Almost half (45 percent) of child deaths under the age of five are related to undernutrition. Not only does undernutrition kill, it also prevents children from growing up to live healthy and productive lives as adults, thus leading to an ongoing intergenerational cycle of undernutrition.

Adequate nutrition is particularly important during the first 1,000 days of life, from the start of a woman’s pregnancy to the child’s second birthday, when both mother and child have increased nutritional needs. Poverty, and the inadequate quantity and quality or access to human, economic and institutional resources, is the most important root cause of malnutrition.

Nutrition-sensitive social protection targets the most vulnerable, and can be an important strategy to address the underlying causes of malnutrition. Targeting strategies of social protection programmes tend to be based on socio-economic criteria, such as poverty, asset ownership, etc., which apply at the household level. However, applying a nutrition lens to targeting is an invitation to consider the nutritional vulnerability of individuals within households in addition to household-level criteria. In fact, social safety nets with nutrition components can help tackle both the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition. They do so by reducing vulnerability; protecting incomes, crops and assets; ensuring basic needs can be met; securing access to a nutritious diet and supporting access to health services and safe drinking water and better sanitation.

When the Government of the Dominican Republic reformed its social sector in 2009, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) supported the Government to incorporate a nutrition intervention as a sub-component of the conditional cash-based transfer in the national social protection program called Progresando con Solidaridad. This included a blended approach to training, capacity development, promotion of growth monitoring and preventative care for children. The nutrition component was delivered through primary healthcare, as well as through the provision of direct nutritional products and services.

An evaluation of the Progresando con Solidaridad programme (2013) highlighted a 50 percent reduction in anaemia prevalence in children enrolled in the programme. Progresando con Solidaridad was presented at the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection in September 2015, whose aim was to facilitate exchanges of lessons learned on social protection and safety nets through South-South knowledge sharing.
of micronutrient powders to all beneficiaries of the social protection programme aged 6-59 months.

Programs like Progresando con Solidaridad highlight that social protection schemes with multiple nutrition components can directly contribute to improving diets. For example, they can provide food to beneficiaries through food transfers and school meals programmes. Furthermore, they can facilitate access to health care through conditional cash transfers, which encourage the use of health services and enable households to access items for personal and household hygiene and clean water.

While a number of social protection schemes around the world may have a single nutrition component, the Dominican Republic’s experience with their innovative Progresando con Solidaridad program can inspire countries which are just at the verge of introducing or expanding their social protection and safety nets and want to place emphasis on ensuring impact on nutrition.

Currently, Progresando con Solidaridad’s conditional cash-based transfer component for food consumption targets over 700,000 poor households. From January 2014 to August 2016, the nutrition component serves 121,706 beneficiaries of these households (88,348 children; 23,665 pregnant and lactating women and 9,693 elderly). In addition, the nutrition component supports 20,000 Progresando con Solidaridad community employees and public health practitioners.

The Social Policy Cabinet of the Vice-President administers Progresando con Solidaridad with the Ministry of Health and with WFP as essential partners in its health condition and nutrition component.

Methodology

The nutrition intervention of the Progresando con Solidaridad programme is composed of the following actions:

1. Distribution of micronutrient powders to children aged 6-59 months to help prevent and control micronutrient deficiencies;
2. Provision of nutrition education to families benefiting from the *Progresando con Solidaridad* programme to improve their capacity to properly select food and, therefore, improve food consumption and nutrition;

3. Strengthen and extend the community volunteer network to reach beneficiaries at the household level, particularly mothers. This helps to ensure an adequate consumption of micronutrient powders, fortified and complementary food. Additionally, it contributes to deliver improved health care services to mothers and their children;

4. Distribution of a specialized nutritious food called *Progresina fortificada* (Super Cereal plus) to children aged 6-59 months to prevent and control chronic and acute malnutrition;

5. Distribution of a specialized nutritious food called *Progresina* (Super cereal) to pregnant and lactating women and the elderly;

6. Strengthen national and local capacities to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities.

This in-kind assistance component complements the conditional cash transfer part of the program called *Comer es Primero*. It supports beneficiaries’ food security with a transfer of roughly US$16 per month, conditional on the participation of the beneficiaries to preventative healthcare activities; children’s school attendance; head of household attendance at community education sessions; and obtaining of identification documents.

**South-South Cooperation**

Social protection and safety nets is WFP’s largest focus area for South-South and triangular exchanges worldwide, so far.

The *Progresando con Solidaridad* programme was selected for presentation as a successful case study at the Global Forum on Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection in September 2015.

The Forum is a South-South learning platform facilitated by the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil. It has the key objective to facilitate exchange of experiences and lessons learned on social protection and safety nets through South-South knowledge sharing.

Over 150 participants from 20 countries joined the Forum and learnt from the Dominican Republic’s experience.

**Innovation**

The Dominican Republic’s case represents an excellent example of how to optimize an existing social protection scheme and make it highly nutrition-sensitive.

While a number of social protection schemes around the world may have a single nutrition component, *Progresando con Solidaridad* is innovative for the comprehensive range of nutrition components that are embedded in the programme.

For example, the programme includes nutrition education; community nutrition networks and distribution of micronutrient powders and specialized nutritious food to children under the age of 5, to pregnant and lactating women and to the elderly.

**Sustainability**

*Progresando con Solidaridad* is the Dominican Republic Government’s main strategy to promote human development and combat poverty.
The nutrition component is integral to the Dominican Republic’s main safety net programme and funded by the Government. Furthermore:

- Interventions are based on Government structures and processes;
- The nutrition component is implemented under national health norms and processes;
- Beneficiary targeting is based on a Government database that has been in existence since 2004;
- Government commitment at all levels is high;
- Progresando con Solidaridad has agreements with most Government ministries and entities.

Replicability

A number of key elements need to be in place in order to replicate this solution elsewhere:

- A successful existing social protection scheme into which nutrition-sensitive interventions can be incorporated;
- A good evidence base to demonstrate the impact of nutrition-sensitive interventions (in the Dominican Republic case, a 4-month feasibility study was first conducted in 2009 and the success of this pilot led to national implementation from 2010);
- Strong political will within the national government;
- Clear definition of roles and responsibilities between participating ministries and organizations;
- Consistent allocation of funds from national government and any supporting agencies.

Resources

For more information on this initiative, please consult the following resources:

- Latin America and the Caribbean: Supporting national priorities on nutrition through multiple platforms (p.11-15)

Contact Person

For more information, please contact the WFP Dominican Republic Country Office’s Nutrition Project Coordinator, Maria Altagracia Fulcar.

References

4 WFP, 2015. Latin America and the Caribbean: Supporting national priorities on nutrition through multiple platforms, pg.11-15.