









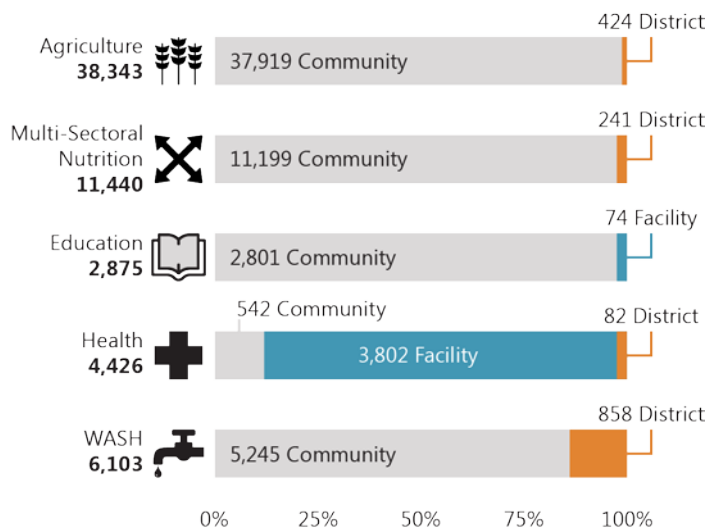




farmers independently purchased tarpaulins and storage bags, indicating that some of SPRING’s work is sustainable.

- Distributed sweet potato seedlings and vitamin-A fortified maize through partnerships with other USAID-funded projects, particularly the Resiliency in Northern Ghana (RING) and Agriculture Technology Transfer projects.

**Figure 2. Number of People Trained in Nutrition-related Topics from Each Sector and at Various Levels**



While we recognized the importance of meeting immediate needs, systems thinking recognizes that external procurement and distribution can undermine existing supply systems. Therefore, SPRING trained health facility staff in inventory management processes, including ordering, distributing, and storing supplies, for longer-term sustainability of nutrition commodity procurement and logistics.

Strengthening the quality and availability of nutrition services was one of our primary focus areas in Ghana. We provided training, supportive supervision, and technical and financial support to complement other GOG and donor activities. Working closely with regional and district government officials, SPRING:

- Adapted UNICEF’s *Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (C-IYCF) Counselling Package* to the Ghanaian context for training health workers and community volunteers.
- Developed training packages on anemia prevention and treatment and pre- and post-harvest cultivation and storage practices.
- Trained service providers from a variety of sectors (including WASH, agriculture, and health) and levels (including community, facility, and district) on a range of nutrition-related topics (see figure 2).
- Supported districts in forming community-level Farmer Field Schools.











## Household Resources

Many households in northern Ghana lack resources, particularly during the lean season, to adopt behaviors that we promoted. Recognizing this, SPRING undertook the following activities to help increase household resources and/or prioritize the use of household resources for nutrition:

- Advocated for the USAID-funded ADVANCE project to work in SPRING areas and prioritize 1,000-day households. Their goal is to increase productivity and household income among small-holder maize, rice, and soybean farmers.
- Supported the GOG's Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) program and USAID's LEAP 1000<sup>6</sup> implementation committees to ensure that the most-vulnerable communities were selected and that our target communities overlapped whenever possible.
- Collaborated with the RING project to promote village savings and loans associations among mother-to-mother support groups.
- Established Farmer Field Schools with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to reduce post-harvest loss, prevent aflatoxin contamination, and increase orange-fleshed sweet potato production.
- Improved household knowledge of nutrition through counseling and communication and encouraged households (and communities) to invest resources in clean play spaces for children or pro-nutrition products such as labor-savings tools, storage bags for aflatoxin prevention, latrine construction, and handwashing stations.

### The Systems Framework:

#### Household Resources

Household resources include human resources (knowledge, skills, agency, and self-confidence) as well as financial resources and assets, including technology. Access to and equitable intra-household distribution of these resources drive how they are used and how services are accessed. They also affect understanding and adoption of optimal care practices as well as nutritional status. For example, education and income enable women to make well-informed decisions regarding their own health and nutrition as well as that of their children. A systems-thinking approach links various efforts to improve household resources and maximizes the use of resources for education, food, health, WASH, and other nutrition needs.

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<sup>6</sup>LEAP 1000 is implemented as part of the GOG's LEAP, a social protection program providing monthly cash transfers to poor households with pregnant women and children under two years old.







## Recommendations for Systems Thinking in Nutrition Programming

Based on this exercise, we have the following simple recommendations to apply systems thinking for nutrition:

1. **Apply** systems thinking to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs. This means considering, if not addressing, each factor and its interactions, processes of change, and consequences as well as periodically mapping programs.
2. **Ensure** that projects are implemented for a sufficient time to apply systems thinking.
3. **Provide** technical leadership and structural support for projects to apply systems thinking during planning and implementation.
4. **Strengthen** coordination and collaboration across sectors, departments, and organizations and with existing structures to fill gaps.

With an increasing number of countries adopting multi-sectoral nutrition policies, we must consider how such policies can have the greatest impact. The application of systems thinking has the potential to strengthen multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder programming for nutrition.

### Additional Resources

Resources for the application of systems thinking for nutrition are limited at this time. USAID's technical note, *The 5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle*, describes a methodology for supporting sustainability and local ownership in projects and activities through ongoing attention to local actors and local systems. [+Acumen](#) offers online courses and a *Systems Practice* workbook to apply systems thinking to address complex, dynamic challenges. In addition, the USAID-funded Child Survival Technical Support Plus (CSTS+) Project prepared a manual that emphasizes systems thinking, *Taking the Long View: A Practical Guide to Sustainability Planning and Measurement in Community-Oriented Health Programming*. This guide is for project managers, planners, and evaluators of health projects in developing countries. Finally, SPRING's *Systems Thinking Assessment Tool* will be available online soon at <https://www.spring-nutrition.org/technical-areas>. <https://www.spring-nutrition.org/technical-areas/systems>.





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