



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MOZAMBIQUE

CASE STUDY

Neighbors Promote Healthy Eating Habits

Changes sharply reduce the amount of malnourished children



Photo: USAID/Suzanne Poland

Neighbors participate in making juice from orange-fleshed sweet potatoes.

“Now many children won’t even eat plain porridge if it’s given to them,” says one nutrition educator. “They like the taste of the healthy food with greens and oil and other things added.”

Challenge

Although Mozambique is making economic progress, many of its people still struggle with poverty and hunger, especially in isolated rural areas. Unhealthy feeding practices and illnesses caused by poor sanitation are key contributors to child malnutrition. Taboos and ignorance often lead to deficiencies in children’s diets, even when healthy foods are available. Young children often eat porridge, even though vitamin- and protein-rich foods such as nuts and greens are produced locally. Strict gender roles have also prevented men — who generally are more educated — from being involved in nurturing. Information is a vital factor in assuring a healthy future for Mozambique’s children, but changing norms is a difficult process.

Initiative

Nutrition education is an essential part of USAID’s food security programs, which strive to reduce malnutrition among children. In Manica Province, the program identifies “Model Families” whose children are better nourished than average and reinforces their successful health and nutrition practices. Those families then share their knowledge with neighbors, leading cooking demonstrations and discussions on how to choose nutritious foods, prevent diarrhea and build latrines. Children who are found to be malnourished are sent with their parents to visit the home of a Model Family each day, where the adults cook meals together and discuss solutions.

Results

Today, more than 2,100 Model Families share their expertise on nutrition and hygiene with their neighbors. USAID has helped communities move beyond strict gender stereotypes. Fathers now attend cooking demonstrations and lead songs about enriching children’s porridge with sesame oil, greens and eggs — unheard of in rural Manica a few years ago. After community-based rehabilitation, the number of underweight children dropped 17 percentage points. Sanitation also improved, despite a general lack of piped water. In 2003, more than 3,100 households built latrines using local materials like grass and trees. Now, said one father, “the children are growing well and don’t have stomach problems.”