

Supporting Optimal Infant, Young Child and Maternal Nutrition and Health in Jordan

FY2020 2nd Quarter Report

January 30th – March 30th, 2020

Leader with Associate Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-LA-10-00006

Under

Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Nutrition, Tufts University, Friedman School of
Nutrition Science and Policy

Cooperative Agreement Associate Award No.: 72027820LA00003

Background

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Nutrition (Nutrition Innovation Lab) aims to generate evidence on the impact of programming, and build academic capacity, to support optimal health and nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children under two in Jordan.

This will be achieved through the implementation of a rigorous research agenda including an assessment of the impact of USAID Jordan's Community Health and Nutrition Activity and through building individual and institutional capacity to conduct and interpret research and train future nutritionists in the realm of maternal and infant young child nutrition.

The Nutrition Innovation Lab will generate evidence firstly through conducting secondary analysis of existing data sets such as the Demographic Health Survey to ascertain complementary feeding practices in infants and young children and secondly through a rigorously planned and implemented evaluation of USAID Jordan's Community Health and Nutrition Activity (CHNA). The evaluation will focus on impact, process and performance with the aim of providing evidence to support current and future policy and programming. The CHNA program, a 5-year initiative aims to improve maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) and post-partum family planning (PPFP) behaviors through a combination of mass media, community and facility based interventions, and policy advocacy actions, to improve nutritional status and health of PLW and children under the age of two.

The evaluation of the CHNA will involve a quantitative impact evaluation, a qualitative and quantitative process and performance evaluation and based on the learning and best practices, a qualitative and quantitative assess of program sustainability. The research will generate evidence of impact from three governorates of Jordan (Amman, Karak and Zarqa) that can be attributed to CHNA as well as their uptake and adoption of program inputs and resources, and beneficiaries' perceptions of the program process and participation

In addition, the project will develop technical and academic capacity in the realm of maternal, infant and young child nutrition by offering a competitive small grants program and supporting seminars, webinars and symposia that will bring together key stakeholders from academia, line ministries, UN agencies, local and international non-governmental organizations and other critical in-country partners. Another critical objective of these activities is to increase awareness and policy engagement through the expansion of MIYCN research and programming within Jordan.

Summary of Activities Accomplished During Quarter 2 of FY 2020

A summary of activities undertaken during the reporting period, listed chronologically according to the timeline of activities is provided below.

1. Partnerships, Engagement and Collaboration

1.1. Engagement with USAID Jordan

- A post-award orientation meeting between the USAID Mission colleagues and Nutrition Innovation Lab was held on February 12, 2020. The meeting included discussions on award requirements, roles and responsibilities and proper communication mechanisms. In addition, clarifications on questions pertained to project workplan, leader award AOR interactions, travel and expected timeline of CHNA roll out were provided by the Mission colleagues.
- Three meetings were held with the Mission AOR on February 20, March 26 and April 1 to discuss a) the timeline for submission of the award requirements, such as the grants manual, annual implementation plan, activity monitoring and evaluation learning plan by the Jordan Mission, b) postponement of travel by the Nutrition Innovation Lab due to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, and c) post-award modifications on the sub-awards as per Nutrition Innovation Lab's request.

1.2. Engagement with FHI 360/Community Health and Nutrition Activity Implementers

- The Nutrition Innovation Lab has had consistent though informal engagement with the FHI 360 team from the start of the award.
- A meeting was held on March 17th to discuss the current program description and the potential evaluation designs linked to the program description. Based on the program design and impact pathways, a repeat-longitudinal study design was suggested, and discussions were held on sequencing of step-wedge design with the CHNA program intermediate results components. Discussions on high level performance indicators, data sharing mechanisms for use by the monitoring and evaluation group of the programmatic activity also took place.
- The collaborators from FHI 360 and Nutrition Innovation Lab agreed to have further specific discussions on the evaluation design and engagement through monthly or semi-monthly meetings with more formal engagement once the award was made.

1.3. Identification of Potential Collaborators and Partners

- During the reporting period, the Nutrition Innovation Lab team finalized the Terms of Reference (ToR), and request for proposal for a competitive bid of potential core-partners and collaborators. In doing so, a list of institutions in Jordan were compiled to share invitations for proposal submissions. This activity is currently delayed to due curtailed travel as a response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

2. Finalization of USAID Mission Post-Award Reporting Requirements

2.1. Activity Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan

- The team is in the process of drafting the Activity MEL Plan, working closely with the AOR to ensure the MEL Plan is consistent with the Mission's Performance Management Plan (PMP) and annual Performance Plan and Report (PPR).
- During the period, as part of the Activity MEL Plan, a theory of change describing the causal and logical relationships of the evaluation and capacity building activities, along with associated interventions, performance indicators, critical assumptions and narrative to articulate the theory of change was finalized and submitted to the USAID Jordan on April 23, 2020.
- Based on the feedback from the Mission colleagues, the Nutrition Innovation Lab team will plan to finalize and submit the Activity MEL plan before the June 8th deadline for submission.

2.2. Grants Manual

- The Nutrition Innovation Lab team worked closely with Tufts team and the AOR to draft the Grants Manual and aims to submit the draft to the Mission before the June 8th deadline for submission.

2.3. Annual Implementation Plan (Workplan)

- During the reporting period, the Nutrition Innovation Lab team successfully finalized the annual implementation plan for the project. As suggested by the Mission AOR, the annual implementation plan includes overall activities for 20 months (January 30, 2020 – September 30, 2021).
- In addition, a communication and outreach strategy were also incorporated as a section in the annual implementation plan, as set forth in the Branding and Marking Plan.
- The plan is being submitted to the AOR along with the quarterly report.

3. Activities related to Research and Evaluation Agenda for Community Health and Nutrition Activity (CHNA)

3.1. Secondary Data Analysis and Literature Review

- A secondary data analysis study was developed by the team. The study will utilize existing nationally representative data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) to assess complementary feeding practices and food choices (for e.g. ultra-processed foods and sugar sweetened beverages) of infants and young children under 24 months of age in Jordan.
- The research team has prepared an analysis plan using dataset from DHS surveys conducted between 2002-2018.
- An application to the ethical review board at Tufts University will be submitted in early April for approval to conduct the data analysis using the DHS datasets. The application is in the process of being reviewed during the time of submission of this report.

3.2. Development of Impact Evaluation Protocol

- During the reporting period, the Nutrition Innovation Lab team actively engaged with the Mission colleagues and FHI 360 in its effort to understand the program impact pathways of the CHNA program and subsequently develop a rigorous impact evaluation design.
- The Lab reviewed the proposed program design shared by the FHI 360 in early March and engaged in a number of meetings to collate information and discuss possibilities of utilizing various evaluation designs.
- To ensure practicality yet maintain a robust evaluation design, the Lab has proposed a repeat-longitudinal study design that will follow multiparous women (having borne more than one child) in early pregnancy at baseline and collect practices of past pregnancy and MIYCN-PPFP practices. The follow-ups at postpartum (midline/end line evaluation) will allow comparing past practices to the present practices (MIYCN-PPFP practices during the antenatal and post-partum)
- Based on the proposed evaluation design, the Nutrition Innovation Lab has started to develop study protocol and study tools. Further discussions have been planned to discuss and work collaboratively on the key areas with CHNA/FHI 360:
 - Development of tools to understand the social movement CHNA program component, and including a family planning component of the program to the evaluation design
 - Development of qualitative process and performance evaluation; use mid-term evaluation to re-evaluate the program outputs and activities
 - Targeting strategies for interpersonal communications (IPC) and if social franchise model and IPC components of the CHNA program can be rolled-out simultaneously
 - Timelines of data collection for efficient implementation of program and research activities
 - Provision of clean, raw de-identified data by the Nutrition Innovation Lab to FHI 360 team to support data analysis on performance indicators listed by the FHI 360. Tufts will also review the list of performance indicators from CHNA and determine which can be included in their evaluation surveys.

4. Supporting Jordan's IYCF research agenda and building Jordan's related human and institutional capacity

- Due to curtailed travel to Jordan, the Nutrition Innovation Lab was not able to meet with potential collaborators and partners to initiate planning on the human and institution capacity building activities in Jordan. This, along with the other activities proposed in the annual implementation plan, are expected to resume as soon as the team is available to travel to Jordan and have interactions with different academic institutions in Jordan.

5. Governance of the Nutrition Innovation Lab

- The Nutrition Innovation Lab, during the reporting period, continued to work on its organizational structure that is both internally and externally collaborative and efficient. The Lab awaits to fulfill the addition of internal and external partners and stakeholder identification interactions in the structure.

- The team is being led by Shibani Ghosh, Associate Director of the Nutrition Innovation Lab, who serve as the Principal Investigator in collaboration with Patrick Webb, Director of the Nutrition Innovation Lab, who will serve as co-Principal Investigator. Both are faculty at the Friedman School and have significant experience working across different countries and cultural contexts.
- The PI and co-PI will be supported by Amman- and Boston-based teams. In Amman, the Nutrition Innovation Lab will hire a Jordan Country Coordinator and a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow. Both positions will be held by Jordanian nationals. In Boston, the team will include Elizabeth Marino Costello, Robin Shrestha and Katherine Heneveld.
- The Jordan Country Coordinator and Post-Doctoral Research Fellow will be hired through a sub-award to a selected partner institution (non-profit, academic institution with a proven record). The core partner institution will be part of the overall Nutrition Innovation Lab's network, and it will function as a key research and capacity building collaborator.

6. Successes and Challenges of working in the context of COVID 19

- Due to the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19, the Nutrition Innovation Lab, during the reporting period, were faced with significant planning and implementation challenges. The delays and postponement have led to delays in the following activities -
 - The first step in cementing the country presence was to through identification of Jordan based core partner that also has a proven track record and ability to conduct evaluation research and deliver on both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Postponement of travel to Jordan in March as previously planned by the Nutrition Innovation Lab has delayed this process.
 - In turn, this has further delayed the setting up of in-country workspace, identification of personnel (country coordinator and research fellow), critical internal piece to provide oversight of the project and plan for the implementation of research and capacity building activities, development of study protocol and tools, etc.
- Despite the challenges, the Nutrition Innovation Lab was successfully able to continue remote engagement with the USAID Jordan colleagues and AOR, as well as the CHNA implementers (FHI 360) throughout the reporting period. These interactions have facilitated key discussions on CHNA program components, evaluation designs, secondary data analysis to support CHNA program design.