Formative Research

Ensuring adequate demand and compliance of MMS in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Tanzania

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Key messages

- Multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) will require careful introduction to ensure acceptability and appropriate utilization among pregnant women.
- *Sight and Life* is using a focused ethnographic study (FES) approach to support UNICEF’s MMS demonstration pilots and inform context-specific design and implementation in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Tanzania.
- The approach will have three iterative phases, with an emergent design to allow for findings from each phase to be built into subsequent data collection efforts.
- Working with in-country partners has allowed us to tailor the generalized formative methodology to suit the unique needs of each program and context. Findings drawn from this approach across the four contexts will be synthesized to develop standardized formative research guidance to help programs to appropriately introduce MMS in other settings.

The social marketing mix

As with commercial marketing, the main focus of social marketing is on the consumer – that is, on understanding what people desire and need rather than trying to convince them to purchase what a firm is producing.¹ The planning process takes this consumer focus into account by addressing four elements that make up the ‘marketing mix.’ This refers to decisions about the conception of (1) Product, (2) Price, (3) Place and (4) Promotion. These are often called the ‘four Ps’ of marketing and are used as the pillars of the ‘social marketing mix’ (Figure 1).

MMS formative research

For multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS) to be a scalable antenatal intervention that effectively addresses maternal nutrition and pregnancy outcomes, both an adequate supply of and a commensurate demand for the supplement are necessary. Lessons learned from the introduction of other specialized nutritional products, such as micronutrient powders (MNP) and iron–folic acid (IFA) tablets, underscore the challenges intrinsic to both the supply and the demand sides of program implementation.² MMS may thus require careful introduction to ensure acceptability and appropriate utilization among consumers (i.e., pregnant women). Using well-designed formative research as a first stage of program planning, we can understand the key social and behavioral elements (e.g., perception of the risk of malnutrition) important for the acceptance and utilization of MMS, as well as the requisite system-related factors (e.g., supply chain, health worker capacity and tools) necessary to ensure all population groups are reached.

“Using well-designed formative research, we can understand the key social and behavioral elements important for the acceptance and utilization of MMS”

Research objectives

In support of the country governments and UNICEF, and to inform the context-specific design and implementation of MMS in Bang-
lodesh, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Tanzania, we prioritized formative research with the following aims:

1. Identify product- and placement-related factors important for generating demand for MMS.

2. Generate contextually appropriate and targeted promotional strategies.

3. Understand the multilevel factors (i.e., facilitators and barriers) influencing the acceptability and utilization of MMS.

Methodology

This formative study will have three iterative phases, with an emergent design to allow for findings from each phase to be built into subsequent data collection efforts (Figure 2).

Phase 1 includes focus groups, market observations and validation workshops that aim to identify the Product- and Placement-related factors (e.g., packaging, logo, language) important for ensuring adequate consumer demand. Phase 2 builds on those findings by using ethnographic methods that will explore local nutritional terms, medical belief systems and perceptions of illness risk for informing MMS Promotions. Together, findings from Phases 1 and 2 will inform uniquely tailored social marketing strategies in each context.

After interpretation and translation of raw data into useable program inputs, Phase 3 will be conducted involving a trial of improved practices (TIPS). It will involve an assessment of tailored behavior change strategies intended to ensure adequate supply, optimal demand and continued utilization of MMS. Repeated spot checks, interviews and compliance surveys will be conducted among a subset of households to identify ‘doers’ versus ‘non-doers.’ Understanding the behavioral factors important for program success before or during scale-up may be achieved using this Phase 3 methodology.

Overall, this suite of methods follow a FES approach, which allows for high-quality data collection in a relatively short period of time – a design that is well suited for this type of public health programming. Findings drawn from this approach across the four contexts will be synthesized to develop standardized formative research guidance to help program officers appropriately introduce MMS in other similar settings globally.

Operationalizing formative research – collaboration across contexts

Working with in-country partners has allowed us to operationalize the generalized formative methodology described above while tailoring the work to suit the needs of each program and context. In Bangladesh and Tanzania, *Sight and Life* is collaborating with local institutions to support formative research efforts specific to each context. These efforts not only include the methodology outlined in Phases 1–3 above, but also include additional analyses relevant to each context.

For instance, in Bangladesh, the MMS formative work will also evaluate current antenatal care (ANC) services through observations, interviews and coverage surveys to determine gaps in
maternal health and nutrition services. In doing so, individuals’ knowledge, attitudes and practices will be assessed.

In Tanzania, in collaboration with a local nongovernmental organization, barrier analyses are being carried out to reveal the range of multilevel factors influencing ANC services in that setting. This work will also include a quantitative survey to assess the nutritional status of pregnant women and estimate IFA and ANC program coverage.

In Madagascar, Sight and Life is working with UNICEF and local partners to evaluate: existing policies and guidelines related to ANC services and IFA distribution; barriers and enablers associated with IFA consumption; and MMS supply chain and delivery platforms (health centers and/or community agents). The formative research being undertaken by Sight and Life will serve as a key building block for the situational analyses in all contexts.

“This multi-country MMS project has great potential to improve maternal nutrition and pregnancy outcomes”

Conclusion
This multi-country MMS project has great potential to improve maternal nutrition and pregnancy outcomes. Investing in collaborative and participatory formative work for the appropriate introduction of MMS in each setting will help ensure MMS does not face the same fate as IFA, with poor program coverage and compliance globally. Furthermore, important lessons learned will be drawn from this work as part of increased efforts to enhance maternal health and nutrition services to the world’s most vulnerable populations.

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References
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