

SUCCESS STORY

Using Community Food Demonstrations to Fight Malnutrition in East Central Uganda

USAID'S REGIONAL HEALTH INTEGRATION TO ENHANCE SERVICES IN EAST CENTRAL UGANDA (USAID RHITES-EC)

Flavia is an eight-year-old HIV positive orphan, who following the death of both her parents in 2019, moved to live with her aunt in Jinja district. Life was not any easier for Flavia, as her aunt faced challenges in feeding her now extended family of six biological and four adopted children on nutritious meals. As a result of these circumstances, Flavia's health deteriorated.

Fortunately, the village health team invited Flavia's aunt to attend a community food demonstration and preparation exercise at Kakira Workers Hospital, which was supported by the USAID Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in East Central Uganda (USAID RHITES-EC). The exercise aimed at addressing moderate acute malnutrition through identification of nutritious foods in the home environment, and appropriate food preparation for malnourished children from households living at subsistence level. As part of the session, the team explained the importance of feeding a child frequently (Frequency), with adequate amounts (Amount) of food of appropriate consistency (Texture) using a variety of different foods (Variety) and in a way that enables responsive feeding (Active) of meals that are hygienically prepared (Hygiene) this is summarized in an acronym (FATVAH) a key feeding principle to combat moderate acute malnutrition.

During the food demonstration and preparation exercise at Kakira Workers hospital in January 2020, a nutrition assessment was conducted and eight-year-old Flavia was



A nutritionist demonstrating to caregivers how to prepare nutritious meals during a food demonstration and preparation exercise in Jinja district in January 2020 © Louisa Nakitende Kiggwe

identified to be severely malnourished. Flavia weighed a paltry 11 kg (the weight of a 2-year-old). Flavia was subsequently referred to Kakira Workers Hospital for further treatment.

While at the hospital, Flavia was started on Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to address her severe acute malnutrition. A month later, Flavia had not gained weight, so a sputum test for tuberculosis (TB) was conducted. The test results were positive for TB, so she was subsequently started on a six-month TB treatment regimen.

May 2021

USAID's Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in East Central Uganda Activity (USAID RHITES-EC) is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement number AID-617-A-16-00001. The project team includes prime recipient University Research Co., LLC (URC), and sub-recipients The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), Communication for Development Foundation Uganda (CDFU) and Youth Alive Uganda.



Community members participate in food demonstration and preparation exercise in Jinja district © Louisa Nakitende Kiggwe

To facilitate her nutrition rehabilitation, her aunt utilized the knowledge and skills gained from the food demonstration and preparation exercises using locally available foodstuffs to complement the RUTF. Flavia began to eat a nutrient-dense diet (comprised of a combination of energy giving foods like high-energy porridge, mashed cassava, potatoes, bananas, white flour, and pumpkin; body building foods like beans and silver fish; and body protective foods like amaranthus, spinach and fruits).

Within three months once her nutrition status improved to moderate acute malnutrition, Flavia was phased off RUTF. Her aunt maintained the good practices learned in growing nutritious foods at home and food preparation for Flavia and other children in her household.

"Food demonstration and preparation exercises have motivated the community to participate in the rehabilitation of children in their community. Her recovery from malnutrition and TB has restored Flavia's hope and she has started taking the antiretroviral drugs she previously threw away. She has also accepted her HIV status and gained hope that she too can live a normal life. Flavia is now our child and we shall take care of her" says Sr. Agnes Basirika, Senior Nursing Officer at Kakira Hospital.

Twelve months later (December 2020), Flavia is now thriving, and currently weighs 16 kg. She also completed her TB treatment and was confirmed to have been cured from TB. Flavia continues to take her life-long HIV treatment with regular monitoring by the hospital.

USAID RHITES-EC supports 24 high-volume healthcare facilities to mobilize and conduct healthcare facility and community-based food demonstration and preparation exercises. These exercises are also integrated in strategic communication approaches like Family Life Schools and Community Care Groups where other health services including immunization, antenatal care, healthcare facility deliveries; water, sanitation, and hygiene; family planning

and reproductive health services are promoted.

Since October 2018, with the support of USAID RHITES-EC, a total of 6,436 children under 2 years of age have been reached in the communities and had nutritional assessments conducted with appropriate nutrition counselling support and referrals provided based on assessments. Furthermore 3,996 caregivers and parents (mostly women) have participated in the community-based food demonstration and preparation exercises. Due to these interventions, the minimum acceptable diet (MAD) among children 6 -23months has improved from 18.7% to 22.3%, while the minimum dietary diversity (MDD) improved from 25.3% to 34.23%.

