WHY IS WASH A KEY DETERMINANT OF THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS?

It is estimated that 50% of child undernutrition is associated with recurrent diarrhoea and intestinal infections linked to WASH unsatisfactory WASH conditions.

The underlying determinants of undernutrition include food insecurity, inappropriate care practices, poor access to health care, and an unhealthy environment, including inadequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Poor WASH conditions facilitate ingestion of faecal pathogens, leading to diarrhoea, intestinal worms, and environmental enteric dysfunction, a ‘chronic infection of the small intestine caused by extended exposure to faecal pathogens’. This directly relates to the body’s ability to resist and respond to sickness by affecting the absorption of nutrients and decreasing the body’s immunity. Indirect links between WASH and nutrition refer primarily to a broader absorption of nutrients and decreasing the body’s immunity. Dysfunction, a ‘chronic infection of the small intestine caused by environmental enteric dysfunction, a ‘chronic infection of the small intestine caused by extended exposure to faecal pathogens’. This directly relates to the body’s ability to resist and respond to sickness by affecting the absorption of nutrients and decreasing the body’s immunity. Indirect links between WASH and nutrition refer primarily to a broader absorption of nutrients and decreasing the body’s immunity.

Malnutrition is linked to WASH due to WASH-related risk factors such as presence of open defecation practices in the community, unhygienic environments (including inadequate waste management), inconsistent access to safe water, insufficient domestic water supply, and poor hygiene practices are consistently identified as one of the main causes of undernutrition.

THE LINK NCA METHODOLOGY (Nutrition Causal Analysis)

The Link NCA methodology has been created by Action Against Hunger as a starting point for improving the relevance and the effectiveness of multisectoral nutrition-sensitive programming. It is a mixed-methodology combining qualitative and quantitative study with participatory phases to identify undernutrition risks factors and pathways in a local context.

Results of the study intend to support programs opportunities to promote change among stakeholders across sectors.

The Link NCA strives to answer the following research questions in a specific context for a precise study population:

1. What is the prevalence and severity of wasting and/or stunting in the study population?
2. What is the prevalence of known risk factors for undernutrition among the population and key ‘nutrition vulnerable groups’?
3. What are the causal pathways of undernutrition by which certain children in this population have become stunted and/or wasted?
4. How have the stunting and/or wasting in this population and its causes changed a) over time due to historical trends, b) seasonally due to cyclical trends, c) due to recent shocks?
5. Which causal pathways are likely to explain most causes of undernutrition? Which sets of risk factors and pathways are likely to be the most modifiable by stakeholders within a given context and within a given period?
6. Based on the causal analysis results, what recommendations can be made for improving nutrition security programming? How can the analysis be linked to a programmatic response?

The quantitative phase uses secondary data, SMART nutrition surveys and Risk Factor Surveys, to assess undernutrition status and the prevalence of known risk factors. Qualitative methods incorporated throughout the protocol addresses questions regarding how and why undernutrition or good nutrition occurs and considers the interactions between causes, common feedback loops and the evolution of the causes through time and seasons.

Finally, data generated are triangulated and reviewed through a participatory process to generate consensus on undernutrition causality and to better inform programs.

A META-ANALYSIS FROM 12 LINK NCA STUDIES WORLDWIDE

Method

Analysis from the 12 most recent Link NCA studies was done from the beginning of 2014 until the end of 2016. Those 12 studies were conducted in 10 different countries (Chad, DRC, Ethiopia (3), Kenya, Uganda, Mauritania, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Philippines). Descriptive statistics have been used to summarize the results per Link NCA study.

Studies were grouped according to the region where they were conducted (8 for Africa and 4 in Asia) and results are compared between the regions as well as by sector/risk factor category and region.

Results

R1 – All sectors concur equally to the prevention of undernutrition globally and in African context, but WASH and FSL are perceived as more critical factors of undernutrition in Asia

R2 – Water access and Personal Hygiene are critical factors to undernutrition in African context, while Sanitation is the main risk to undernutrition in Asian context

R3 – WASH plays a major role in undernutrition prevention

Association between poor WASH conditions and poor nutritional status has been widely perceived by the communities. WASH-related risk factors such as presence of open defecation practices in the community, unhygienic environments (including inadequate waste management), inconsistent access to safe water, insufficient domestic water supply, and poor hygiene practices are consistently identified as one of the main causes of undernutrition.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER INTEGRATION OF WASH AND NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

1. Joint situation analysis and planning. Conducting joint assessments by WASH and nutrition technical sectors is more likely to foster a comprehensive understanding of the situation and encourage an integrated response. The Link NCA methodology is a suitable tool to engage multidisciplinary stakeholders in causal analysis and transfer the results into multisectoral programme planning and response.

2. Co-ownership of the results. Participatory process is essential for establishing accountability and co-ownership of the results. One way to incentivise sectors to work together is to incorporate specific indicators into the project objectives of another sector and/or to set a common specific objective for both sectors.

3. Geographical co-location of WASH interventions in nutritionally vulnerable areas. Pathway diagrams (visual examples of interaction among different risk factors) demonstrate where key interventions would have the greatest impact on undernutrition. It can help in the selection of geographical area, level, and type of intervention. The use of low-cost and easy-to-apply mapping techniques can improve decision-making.

4. WASH and nutrition co-messaging. Timing, location, and potential synergies among interventions should be carefully thought out to ensure activities have maximum participation without overburdening women. Delivering key WASH and nutrition messages in an integrated manner can save resources, identify areas of overlap, and reinforce them through joint communication channels.

5. Communication and coordination between WASH and nutrition stakeholders. There is a need to ensure regular communication and information sharing among key stakeholders as well as establishing well-coordinated management and reporting structures. Even when strong synergies are not possible, there are still options for aligning interventions as long as there is good coordination, communication, and collaboration between actors.

6. Implement the five pillars of the WASH’Nutrition Strategy to prevent effectively undernutrition.

Refer to the value tree on the back cover.
For concrete guidance and examples of good practice from the field we recommend consulting WASH’ Nutrition: A Practical Guidebook on Increasing Nutritional Impact through Integration of WASH and Nutrition Programmes (Action Against Hunger/UNICEF/ECHO, 2017).

http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/fr/content/wash-nutrition-practical-guidebook-increasing-nutritional-impact-through-integration-wash

Any organization planning to conduct a Link NCA study can receive support from the Link NCA Technical Unit, for more information please consult http://linknca.org/support.htm

References of the article:
Relationship between water, sanitation, hygiene, and nutrition: what do Link NCA nutrition causal analyses say

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