



# CO-OPERATIVES LEARNING SERIES



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What nutrition considerations must be taken into account in co-operative development?

## OVERCOMING NUTRITION CONSTRAINTS IN CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

### WHAT IS NUTRITION SENSITIVITY?

Nutritional sensitivity in co-operative development involves intentionally improving the food and nutritional security of the co-operative members, their families, and the consumers who are impacted through their produce. This includes specific consideration of the selection of crops, post harvesting processes, and processing. Nutritionally-sensitive co-operative development could include development projects supporting the following type of initiatives:

- Integrating nutritional considerations into the co-operative members' selection process of crops to be produced.
- Analyzing dietary habits and dietary needs of consumers of co-operative's produce, identifying relevant nutritional gaps, and developing co-operative development strategies built on these assessments.
- Facilitating transport, packaging, and storage options that preserve and maximize nutritional value: ensuring that co-operative members have the ability to perform or support the new methods or processes introduced.
- Introducing and building demand for food crops with improved nutritional value, such as high-quality fortified food products, and ensuring that co-operative members have the capacity to produce these. (This includes product development, market research, supplementary food formulation and testing, behavior change campaigns, technology transfer, and efforts to build regulatory reforms.)
- Improving input supplies that have higher nutritional value (such as promoting bio-fortified seeds and roots that have added nutritional value) and access to these by co-operatives.
- Extending availability of diversified varieties and extending growing seasons (such as through the use of tunnels) to overcome the nutritional challenge of the poor

### Inside this Learning Note

1. Nutritionally-sensitive co-operative development
2. Example from the Field: Mongolia
3. Example from the Field: Rwanda



## EXAMPLE FROM THE FIELD: MONGOLIA

The *Global Communities*' EMIRGE program in Mongolia was faced with an interesting situation. In general, Mongolians eat very few vegetables, and those that are eaten are primarily potatoes, carrots and cabbage. Given the country's harsh climate, these are vegetables that are able to be easily grown and stored. Two key problems were: 1) the lack of diversity in vegetable production; and 2) the lack of knowledge by Mongolians on how to prepare less common vegetables. In response to the first problem, EMIRGE's greenhouse programs are designed to reduce seasonal food shortages and income fluctuations of rural farmers and extend the ability of rural communities to have access to nutrient-dense foods longer in the lean months of winter—a critical element in impacting nutrient deficiencies in the Mongolian diet. To address the second challenge, the EMIRGE program has offered activities and workshops on how to increase the variety of food in diets, including cooking shows.



only having access to undiversified diets for the majority of the year. Practitioners can use seasonality calendars to determine what is available at different times of the year in various climates and support co-operatives in obtaining and using new techniques involved.

- Supporting the implementation of nutritional specifications and certifications, such as Codex international standards on food safety and nutrition or country-specific food products' nutritional requirements, and ensuring that co-operative members understand and follow the necessary requirements.
  - Advocating for nutritional analysis and labeling of foods where appropriate and, again, ensuring that co-operative members understand and follow the necessary requirements.
- Applying regulations, standards and capacity building on food quality, food regulations, food safety and food controls, including at the co-operative level.
  - Examining new or existing market channels for co-operative members' food crops (including fortified food products) to local and national nutritionally-vulnerable groups.
  - Enhancing food usage in local markets through strategies to reach infants 6-12 months old.
  - Facilitating community-level behavior change, as needed, to improve nutritional outcomes.
  - Influencing market trends and/or consumer interest.
  - Using tools to monitor and evaluate for nutritional outcomes in co-operative development projects.

*Text includes adaptations from the 'Integrating the Very Vulnerable into Markets Field Guide'*

## EXAMPLE FROM THE FIELD: RWANDA

In Rwanda, a *Global Communities* implemented program, *Ejo Heza*, has a key component of health and nutrition. *Ejo Heza* has trained 80,000 Rwandans on health and nutrition over the last five years (5,000 over the target of 75,000). Training topics include: nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers; breastfeeding; complementary feeding; first 1,000 days of a child's life; best hygiene practice; and cooking demonstrations. *Ejo Heza*'s cooking demonstrations are conducted at the community level. Neighbors are invited to attend and learn together; each person brings a different food and they cook it together. A common challenge of promoting the production of nutritious vegetables is that they are often also of higher value; therefore, farmers may be growing these vegetables, but they are all being sold in the market and none are consumed at the household level. To address this, *Ejo Heza* introduced kitchen gardens, where vegetables are grown only for consumption—not to be sold.



According to *Ejo Heza*'s Health and Nutrition Specialist, challenges remain. The Nutrition Specialist explained that when she goes into the community and speaks with the population, there is a clear **increase in knowledge** on health and nutrition, but this does not always translate into an **increase in uptake**. It is not in *Ejo Heza*'s mandate to ensure that the knowledge and information from the trainings is being put into practice, and that nutrition levels are actually improving.