Tufts University is conducting a review of the quality of food aid products used in nutrition programs. One part of this project was a study examining the feasibility of increasing the ratio of fortified oil to Corn Soy Blend (CSB) in porridge prepared by caregivers of children enrolled in a supplementary feeding program for treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in Southern Malawi. Increased oil is intended to increase calorie density and Essential Fatty Acids content.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted among participating caregivers in order to better understand their perceptions and experiences in the supplementary feeding program (SFP). The objective of this analysis was to identify and describe these findings.

**Figure 1. Study Area in Southern Malawi**

This was an analysis of qualitative data collected as part of a 2014 feasibility study assessing programmatic changes designed to increase the amount of oil added to CSB porridge prepared by caregivers. Study participants were caregivers who were receiving CSB with oil as treatment for their children (age< 5 years) with moderate acute malnutrition.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted among participating caregivers, consisting of semi-structured questions about experiences in the SFP. Interviews were audiorecorded, transcribed, de-identified, and then analyzed using QSR International’s NVivo 10 Software. An inductive, thematic content analysis approach was used to identify common conceptual themes from the data. Consent was obtained from all FGD participants.

**Figure 2. Common challenges with the SFP centered around the distribution process**

Nine FGDs were conducted, with between 7-10 caregivers participating in each. Several themes emerged relating to on-the-ground experiences, benefits and challenges of the SFP, and its effects within the community. Challenges with the SFP were commonly centered on the distribution process. Participants described not knowing when to expect the distribution (e.g. no fixed date or time, or distribution not arriving when planned); poor communication (e.g. having no advance notice of when the distribution will arrive, being told the day of, or not everyone receiving the message); long wait time at the distribution site; ration not received by the intended beneficiary. Additionally, it was commonly described that the ration does not last until the next distribution because the child eats the CSB porridge often (more than recommended). Participants also described common perceptions within their community: that the CSB is better than other flours; that beneficiaries are favored; and that others should also be entitled to receive the porridge.

**Figure 3. Long wait times were commonly cited**

Several participants also described experiencing confrontation with other community members as a result of not sharing their CSB ration. Caregivers often cited improvements in the health of the beneficiary children. Other benefits of the SFP reported by caregivers included: happier, more active children and having gained knowledge about child feeding.

**Figure 1. Study Area in Southern Malawi**

**METHODS**

**FINDINGS**

**SAMPLE QUOTES**

**CONCLUSIONS**

Qualitative information is critical to identify contextual issues that may affect program implementation and acceptance. These findings highlight common challenges encountered in a supplementary feeding program, and may be relevant in other settings. Implementers can use these findings to anticipate potential challenges and unintended consequences. The following should be considered and appropriately managed to ensure effective implementation: barriers to collecting supplementary food rations such as distance to distribution site and reliable means of communication about distributions; community perceptions, norms, economic status of other households, and availability of other foods that may influence how beneficiaries are perceived, and the pressure to share the ration with others.

Acknowledgment: This research was performed under the extension of the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR II) project implemented by the USAID Office of Food for Peace by the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. The contents are the responsibility of Tufts University under the terms of Contract #404-C-00-00040-00 and AID-00A-C-16-00020 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. The partner Title II program, Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement operated in Malawi under the management of Catholic Relief Services, and was implemented by several private voluntary organizations, including the three that participated in this study: Project Concern International, Save the Children, and Africare. The Center for Social Research, a research institution within the Faculty of Social Science of the University of Malawi in Zomba, was in charge of data collection.

“...they say the CSB tastes better than the corn...”

“...think that we are just favored...”

“...some people just want to taste the FVO...”

“...they think everyone is entitled to eat the porridge...”

“...they look at the CSB as something prestigious...”

“...her body looks healthy...”

“...we have gained knowledge...”

“...we can see a change...”

“...she grows up to be intelligent...”

“...My child has improved a lot...”