

A conversation with Alive & Thrive, February 27, 2019

Participants

- Dr. Karin Lapping – Project Director, Alive & Thrive, FHI 360
- Sujata Bose – Director of Monitoring, Learning, and Evaluation, Alive & Thrive, FHI 360
- Caitlin McGugan – Senior Fellow, GiveWell
- Andrew Martin – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Dr. Lapping and Ms. Bose.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Dr. Lapping and Ms. Bose of Alive & Thrive (A&T) to get an update on its work. Conversation topics included an overview of Alive & Thrive, the cost-effectiveness of its program, and how it would use additional funding.

Overview of Alive & Thrive

Former direct implementation work

During its first five years of operations, A&T's program model (reviewed in a GiveWell interim intervention report) was focused on the direct implementation of a package of infant and young child feeding interventions, which included promotion and support of complementary feeding but focused mainly on the promotion, support, and protection of breastfeeding. A&T's work in Bangladesh and Vietnam during this period was evaluated in two randomized controlled trials (RCTs).

Application of learnings to West Africa

Based on its early work, A&T then adapted its program model to the West African context, focusing primarily on breastfeeding and not addressing complementary feeding. A&T's work in Burkina Faso during this period was evaluated in an RCT.

Current technical assistance work

Although A&T continues to support improved maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) through its work, it is no longer a direct implementer and instead provides strategic technical assistance to partners. Similar to its former work, A&T's framework for technical assistance emphasizes strategic use of data, interpersonal and mass communication, community mobilization, and policy advocacy. However, its approach is tailored to the context of a given country.

A&T believes its current strategy results in stronger government ownership of MIYCN efforts and long-term sustainability.

Current portfolio

A&T's geographic focus is primarily guided by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), which include one global award and three country-specific awards. A&T's current work portfolio includes activities in the following locations:

- **Southeast Asia** – A&T supports work in seven countries through its Southeast Asia regional platform.
- **West Africa** – A&T's newest program is a regional initiative in West Africa.
- **Burkina Faso** – Governmental infrastructure for implementing community mobilization strategies does not currently exist in Burkina Faso. A&T's work in the country is focused on policy advocacy and conducting research that demonstrates the value of community mobilization for achieving behavioral outcomes related to MIYCN.
- **Bangladesh** – A&T's work in Bangladesh includes assisting the government in achieving disbursement-linked indicators (goals which unlock external funding upon completion) related to nutrition, with key partners including the World Bank and UNICEF.
- **Ethiopia** – A&T's work in Ethiopia is designed to build capacity within health and agricultural sectors for undertaking social and behavior change (SBC) activities, with an emphasis on strategic use of data. A&T does not support mass media campaigns in Ethiopia.
- **Nigeria** – A&T's technical assistance strategy in Nigeria is similar to its initial framework for direct implementation work.
- **India** – A&T's work in India focuses on providing technical support for MIYCN programs at the national level and at the state level in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Cost-effectiveness of Alive & Thrive's program

There has not been a high-quality study assessing the full costs per person reached of A&T's past programs. Due to other priorities, A&T will also likely not collect detailed data on costs for its current work. Furthermore, it would be difficult to attribute impact to A&T's current work because technical assistance has an indirect rather than direct effect on beneficiary populations. For example, the training sessions it holds for supervisors of MIYCN programs or its efforts to improve collection of nutrition data will ultimately have an impact on mothers, but it would be difficult to determine the true effect size. A&T's individual impact would also be difficult to separate from the combined impact of all partner organizations, as it focuses on contribution rather than attribution.

Use of additional funding

Instead of utilizing additional funding to expand to new geographies, A&T would increase the depth and potentially the scale of its current work—which already encompasses a significant number of countries. Examples of how A&T might spend additional funding include:

- Investing further resources in mass media strategies for Nigeria.
- Incorporating well-child visits into its programs in Bangladesh.

A&T might choose to utilize additional funding differently, depending on how the timeline of additional funding corresponded with the timeline of its existing grants from BMGF.

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