

Combating Mixed Messages: Promoting Complementary Feeding in Mumbai's Slums

BACKGROUND

The Foundation for Mother & Child Health (FMCH) promotes effective complementary feeding practices through its First Thousand Days program, which aims to provide clear messaging through one-on-one counseling, courses, and home visits with pregnant and lactating mothers on complementary feeding practices. The objective of this program is to support proper growth and good health during the first 1,000 days of a child's life, avoiding the common plague of undernutrition and malnutrition. This program was launched in 2006 by the foundation's trustees and volunteers, and now has 25 full-time staff working at four clinics in Mumbai's slums.

APPROACHES AND METHODS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The FMCH clinics provide prevention and treatment services in the area. These are the only facilities available in the neighborhood, which have no functioning *anganwadi* centers.

Nutritionists, nurses, and doctors employed by FMCH at the clinic offer education on the initiation of complementary feeding; types, consistency, and quantity of food; and feeding behaviors that are most likely to ensure healthy child growth.

There are currently four clinics in three locations, with five to six clinic sessions held each week that reach 200–250 children age zero to two

years and pregnant mothers. One-on-one, age-appropriate counseling is supported by visual posters and pamphlets provided to the mothers, as well as growth charts generated by an electronic medical record.

The clinics also conduct a pregnancy club, an *accha baccha* (child development course), and a nutrition course, which reiterate the messaging provided during counseling with demonstrations, videos, and posters led by social workers and field officers. On average, every month 30–50 mothers attend the nutrition course of 9–10 sessions, 20–30 pregnant women attend the pregnancy club, and 10–15 mothers and their children attend the *accha baccha*. Those who complete the pregnancy club receive a baby shower, and those who complete the nutrition course receive a certificate.

Field officers, social workers, nutritionists, and nurses make an initial home visit for all children who attend counseling, following up with the entire family and engaging them in healthy feeding practices for the child to ensure successful growth.

The foundation monitors its programs through a robust, cloud-based, custom-made electronic medical record system. This tracks each patient's data from clinic visits to course attendance. The success of the intervention is evaluated based both on the overall growth patterns of individual patients, as well as on specific case studies that

demonstrate successful behavior change in complementary feeding.

KEY FINDINGS

In cases in which FMCH beneficiaries have not come out of malnutrition or have fallen into malnutrition during the program, the failure can be attributed to one of two causes: (1) noncompliance by the family by not providing appropriate food, not following recommendations, and/or not visiting the clinic; or (2) the child suffers from another

disease or handicap and has not been treated by a hospital or specialist.

Along the way, the foundation has learned several lessons

- **Clear messaging is key.** Organizations should take an approach akin to major brand marketing, where a clear and simple message is repeated throughout.
- **Engage the whole family.** For a mother to adopt any recommendations from FMCH, it is necessary not to have conflicting advice from the family, especially the mother-in-law.

EXHIBIT 1 Change in nutrition status over time

NUTRITION INDICATORS	2012 (N=580)	2015 (N=584)
Wasting		
Well	84%	89%
Moderate acute malnutrition	13%	10%
Severe acute malnutrition	4%	1%
Underweight		
Healthy	67%	73%
Moderate underweight	20%	18%
Severe underweight	13%	9%
Stunting		
Healthy	70%	73%
Moderate stunting	16%	16%
Severe stunting	14%	12%

Source: Project's monitoring dashboard.

- **More collaboration with hospitals is needed.** After observing conflicting messaging from non-FMCH doctors, FMCH recognizes that more collaboration and education with all medical professionals is required to ensure that the same message is delivered consistently.

A rigorous evaluation of the program has not been conducted yet because of lack of funding and capacity.

WAY FORWARD

Based on its observation of gains made by its target children, FMCH is implementing two additional programs: (1) a partnership with the government of Maharashtra through the Urban Nutrition Initiative, in which FMCH will support *anganwadi* centers in the delivery of services; and (2) the launch of a training center, where partner nongovernment organizations, medical personnel, and government staff will be trained in our best practices. We also envision conducting a more rigorous evaluation of our approach.



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ABOUT POSHAN

Partnerships and Opportunities to Strengthen and Harmonize Actions for Nutrition in India (POSHAN) is a 4-year initiative that aims to build evidence on effective actions for nutrition and support the use of evidence in decisionmaking. It is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by IFPRI in India.

ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

Implementation Notes summarize experiences related to how specific interventions or programs are delivered. They are intended to share information on innovations in delivery and are not research products.

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