

6

Strengths and Weaknesses of Regional Technical Assistance in the Area of Nutrition and Food Fortification



There are some unique characteristics to nutrition interventions, suggesting that a modified (hybrid) modality TA/RETA that allows small investments for pilot projects, equipment, etc., is better suited to produce a sustainable impact than the current TA/RETA modality that is limited to consultants' inputs and a series of meetings and workshops. This type of modified (hybrid) modality is currently provided by JFPR-funded TA/RETA. However, experience shows that processing and administering such TA/RETA can be highly complicated and requires much more time and effort from staff. In addition, to ensure success and a sustainable impact, detailed administrative plans should be prepared, and rigorous reviews are warranted—as demonstrated by TA 9005-REG—supported by highly professional and dedicated local project managers. Therefore, although this preferred modality indeed offers greater possibility of good outcomes, particularly with the inclusion of small investments as mentioned above, its complicated administration³⁵ often discourages its use.

The importance of community nutrition status is now recognized by many bilateral and multilateral agencies. Of the eight MDGs, the second target for the first goal (proportion of people suffering from hunger) is directly related to nutrition. Two others (under-five mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio) can only be achieved with strong nutrition inputs, and the 10th target (drinking water and sanitation) also has a nutrition impact. With several nutrition components reflected in the MDGs, it is important to help various DMCs review their progress on the MDGs. RETAs might be a good forum to accomplish this discussion, followed by country-specific plans of action. Those countries making the slowest progress in implementing the MDGs might require country-specific TAs toward that end, preferably TAs that can provide small investments, e.g., for pilot projects, to ensure sustainable impacts.

Sharing experience and developing cost-effectiveness estimates are topics that could be well addressed in regional forums, such as RETAs. More data on program impact are needed, and RETAs might provide a solution for compilation of data not found in peer-reviewed literature.

The use of RETAs to develop effective nutrition policy for the region has been limited. This does not appear to be due to the way the policy-oriented RETAs were managed and implemented, but more associated with the nature of the general design of RETAs, and the low participation of the DMCs at

³⁵ JFPR processing has also been known to be complicated, though this has been partly overcome by the guidelines from the 2004 Directional Guidance Paper, revised on 26 February 2004.

design stage. Meetings and workshops are useful for defining issues; however, integrating effective nutrition policy components into overall development plans is something that can best be done as country-specific TAs, and loans could build on outputs of the policy-based RETAs and TAs.

While the results of consensus building at the regional level using RETAs do not always “trickle down” to national decision makers, they are good forums for advocacy and raising awareness.