

## Securing diverse nutrition

### Successes and experiences from nine years of implementation

An estimated 735 million people are still suffering from acute hunger. Two out of five people worldwide are too poor to afford a healthy diet. This has a particular impact on vulnerable members of society: more than 22% of all children under the age of five years are poorly developed due to prolonged malnutrition. They are too small for their age or too light for their height. Women in rural areas are also particularly affected by severe food insecurity. Freeing people from hunger and malnutrition is one of the most important Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the global 2030 Agenda due to its interlinkages with other development goals. It is central for the achievement of all 17 SDGs, especially those related to health, education, gender equality and climate.

In many places, current and lingering crises are exacerbating the already difficult access to healthy food, while its availability continues to stagnate. Only societies that have sustainable food systems can sufficiently cushion these shock-like cuts.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a general economic deterioration in many countries, which favoured the loss in value of their currency. This has increased food prices, but also made the cost of seeds and fertilisers soar. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, until then the world's leading grain exporter, suspended the global supply of important staple foods. This was followed by further price increases and shortages in countries that depend on these food exports. The food system is also suffering globally from the changing climatic conditions, which are particularly noticeable in places where people already live with only a few vital resources, such as water and food.



## Global Programme on Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience

- › Budget: EUR 285 million, financed the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ)
- › Duration: 08/2014 – 09/2026
- › Goal: The nutritional situation and resilience to hunger crises of people at risk of food insecurity have improved at household level.
- › Beneficiaries: Women of childbearing age, pregnant women, nursing mothers and infants (1,000-day window)
- › Countries: Ethiopia\*, Benin, Burkina Faso, India, Yemen\*, Cambodia, Kenya\*, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Zambia, Togo\*  
\*completed

🌐 <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/131583.html>

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In the regions in which the Global Programme Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience is active, not even a quarter of young children reached the minimum food diversity and meal frequency for an age-appropriate diet at the time of the baseline data collection. Women living in these households also often do not have a sufficiently diversified diet and thus an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals. Women of reproductive age, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and young children suffer particularly frequently from malnutrition. Therefore, the healthy nutrition of women and young children is at the centre of our work.

For every single person, the first 1,000 days of life are decisive for their further development. Good nutrition in infancy – and even before birth via the mother – prevents serious developmental disorders that can lead to a vicious circle of poverty and malnutrition – with consequences for the entire society and economy of a country for generations to come.

Due to the many causes of hunger and malnutrition, the key to successfully combating them lies in the close cooperation between all relevant sectors. This includes agriculture, health, education, social security, water, climate and environmental protection. Multisectoral work creates the necessary synergies to realise the human right to food. At the same time, the people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition must be actively involved in solving the underlying problems and challenges.

In the following, we show how the Global Programme contributes to (1) improving dietary diversity by increasing diversity and improving access, (2) achieving the necessary and important behavioural changes, (3) making policy design the decisive lever for greater nutrition security and resilience, (4) strengthening resilience also in the long term, and (5) creating new evidence and showing how success in improving nutrition can be measured.



## 1. Increasing vital diversity in diets

The human right to food does not only mean that there is enough on the plate to fill one's stomach, but that everyone can eat a balanced diet rich in nutrients and vitamins. Diversity is fundamental to healthy and humane nutrition. If food is one-sided and lacks important nutrients such as iron, iodine or vitamin A, it has an impact on the physical and mental development of a person. Malnutrition causes illnesses, makes people susceptible to infections and reduces performance – and it leads to high economic costs. The estimated costs of malnutrition for the global economy amount to up to 3.5 trillion US dollars per year due to lost economic growth combined with increased mortality in children and adults caused by diet-related and non-communicable diseases. In African countries such as Ethiopia and Malawi, these costs correspond to 10% to 16% of the gross domestic product.

### **What are we doing to increase dietary diversity? What have we already achieved?**

Especially in difficult contexts - for example in regions with recurring hunger crises – we fight for ensuring a healthy and diverse diet and strengthening resilience. We support the increased availability of and better access to diverse food for smallholder households that do not produce sufficient amounts of nutrient-rich food themselves or do not have the financial means to purchase them on markets. To this end, we initiate and promote measures that ensure the provision of women and their (future) children with a wide variety of micronutrient-rich and nutritionally valuable foods. At the same time, we support the dissemination of knowledge and expertise on optimal use, hygiene during cultivation, storage, processing and preparation of food. We follow the so-called *food-based approach*: This approach aims to increase the quality and quantity of food by promoting the diversification of cultivation, purchasing and consumption of food. This is flanked by support for better hygiene, health and sanitation.



With a view to strengthening the resilience of rural communities, we focus on the reliable availability of food throughout the year and in recurring times of crisis such as droughts. Depending on the context and needs, measures from at least two sectors – primarily agriculture, health and social protection – are connected so that people can benefit from synergies. In doing so, we act both at the level of households and individuals as well as at municipal and national level in order to facilitate the dissemination and stabilisation of the measures. In eight of nine countries we have already achieved a significant increase in food diversity. Our measures to introduce and promote new practices in the cultivation of vitamin- and nutrient-rich foods and to strengthen the skills of target groups, intermediaries and decision-makers on healthy and balanced nutrition, health and hygiene have led to many households applying the new knowledge and as a consequence, their nutritional situation has improved significantly. In this way, we are laying the foundations for a healthy life and for the next generation to grow up healthy.

## 2. Behaviour change is central

For a healthy and diverse diet, favourable habits and behaviours are important. The availability of and access to food alone is not enough if knowledge about a balanced diet, hygiene and the special needs of women of reproductive age, infants and young children is missing at household level. Lack of awareness about nutritional diversity and quality, adequate preparation and care practices favours undernutrition and malnutrition. As a result, deficiency symptoms can persist, for example, if the quality of food and availability of micronutrients is reduced by incorrect preparation. Changes in nutrition and hygiene practices are crucial in many cases in order to improve individual nutrition and resilience at community level.

### What are the challenges?

Like human behaviour as a whole, nutritional behaviour is strongly influenced by social norms. Desirable sustainable changes in nutrition are lengthy processes. They require commitment and perseverance – and therefore time. To achieve them, people have to change their attitudes, internalise new values and goals and put them into practice. Self-determined behaviours are significantly more likely to be retained in the long term. The sustainability of measures for a diverse and healthy diet depends on long-term changes in people's attitudes and behaviour (*Social and Behavioural Change*).

### What are we doing? What have we already achieved?

Strategies for behaviour change in the area of nutrition are a basic building block for successful nutrition security and should be included in any project planning from the outset. It is important to bear in mind that most decisions are made unconsciously and according to habit. They are influenced by what others do or how choices are presented. For our strategies, we analyse behaviour, identify barriers and enablers, reduce barriers and support favourable enabling factors.

Comprehensive *social and behavioural change communication* activities go far beyond the mere communication of information: They address the attitudes and social norms of individuals and groups and thus work towards actual and sustainable changes in behaviour.

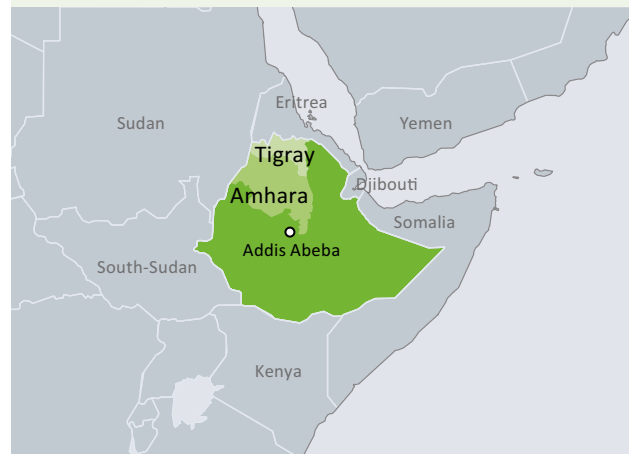
Proven to be effective are cascading training programmes down to household level, social learning measures such as theatre performances, cooking competitions and demonstrations, *Food and Nutrition Days* and the sending of text messages via mobile phones. Key factors for success are the skills and commitment of the local ambassadors, such as volunteers from the communities or extension workers from governmental and non-governmental basic services. They pass on their knowledge and corresponding practices convincingly and – thanks to their knowledge of local conditions – in a way that is easy to implement. Through continuous motivation and training on content, better counselling, dissemination and communication strategies, they are able to effectively promote healthy eating in their communities beyond the project period.





In order to improve the nutritional situation of women and young children, decision-makers in households and communities, such as husbands and older women, must also be involved more. In **Ethiopia**, believers of the Orthodox Church fast for up to 250 days a year. In the rural regions also pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers fast, despite an exemption granted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For this reason, the project began a collaboration in Amhara to sensitise clergy to the importance of a balanced diet. In a second step, they will inform households in the rural areas about the declaration of exemption from fasting and promote its observance.

In **Zambia**, we rely on targeted **accompanying communication measures** to not only share relevant knowledge with the people we work with, but also to tie this to positive emotions. To this end, an animated television series was produced and broadcast, a **food fair** organised in the villages and a **card game** developed. The now very popular **game** is based on the principle of the car quartet or ‘Supertrump’ and ties in with a widespread culture of card playing in Zambia. Players acquire important knowledge about nutrition in a relaxed atmosphere – especially about locally available food and the consumption of important nutrients such as vitamin A, iron and proteins. An initial study on the benefits of the game shows not only a significant increase in knowledge among the target group, but also positive changes in behaviour.



In order to distribute responsibility for the issue of healthy nutrition equally, the global programme relies on a gender-sensitive approach. Many undernourished and malnourished people – especially women – are socially disadvantaged and have limited access to education, healthcare and social security systems. Gender-specific differences represent an obstacle to achieving nutrition security due to socially anchored values and norms. In order to ensure the longevity of successes, the general conditions for women must improve. The strengthening of rights or the dismantling of discriminatory laws and norms, equal access to resources and equal representation and strengthened opportunities for influence are crucial factors to ensure resilience and to enable healthy eating for all people.



To anchor the intended attitude and behaviour changes towards a balanced and nutritious diet sustainably and across gender, we consistently and systematically involve the important decision-makers in households and communities into the activities. These include, for example: Husbands, older women and local authorities. Through their targeted education and advice on the importance of dietary diversity they become sensitized to the nutritional needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women and the young children in their midst – and are educated about the consequences of malnutrition. Men are – without a potentially feared social loss of face – motivated to become more involved in feeding their family and to actively support their wives. In more traditional societies this is often a sensitive topic. The inclusion of men is successful usually via context-sensitive, longer-term discussions about their understanding of roles and the associated behaviours.

Specific measures of the global programme target the underlying causes of **inequalities between genders**. In **Burkina Faso**, men are educated in so-called *Écoles de maris* to actively make use of good consumption, hygiene and nutritional practices. In **India** successful campaigns, competitions, street theatre and – partly virtual – workshops on topics such as dietary diversity, breastfeeding practices, complementary foods and hygiene are carried out that are particularly aimed at men. In **Cambodia**, men are reached through specially tailored offers in chat groups, sports and theatre events and through inclusion in so-called *Care Groups*. In **Malawi**, awareness campaigns are carried out specifically for men – through this *Male Champions* are identified and trained to motivate other men to become more involved in nutrition-related household activities.

### Effectiveness is context dependent

We have analysed and documented our experiences of the effectiveness of behaviour change measures in five countries (Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, India, Malawi and Zambia). An important conclusion is that greater knowledge alone is not enough to change behaviour. The background of certain behaviours, i.e., barriers and enablers, must be understood anew in every context. For the development of behaviour change strategies it is particularly important to identify and promote respected individuals and locally functioning behaviours that exemplify the intended, changed behaviour.

Together with the *University of Antananarivo* the *Humboldt University of Berlin* is conducting accompanying **applied research for the Madagascar country package**. Through participatory field research with the target group of the country package, scientific findings on the implementation of nutrition programmes are generated. For example, the interaction of various measures used to increase the consumption of provitamin A, the gender-sensitive orientation of agricultural training or perception of the individual usefulness of measures were analysed. The insights gained are regularly shared and discussed with the various local partners in order to adapt activities to local needs. The results are presented and made available to the scientific community at various conferences and through the publication of scientific papers on topics such as positive deviance.



### 3. Nutrition governance as a success factor

*Nutrition governance* includes all processes of governance that are aimed at enabling a safe, diverse and healthy diet for all people in a country. Only through successful *nutrition governance* can the human right to food be implemented and anchored sustainably in the national, decentralized and municipal structures of a country. *Good nutrition governance* is an important lever and the decisive factor for the effectiveness and sustainability of all corresponding measures.

**What approaches do we pursue?**

**What have we already achieved?**

We improve the *governance* of nutrition policy through our state partners by: (1) supporting favourable framework conditions and the anchoring of successful approaches and experiences in national strategies of different sectors, (2) promoting the capacity development of state employees, (3) initiating and strengthening multi-sector coordination committees and (4) bringing national and decentralized government institutions together on the topic of nutrition, strengthening their cooperation and thereby creating synergies through the shared use of resources, planning and implementation of nutrition-related measures.

To this end, we advise our partners on the analysis of concrete implementation experiences and on the preparation and anchoring of successful approaches (*best practices*). We build expertise in the areas of nutrition, planning and impact measurement in relevant ministries and feed experiences from implementation into the national and international expert and political discourse. An important factor in the sustainable anchoring of healthy nutrition in national politics is the successful development, adoption and implementation of nutrition strategies as well as their coordination and harmonization with other sector strategies. We support and accompany this through strengthening multi-sectoral coordination committees, initiating action plans on *nutrition* and implementing these in trainings and further education.

We actively promote the integration of national and decentral government institutions and thus make possible an improved operationalization and implementation of adopted strategies – and at the same time the effective feedback of implementation experiences in order to put it to good use in policy for healthy and diverse nutrition. Our commitment is already paying off: diverse and healthy nutrition is now an important topic in numerous state coordination committees and processes. We see lasting effects on the nutrition and health of the population through the improved coordination between the sectors as well as joint training for employees of government and civil society organizations. People on the ground are made aware of the subjects hygiene, nutritional practices, agriculture and (crisis)prevention. It is increasingly important to reduce the dependence on external donors for implementation of such measures and to support the partners in the identification and securing of state budgets for nutrition.





Among the results of the successful multi-sectoral cooperation – for example between the sectors of agriculture, health, education and/or social security – is the integration of concrete, coordinated activities for improving nutrition in the development plans of the communities. Another result is the switch to nutrition-sensitive agriculture, i.e., agricultural production that aims at a healthy and diverse diet for people on the ground.

Good **nutrition governance** has an impact: In almost all countries we have supported our partners successfully in initiating and establishing multi-sectoral platforms at county and district level that have a healthy and diverse diet as their primary goal. Development and action plans at local, regional or national level are nutrition-sensitive. The interconnection of the municipal level with the district level and the national level is effectively promoted in **Malawi**, for example, through village development plans. Here the responsible ministry and a district administration were successfully supported in piloting an approach for the participatory development of nutrition-sensitive village development plans. The findings of this are now being used to expand the approach at national level. Our experiences are used to design supportive framework conditions: Our project experiences in **Benin** played a key role in the development of a budgeting tool for nutrition in municipal development plans, in **Cambodia** in the national food security strategy and in **India** in the development of a standard procedure for creating and managing community gardens.



We have examined the challenges and advances in *nutrition governance* over the last two years in a study. It recommends focusing on the topic of *nutrition budgeting* in the future and further promoting and strengthening multi-sector coordination structures with a variety of relevant partners. Another focus should ideally be on the strengthening of national monitoring systems and the systematic dissemination of successful measures. The great benefit of the analytical framework for a strategic strengthening of *nutrition governance*\* developed by us is also emphasized. To further promote the anchoring of healthy nutrition, selected country packages together with their partners are currently developing advocacy strategies to further increase awareness for the topic in governance structures and decision-makers.

\* see references

## 4. Strengthen resilience in the long term

Overlapping or recurring crises endanger development progress achieved. Only when the resilience of vulnerable population groups against food crises is strengthened can hunger and malnutrition be reduced in the long term. Impacts of climate change, violent conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic are contributing to a significant increase in global hunger and malnutrition rates, especially in countries of the global south.

**Being resilient** in the face of crises means having options for action that protect life, Livelihoods and prospects for the future. The ability to act increases the more informed the actors are, the more diverse their options and the stronger their capacity is to use that information and these options for themselves.

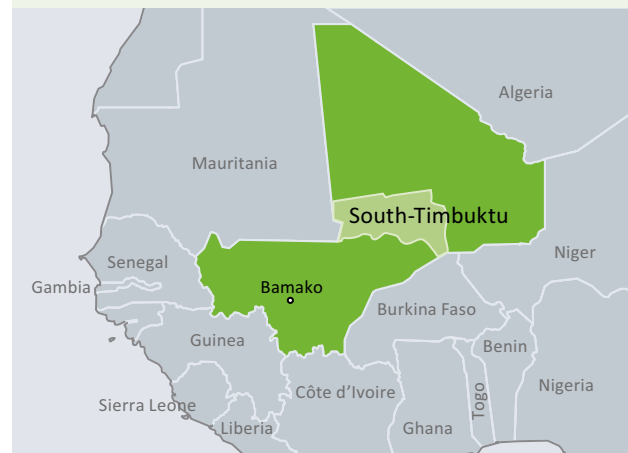
### What are the challenges?

The effects of climate change such as unreliable rainfall but also extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have a profound impact on food production and availability in the respective regions. War and conflicts can also weaken entire food systems and reduce access to food, causing hunger and malnutrition to be further intensified.



Global pandemics, such as COVID-19, and their ongoing effects also have a significant impact on food security, as lockdowns and other restrictions particularly affected supply chains until the beginning of 2022 which led to economic instability in entire countries. This has further exacerbated the challenges for vulnerable populations, particularly in developing countries.

**Mali – The main causes** of chronic food insecurity as well as recurring, acute food crises are diverse. Frequent droughts and floods, land degradation as well as political instability and long-standing violent conflicts have clearly increased in recent years. The cumulative effects lead to a progressive deterioration of livelihoods, resulting in high stunting rates in the affected areas. Stunting occurs when a child does not receive enough nutrients for its growth and development. The Sahel zone in northern Mali, including the project area in the Timbuktu region, is in a constant state of food emergency.





### What do we do to make households more resilient against hunger and malnutrition?

Diversified agriculture strengthens local food systems and contributes to a better nutritional situation in vulnerable regions.

To support families in their resilience, we work at local, regional and national levels. Food availability and access are improved in households through training on agroecological topics. This includes the independent cultivation of diverse, but also resistant varieties in home gardens and on community fields in the region. Through subsequent storage and further processing of the harvest, food lasts longer and can also be offered on markets further afield. The propagation of locally available seeds and seedlings helps to establish the promoted nutrient-rich foods in the municipalities in the long term. In addition, we support households in the production of organic fertilizers in order to reduce their dependence on imported operating resources and to make the local farming system more resilient.

In order to secure knowledge and practices in the long term, state intermediaries are trained in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, to serve as a contact person for local small-holder farmers who want to diversify cultivation and thus increase the availability of healthy food in their region. This makes it easier for local households to consume a diversified diet.

### What have we already achieved?

Data collection in the partner countries of the global programme has shown that multisectoral food security measures demonstrably increase the resilience of households to shocks and multiple crises. Although the food situation has worsened overall due to climate change, pandemics and local and global conflicts, supported households were still significantly better off than the comparable unsubsidized households.

**India** – The Indian district of Sheopur in the state of Madhya Pradesh is increasingly stricken by longer lasting droughts. Here, people in the communities supported by the programme have begun to dry and store products from their gardens, such as vegetables and seeds for a longer period of time. They have also begun to use drought-resistant and seasonally-adapted seeds which allows them to harvest more vegetables – also through the use of grey water for irrigation.





### Social security

The importance of nutrition-sensitive social security measures is becoming increasingly important in light of a food situation worldwide that is worsening due to multiple crises. Social security programmes can provide poor households with necessary resources to cope with situations that they would no longer be able to overcome on their own. This can help households to secure their food supply in emergencies without jeopardizing their long-term livelihoods. That is why we promote nutrition-sensitive saving groups that also provide basic financial knowledge. This enables savers to build up reserves in order to invest in healthy eating over the long term. Additionally, we offer perspectives regarding income-generating activities, such as the production of nutrient-rich flour mixtures, honey or the processing of soy flour or rice.

Our surveys have shown that accompanying social security programmes increase the effectiveness of measures to improve the nutritional situation. Even within the target group generally at risk of food insecurity, the resources available to households varies. The poorest households will benefit less from the measures if they are not empowered by social security programmes to eat better.

**Malawi – The establishment of Village Savings and Loans Associations** make it possible to protect those people who in times of lower income rely on the purchasing of food and agricultural operating resources. These groups thus make a decisive contribution in preventing acute food insecurity.



## Governance for strengthening resilience

By strengthening state institutions and effective governance structures, countries are enabled to respond more effectively to crises. Thus, their resilience is improved. We therefore make a contribution to the development, adoption and implementation of national strategies and policies. To this end, we support professional exchange between decision-makers in the global south to share experiences and develop perspectives: Among other things, on topics such as developing nutrition, monitoring and planning skills. On site, we support cross-sector budgeting for nutritional measures and the strengthening of multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms at regional and national level.

**Mali** has been part of the global resilience alliance AGIR, an **international association for strengthening resilience** in the Sahel, since 2012. All AGIR member countries define a national resilience strategy for their policy-making, which is based on the four pillars social security, nutrition, production/improving income and **governance**. Mali adopted this in 2020. The GP supports the Malian government in operationalizing it. This includes the National Council for Food and Social Security, which was formed as part of the new food security policy and now ensures coherent implementation of the resilience strategy. In the long term this is expected to transform nutrition and resilience systems.

When **planning resilience measures** different capacities must be taken into account. A distinction is made between adaptive, absorptive, anticipatory and transformative measures:

- › Adaptive capacities at the local level target for example the promotion of nutrition-sensitive production with drought-resistant seeds or the creation of home gardens.
- › Absorptive capacities are strengthened, for example, by the distribution of transfer payments.
- › Anticipatory capacities of national and decentralized structures refer to the preparation for external shocks, for example through early warning systems, and attempts to be prepared for crises beyond providing emergency aid before they occur.
- › Strengthening transformative capacities leads to livelihoods being holistically oriented towards new conditions – however, for this to be the case fundamental changes to political, economic and socio-cultural structures are necessary.





## 5. How do we measure that we are successful?

Figures, data and facts from the programme work must be reliable, meaningful and as up-to-date as possible. Only then they can be used effectively for management and political decision-making. We can generate coherent and reliable information on the development of the nutrition situation in a target region through comprehensive monitoring and regular standardized household surveys. In all programme countries representative and cross-country comparable data on the nutritional situation and on people's nutritional behaviour over several years is collected and thus evidence of the effectiveness of the pursued approaches is created.

To determine how effective our measures are in increasing dietary diversity among women, we use the indicator *Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women* (MDD-W). This indicator measures the proportion of women that achieve the minimum recommended dietary diversity. It has been scientifically proven that there is a sufficient supply of important micronutrients, if at least five of ten defined food groups – grains, legumes, nuts, fish, meat, milk, eggs, fruits rich in vitamin A, other fruits, leafy greens and other vegetables – are consumed. The MDD-W is therefore a proxy indicator for nutritional quality. The global programme was one of the first programmes worldwide that used the MDD-W as an impact indicator and can therefore now access a continuous series of measurement data since 2016.

This also allows conclusions to be drawn about external factors which influence the number of food groups consumed. During the COVID-19 pandemic it was possible to observe a significant decline in dietary diversity which has now in most countries returned to normal. Measurements also showed how measures of the global programme contributed to cushioning cuts in contrast to comparable control groups.

At the beginning of each project, basic data was collected in the target regions based on internationally agreed standard indicators. At intervals of two years recurring follow-up surveys with the same indicators are carried out, whereby changes in the nutritional situation are identified and made measurable. At the centre are household surveys which record the changes in people's dietary behaviour, include control groups and provide further information – for example about production conditions and participation in project activities. These comprehensive surveys make it possible to identify developments, correlations, obstacles and catalysts for a successful project implementation at an early stage. They allow statements to be made about the direct impact of the implemented measures on the people and thus on the degree to which the global programme has achieved its goals.

The effort has proven worthwhile and useful. The insights gained from consistent monitoring are essential for sensitive management and continuous adjustment of the measures. At the same time, they enable comprehensive accountability of the overall programme. The design of the surveys provides scientifically recognized evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of individual measures and entire packages of measures. The findings from the impact measurements are often convincing arguments in the endeavours to incorporate proven approaches into national strategies and government action. Impact evaluations through surveys and studies should be planned and budgeted for in all innovative projects. As we support the further scientific development on the topic food security and the active exchange between experts and practitioners, others benefit from our findings and vice versa.

In a **series of events** that we organized in cooperation with the FAO and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (DG INTPA) in 2020, there was an intensive exchange of expertise on the **methodology and application of the MDD-W** between research and implementation organizations. In the presence of the coordinator of the *Scaling-up Nutrition* movement, the great importance of the MDD-W indicator for the topic of nutrition and its potential as a basis for **policy-making** – for example as an indicator for SDG 2 – was discussed in detail by experts for the first time. The **guide** published by the FAO, which incorporates the experiences of the global programme, sets the first standards. By now, the European Commission considers the use of the MDD-W indicator as a quality criterion for programmes with the goal of mitigating malnutrition.

## References

The aforementioned studies on *Nutrition Governance, Resilienz, Gender-Transformative Approaches, Positive Deviance und Social Behaviour Change* and other studies can be found on the website of the Global Programme on Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience:

🌐 <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/131583.html>

Study Misereor / University of Göttingen

🌐 <https://www.misereor.de/presse/pressemeldungen-misereor/neue-studie-zur-armutsluecke-gesunder-ernaehrung>

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