available at initiation
- This mapping exercise was an opportunity to:
  1. strengthen the framework and guide development of practical tools
  2. reassess SPRING's approach in the Kyrgyz Republic to potentially identify gaps for future investment.
- Mapping involved interviewing project staff and stakeholders at various levels
- Development of tools, identification of key informants, and reporting of findings followed an inclusive process

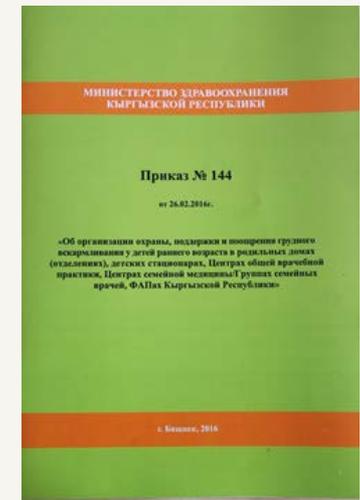


# Findings from a Systems Mapping Exercise



# Policies and Governance

- Developed National Technical **Guidelines** on Anemia Prevention & Treatment and deworming and helminth infection **protocol**
- Facilitated issuance of government **decrees** for:
  - anemia and deworming policies and protocols
  - the infant and young child feeding (IYCF) training and counselling as a health worker responsibility
  - integration of nutrition content in the pre-service educational curricula for doctors and nurses
  - Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) certifications
- Actively **participated** in SUN CSO network
- Conducted **advocacy and education** at the national/ policy level





# Infrastructure and Markets

Little need and not within scope





## Inputs and Services

Less need related to inputs for nutrition and little could be done, given donor priorities, but...

- Conducted **trainings of trainers** on nutrition counselling for master trainers
- Supported **cascade trainings** within health sector
- **Revitalized BFHI trainings and certification process** for health facility staff in program areas



# Inputs and Services

- Trained Ministry of Health (MoH) supervisors in IYCF **supportive supervision**
- Supported the MoH to conduct **supportive supervision visits**





# Information and Communication

Strengthening the HMIS for nutrition was **beyond the scope and not feasible** within the initial project duration, but...

- Conducted baseline, annual, and endline surveys focused on **11 priority practices**
- Engaged **MoH staff and community activists** in meetings to **share and discuss** SPRING progress
- Did not **routinely collect** information on **attitudes and knowledge** related to the 11 priority practices



# Information and Communication

- Developed a comprehensive **SBCC strategy** that guided SPRING activities
- Supported MoH in **reviewing, revising, and developing SBCC materials** to promote 11 priority practices
- **Built capacity of the MoH to** design, plan, and implement SBCC
- Engaged **MoH staff** in the dissemination of messages
- Trained and continuously supported **local community activists to educate and counsel** communities and households
- Supported development an urban nutrition communication strategy and implementation of SBCC activities **aligned with the national strategy**





# Financing

Largely **beyond the scope** of SPRING,  
but...

- Generated **interest in assessing and advocating** for government and donor funding





# Household Resources

Less of a priority for SPRING because...

- Most targeted households **had the resources** to make recommended changes
- **Government cash transfer program** already existed to help those in greatest need
- Agro Horizon project focused on **income generation through agriculture**

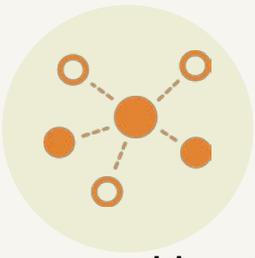




# Sociocultural Environment

- **Formative research** on food consumption, family diet, WASH and care practices conducted and **used to design activities and messages**
- Sociocultural context was **mostly supportive** of priority practices, **but** the low status of newly married women and intra-household food distribution were identified as barriers to adoption of priority practices
- In response, a **gender activity** was developed but not taken to scale
- Community activists (both men and women) were selected **from their communities** and a **wide range of backgrounds** to ensure receptivity of community members

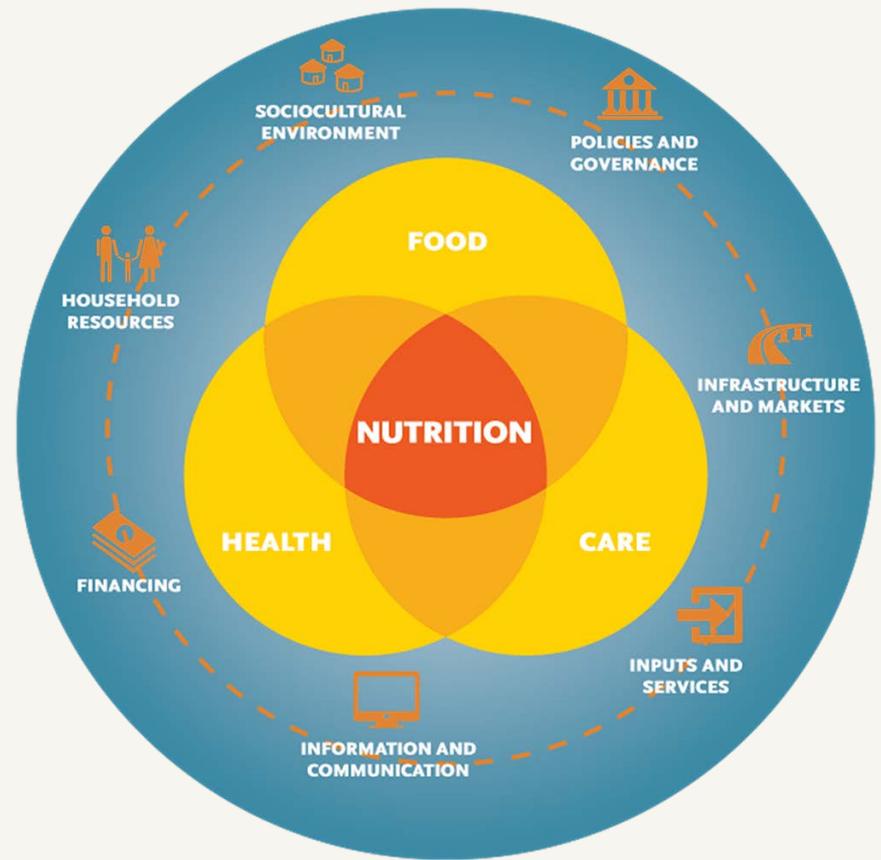




# Interactions and Consequences

- Used the socioecological model to develop different approaches, **addressing different factors** in the systems framework, reaching **a wide range of people** through **multiple channels** and at **multiple levels**
- Ensured that **messages were consistent** at every level and **complementary** to messages communicated through multiple channels
- Facilitated the **reporting, sharing, and use of information** among regional and national stakeholders to encourage **positive interactions**, create **synergies**, leverage **positive feedback loops**, and avoid **negative consequences**





# Conclusions and Recommendations



# Mapping of the Systems Framework for Nutrition

- There were factors that **mapped well** to project activities and other where **more could have been done**, had project staff had the framework to inform design.
- There was clearly **overlap between principles of good program design, multi-sectoral nutrition programming, and systems thinking.**



# Recommendations for the Application of Systems Thinking to Nutrition

1. **Use a systems-thinking lens** to assess, design, prioritize, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs.
2. **Ensure longer periods of performance** and a **mandate** to apply systems thinking.
3. **Provide leadership and structure** for the application of systems thinking.
4. **Leverage existing programs** to ensure that programming gaps are filled.
5. **Strengthen coordination and collaboration** across sectors, departments, and organizations.

With the increasing number of countries adopting multi-sectoral nutrition policies, we must ask **how such policies can be most effective and have the greatest impact**. We believe that the application of systems thinking has the potential to strengthen multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder programming for nutrition.



# Thank you!

For more info, please visit:

<https://www.spring-nutrition.org/countries/>



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