

CARMII

(Central American Regional Micronutrient Initiative)

REPORT

Based on
CARMII LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP

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Participating Cooperating Partners

OMNI/INCAP - BASICS - SUSTAIN - USAID

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a mere eighteen months CARMI has managed to establish itself as a leading player in food fortification for Central America.

The Latin America Bureau at USAID (LAC) -- in cooperation with USAID's Global Bureau -- conceived of the Central America Regional Micronutrient Initiative (CARMI) to address emerging Central American regional needs regarding food fortification. CARMI's goal has been to reduce the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies, particularly relating to iron, by increasing the availability and consumption of fortified foods with an emphasis on wheat flour and cereals. The Initiative was launched in November 1996, with a total budget --spread among partner implementers-- of \$874,633. CARMI activities have focused on improving the policy environment (in order to increase the supply of fortified foods), instituting regional Quality Control standards and practices, and increasing demand for fortified foods.

CARMI has incorporated a regional, multi-partnership approach with USAID's US-based BASICS, OMNI and SUSTAIN projects, as well as INCAP (Instituto de Nutricion de Centroamericana y Panama) in Guatemala. USAID's partners have made an effort to include all seven countries in Central America, but USAID funding has focused primarily on four USAID priority countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

Perhaps CARMI's greatest impact has centered on bringing together government and industry to discuss fortification. By interacting across Central America, awareness has been raised regarding the need to establish regional standards for fortification. Improved standards not only contribute to international trade, but also assure the quality of products intended to improve the health and nutrition of the region's populations.

CARMI has initiated groundbreaking work with the partners' decision to address fortification issues related to corn masa flour in a part of the world that has long relied on corn products as a staple.

Despite many early successes and impacts, CARMI has struggled to meet its original, rather ambitious targets. The complexities inherent in launching an international region-wide multi-partner approach have posed greater diplomatic and technical challenges than anticipated. At the same time, however, CARMI's main players have acknowledged that a regional approach was the most practical and effective way of dealing with fortification and regulation, offering greater potential for impact than individual country interventions. In the context of economic globalization and international trade considerations, it has been essential for the countries involved to reach agreement concerning issues that affect the region as a whole.

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While undertaking a multi-partnership approach has contributed to a broader, more efficient base of resources, it has also involved more players in the coordination of activities. Working collaboratively with several groups has proven to be one of CARMÍ's greatest strengths, bringing together a number of committed and experienced cooperating partners to implement a major regional micronutrient initiative-- but it has also proven to be one of CARMÍ's toughest challenges.

In general it appears that communication and planning among the partners have not proved as effective as they might have. In retrospect, OMNI/INCAP, SUSTAIN and BASICS would have welcomed and benefited from formal team-building efforts early on in order to clearly define partner roles and responsibilities. This would have contributed greatly towards enhanced communication and cooperation.

In addition, a need has been recognized for USAID's upper management to acknowledge that important non-programmatic, communication and coordination challenges exist whenever people work collaboratively within a cross-cultural context. Support "from above" is needed for USAID's CARMÍ manager to be able to make time to help maintain a smooth, clear flow of communications among cooperating groups. Unfortunately, misunderstandings and competitive disagreements over areas of expertise and responsibilities among cooperating partners can easily overshadow program efforts. Acknowledging this reality and addressing it directly from the start is essential to ensuring the technical success of this initiative and others like it in the future.

Despite a number of obstacles encountered along the way, CARMÍ has achieved a great deal and demonstrated that it *can* make a difference to the physical and economic health of populations throughout Central America. One of the participants at the CARMÍ Lessons Learned Workshop highlighted CARMÍ's overall success when he observed that:

"We were able to achieve in one year what normally would take five years, because the resources were made available to Central American people. "

2. BACKGROUND /OVERVIEW

PURPOSE OF CARMI REPORT

This report is intended to act as an assessment tool by capturing the substance of discussions that took place during the June 1998 CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop, as well as interviews with partnering organizations before and since the workshop. CARMI's successes and challenges to date have been identified and recommendations for the future have been suggested.

CARMI's cooperating partners can use this report to record their reflections on the past and future of CARMI and as a tool for considering the future of CARMI and related program activities. USAID's Global Bureau and Latin America Bureau can use this report to: 1) help determine USAID's role as manager and funder of CARMI in the future and, 2) consider CARMI as a model for use in other regions and other activities.

HISTORY

TIMELINE OF HIGHLIGHTS

February 1996

- ◆ USAID worked with OMNI/INCAP and SUSTAIN to "harmonize" micronutrient activities in the region and prepare the launch of a regional training program to bring participating countries together as part of a Central American project called the Central American Regional Initiative or "CARI". (CARI was not part of what later developed as CARMI.)

November 1996

- ◆ Results framework for CARMI reviewed by USAID Central American missions at a "State-of-the-Art" (SOTA) meeting and endorsed.
- ◆ Official start of CARMI, the Central America Regional Micronutrient Initiative-- again, this was separate from CARI, but built on some of its work. Planning and implementation of "field assessments". Multi-partnership established. Meeting convened by USAID in Guatemala to discuss plans for the region. INCAP was invited to discuss advances in the field of micronutrient fortification.

Summer/Fall 1996

- ◆ SUSTAIN-organized meetings with INCAP took place regarding upcoming CARMI activities (in Washington, DC).
- ◆ CARMI goals and objectives were redefined to incorporate both fortification and world trade issues.
- ◆ SUSTAIN-organized workshop was held in Washington, DC with representatives from FAO, USAID, ITC, Commerce, USDA, FDA and Latin American specialists in trade, WTO and nutrition specialists to clarify purpose of CARMI.
- ◆ Participating partners defined their roles and responsibilities.

Fall/Winter 1996

- ◆ Numerous planning meetings held in Washington, DC to clarify cooperating partner roles and responsibilities.

January - March 1997

- ◆ First official CARMI activities took place when SUSTAIN, OMNI/INCAP and BASICS conducted site visits and program assessment (with support from OMNI, INCAP coordinated the participation of all seven Central American countries).
- ◆ Team meeting held in Washington, DC with OMNI and INCAP present.

March - May 1997

- ◆ INCAP and OMNI publication prepared detailing an assessment of programs and policies concerning food fortification in Central America with emphasis on iron.

July 1997

- ◆ OMNI organized Workshop #1 held in Guatemala with government representatives to discuss "harmonization" of fortification policy guidelines.

August – December 1997

- ◆ Follow-up visits made by INCAP with support from OMNI to each country in order to initiate recommendations from Workshop #1.

Fall 1997

- ◆ Planning meetings held in Washington, DC with representative from INCAP.

December 1997

- ◆ SUSTAIN-organized meeting of Expert Advisory Panel on Iron Fortification of Corn Masa Flour was held.

January – March 1998

- ◆ Site visits to mills conducted by SUSTAIN expert-volunteers and INCAP representatives in Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador.

January 1998

- ◆ OMNI organized Workshop #2 held in Guatemala with private and public sector to discuss "harmonization" of Quality Assurance/Quality Control.

March 1998

- ◆ SUSTAIN-organized Workshop #3 on Quality Assurance and Quality Control in Milling and Fortification was held in El Salvador for key personnel from the wheat milling industry.

February – July 1998

- ◆ Follow-up visits made by INCAP with support from OMNI to improve national organization, Quality Assurance/Quality Control activities, network of laboratories working in food fortifications, and updating of national legislation.

NARRATIVE HISTORY

The Latin America Bureau at USAID (LAC) -- in cooperation with USAID's Global Bureau -- designed the Central America Regional Micronutrient Initiative (CARMI) to address emerging Central American regional needs regarding food fortification. CARMI's goal has focused on reducing the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies, particularly relating to iron, by increasing the availability and consumption of fortified foods with an emphasis on wheat flour and cereals. Intermediate Results from CARMI were outlined with a focus on improving the policy environment (in order to increase the supply of fortified foods), regional Quality Control standards, practices, and quality; as well as increasing the demand for fortified foods.

While the partners have worked hard to include all seven Central American countries in CARMI activities, the Initiative has primarily focused its resources on four USAID priority countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. (It was the original USAID program manager's hope that while the initiative would work from a base of four countries which had USAID missions, the remaining three Central American countries Belize, Costa Rica & Panama would find support elsewhere and be able to join the Initiative.)

CARMI was designed as a partnership between USAID's US-based BASICS, OMNI and SUSTAIN projects, along with INCAP (Instituto de Nutricion de Centroamericana y Panama) in Guatemala, which has provided valuable support with the implementation of this Initiative. Within the parameters of CARMI, OMNI (Opportunities for Micronutrient Nutrition Interventions) has worked toward regional harmonization of legislation and technical specifications related to fortified foods with an emphasis on wheat flour. BASICS' (Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival) efforts have centered on generating demand for fortified corn flour. SUSTAIN (Sharing US Technology to Aid in the Improvement of Nutrition) has worked with industry to improve the quality of fortified foods through quality assurance and control, and government monitoring systems.

In a 1991 field-based idea a proposal called "CARI" (Central America Regional Initiatives) helped lay the groundwork for the coordination of *ongoing* micronutrient

activities in the Central America region. However, CARI was never actually implemented as an activity; rather it was conceived as an idea and then later merged into USAID's vision of a separate project called CARMI and initiated by USAID in November 1996.

With CARMI in place, a more focused expertise has been brought to the region, building on the original CARI notion by addressing research and development issues related to wheat flour fortification. (At INCAP's suggestion, an additional sugar and salt fortification activity was conducted with funding from UNICEF). Due to its potential to reach large numbers of consumers, corn masa flour has been included as well.

Created by USAID's LAC Bureau in 1996, CARMI has emerged as a quality program making use of existing micronutrient money in an innovative and proactive manner in order to ensure a more direct impact on health and free trade in the region. Public health studies in Central America had revealed a significant micronutrient deficiency among women and children. Furthermore, the smaller, regional food manufacturers needed additional support. The primary concern was how USAID could help build local capacities to fortify staple foods in the region, thereby improving the health of consumers while also safeguarding local economies. A cooperative, partnership approach was identified as a way to address this issue, since no single cooperating agency could provide the variety of skills and resources required to successfully implement such a major initiative.

The concept of CARMI was originally vetted in a SUSTAIN-organized workshop in Washington, DC in July 1996 with representatives from FAO, USAID, ITC, Commerce, USDA, FDA, the new World Trade Organization, Latin American sector specialists in trade, and nutrition specialists. The results framework for CARMI was reviewed and endorsed by the USAID Central American missions at a "State-of-the-Art" (SOTA) course in November 1996.

OMNI, SUSTAIN and BASICS were brought together as a team and by winter 1996, discussions were underway for engaging INCAP, a Central American research institution long active in the area of fortification and already serving all seven countries in Central America. With USAID's approval, INCAP joined CARMI as a subcontractor of OMNI and provided invaluable assistance coordinating a number of CARMI activities in the field. A regional assessment evaluating food fortification policies and programs in the region was conducted by OMNI and carried out jointly with INCAP from January to March 1997.

With INCAP as a partner the support of national governments for the pursuit of regional cooperation under the auspices of CARMI was more secure. In the ensuing months collaboration among the partners gradually evolved, and by mid-1997 CARMI had established itself as a legitimate working entity.

One of the greatest challenges of CARMI has been managing a complex multi-partner cooperative effort in which some of the players are based in Central America while others work from Washington, DC. Despite numerous diplomatic, cross-cultural communication and technical challenges, as well as changes in CARMI's management

personnel in the USAID (required by contract end-dates and the agency's rotation practices), CARMI has demonstrated that such innovative cooperative approaches offer significant advantages.

The lessons learned from the partner agencies' experiences, both individually and collectively, are gathered in this report. It is the hope of CARMI's partners that other regions will look to CARMI as a model for region-wide initiatives. Despite a number of obstacles encountered along the way, CARMI has achieved a great deal and demonstrated that it *can* make a difference to the physical and economic health of populations throughout Central America.

COOPERATING PARTNER ACTIVITIES OUTPUTS & IMPACT

CARMI ascribed a "head cooperating agency" to each Intermediate Result (IR) based on each organization's or project's past experience and potential for results.

The following summary of Intermediate Results for each organization reflects the period from January 1997 -- which includes an assessment period from January through March 1997 -- to the present. Individual outputs and/or impacts are also described below:

OMNI's Intermediate Result: To improve the policy environment regarding fortification efforts

Related Activities

- (1) **Regional assessment/country assessments of the fortification policy environment** (January, February, March 1997)

Output: Report Analysis

Impact: Provided baseline data for CARMI program development

- (2) **Establishment and implementation of regional guidelines on food fortification through two workshops**

Outputs: **CARMI Workshop #1** - Regional workshop held in Guatemala in July 1997 with government representatives to discuss "harmonization" of guidelines (regarding, for example, Quality Control and norms).

CARMI Workshop #2 - Regional workshop held in Guatemala in January 1998 with representatives from both the private and public sectors, to review technical issues related to "harmonization" of technical specifications and Quality Assurance/Quality Control. (Note: Training courses were also conducted for government and industry personnel in Honduras with UNICEF support and in Nicaragua, sponsored by OMNI.)

Impact: 40 participants (most from government ministries) representing all of Central America benefited from the first workshop. (Non-USAID countries were funded by UNICEF). Participants agreed on a basic set of standard regulations concerning food labeling, a Quality Assurance/Quality Control system, and monitoring of fortified products. The delegates were expected to initiate dialogue with the food industry in order to review standard specifications and to discuss options for implementation. For the second workshop, a dialogue was established between industry and government-- a positive step toward regular professional exchanges.

Legislation on wheat fortification was passed in Costa Rica and Panama (two non-CARMI countries). Revised technical specifications were prepared for wheat flour fortification in Honduras and Nicaragua. Iron fortification of wheat flour has been on going in El Salvador and Guatemala since 1992; and during 1997, CARMI began targeting the rest of Central America.

Via the workshops, CARMI (with INCAP playing an important role) enabled the Ministries of Health from all participating countries to reach an agreement on specifications concerning how much and what type of iron would be used to fortify flour.

(3) Follow-up Visits

Follow-up visits took place at regional workshops to provide further assistance and encourage discussions between government and food producers.

SUSTAIN'S IR: To improve the quality of food fortification

Related Activities

(1) Meeting with INCAP Representative in Preparation for Upcoming CARMI Activities, Fall 1997

Output: SUSTAIN organized a two-day series of meetings with Dr. Omar Dary of INCAP, in which decisions were made concerning the preparations for up-coming CARMI activities. During the two-day visit by Dr. Dary, SUSTAIN arranged for meetings and consultations via telephone conferencing with noted experts from industry, government, and academia.

Impact: Strategies were developed for the second (January 1998) and third (March 1998) workshops, and the first meeting of the corn masa flour fortification advisory panel (December 1997).

(2) Industry Experience Review of corn masa flour fortification.

Output: SUSTAIN commissioned noted experts in corn products processing and fortification to search, collect, and review existing information on the fortification of corn masa flour with iron, and other micronutrients, from the scientific

literature as well as unpublished material from industry and academic sources. Report was published: *Fortification of Corn Masa Flour with Iron and/or Other Nutrients – A Literature and Industry Experience Review*.

(3) SUSTAIN organized and convened a meeting of the Expert Advisory Panel on Iron Fortification of Corn Masa Flour

Output: An advisory panel of experts from the corn masa processing industry, fortification industry, medical doctors specialized in bioavailability, INCAP, and food scientists met in December 1997.

Impact: Workshop summary was prepared. An outline for determining the best form of iron to fortify a new commercial product (corn masa flour) that would reach a broad segment of the population in Central America. Industry participants volunteered to conduct various aspects of the study and fieldwork.

(4) SUSTAIN conducted country assessment/site visits to wheat mills in preparation for Workshop #3 ("Quality Assurance/Quality Control in Milling and Fortification").

Output: In preparation for the workshop on Quality Assurance and Quality Control in milling and fortification, a SUSTAIN volunteer expert and INCAP representatives provided initial technical assistance to mill managers and workers visited in Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador from January to March 1998.

Impact: The SUSTAIN volunteer expert in milling evaluated assistance needs and assessed practices in order to tailor a workshop agenda most appropriate for the millers' needs. The information collected became the basis for Workshop #3 in El Salvador. While the SUSTAIN volunteer expert conducted assessments pertaining to the future workshop, he also provided technical assistance to individual mill sites visited.

(5) SUSTAIN organized a Quality Assurance/Quality Control training in El Salvador (March 1998) for key personnel from the wheat milling industry.

Output: During the third and final CARMI Workshop #3 in March 1998, two SUSTAIN volunteer-experts in milling and ingredients (including fortification), a representative from ESLAMO (a Latin American regional training institute), and a representative from INCAP provided training on Quality Assurance and Control in milling and fortification for key personnel from the wheat milling industry.

Impact: The report was issued March 1998. The training brought millers together from all Central American countries. The millers stayed for the entire workshop and paid their own way in order to participate. SUSTAIN was able to attract millers by designing the workshop to address standard milling issues but also introduced fortification topics.

BASICS' IR: To increase the demand for fortified foods

Since the demand for fortified wheat flour in Central America was already well documented, BASIC's role in CARMI to date has been limited.

Related Activities

- (1) Regional assessment of wheat and corn flour consumption patterns**
(Jan, Feb, Mar 1997)
Output: Report Analysis
Impact: Provided information for CARMI project development
- (2) Technical Assistance in preparation of materials for Workshop #2.**
- (3) Market Analysis on consumption pattern of corn flour at consumer and tortilla levels.**

Output: Site Visit Report prepared regarding the collection of market information.
Impact: Confirmed assumptions regarding importance of fortifying corn masa flour in region.

INCAP

Although INCAP was envisioned as a full partner from the beginning, according to the USAID manager who launched the original initiative, INCAP and subsequent USAID managers perceived INCAP's role as a "sub-partner" under OMNI. Again, according to the first USAID CARMI manager, this situation occurred because unlike the other partners who had existing agreements with USAID, the only mechanism USAID had available to fund INCAP was a sub-contract with OMNI. This unusual funding arrangement has unfortunately been misinterpreted as a lesser role for INCAP, when in fact it was merely implemented as a convenient administrative/funding mechanism for USAID. In practice, however, INCAP has felt uncomfortable with its perceived role.

INCAP consistently supported and helped expand CARMI activities in the region, acting also as a liaison for North-South interactions. As a Guatemalan institution serving all seven countries of the region, INCAP has contributed important political and cultural expertise to CARMI's planning and implementation efforts. In fact, INCAP's efforts have ensured that CARMI's impact extends beyond the Initiative's official four target countries to all seven Central American nations.

COOPERATING PARTNER BUDGETS FOR CARMI

The following chart summarizes CARMI funds budgeted for each cooperating partner:

<i>Cooperating Agency</i>	<i>CARMI Budget</i>
OMNI/INCAP	\$ 314,637*
SUSTAIN	\$ 409,996**
<u>BASICS</u>	<u>\$ 150,000</u>
TOTAL CARMI \$:	\$ 874,633

*This includes \$65,000 field support, \$226, 637 for delivery of funds and \$23,000 for core support funds.

** This total includes prior field support funds of \$174,996 that were also applied to CARMI.

3. CARMI - SUCCESSES & CHALLENGES

OVERALL IMPACT

In a mere 18 months CARMI has managed to establish itself as a leading player in food fortification for Central America.

Industry, and millers in particular, have long been willing to work with government to establish uniform regulations in order to "level the playing field" so that all producers could follow the same rules regarding fortification of food products. Government was wary of working with industry at first, feeling somewhat suspicious of industry's profit motive. Although some dialogue between government and industry existed prior to CARMI; standards relating specifically to wheat flour fortification in the region were limited. In addition, quality was not monitored, and shared technical assistance and research were often completely lacking. By opening a true dialogue between the private and public sectors on issues of wheat flour fortification, governments were made aware

of areas for potential collaboration and of ways to help industry by providing enforceable standards and regulations through consistent legislation.

CARMI essentially acted as an important catalyst to build from activities initiated earlier in Central America, many of them in 1992 as part of another USAID-funded activity Institutional Strengthening Project (ISP) which provided institutional strengthening support to INCAP. (ISP had an add-on activity aimed at the prevention and control of vitamin A deficiency in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador; and included the promotion of food fortification, Quality Control/Quality Assurance practices, and legislation efforts.)

Great strides have been made with the inclusion of iron-fortified corn masa flour into the Initiative. An initial SUSTAIN assessment of staple food consumption in Central America found that while many countries in Central America have a tradition of iron fortification of wheat flour, improvements could be made in the quality and uniformity of fortification. The assessment also discovered an opportunity for iron fortification of corn masa flour, which is used to make tortillas, a more widely consumed staple food. The market for commercially produced corn masa flour in the region is growing quickly, by approximately 25% every year. The fantastic potential of this effort to reach broad segments of the population cannot be underestimated.

It is still too early to measure the long-term impact of CARMI, partly because wheat flour fortification in some form was already established to varying degrees in most of Central America before CARMI's implementation and because eighteen months is not long enough to accurately gauge significant long range impact. Nevertheless, there are numerous short-term successes worth noting that indicate positive potential for the longer term.

CARMI SUCCESSES

- ◆ In workshop activities, millers in all four participating countries expressed their enthusiasm for improving their practices and standards. All three CARMI workshops were well attended and provided opportunities for rich and productive dialogue between representatives from both government and industry. Due in great part to CARMI's interventions, all seven Central American countries have come to an agreement regarding the need for fortification studies, Quality Assurance and monitoring.
- ◆ Major corn flour market leaders, such as MASECA and MINSA (both with headquarters in Mexico and mills throughout Central America) have proved receptive to working with CARMI on research and consumer testing regarding fortification efforts. Corn flour represents an important opportunity to expand fortification to a new food vehicle with potential to reach a very broad segment of the population. While corn masa has been produced in peoples' homes for centuries, commercially produced corn masa is a growing trend.

- ◆ A multiplier effect to improve health and standardization procedures for fortified food products has been set in motion, beginning with millers, extending to bakers, and finally, arriving to consumers.
- ◆ CARMI efforts have resulted in the issuance of guidelines and recommendations to all Central American government and industry representatives regarding fortification specifications for wheat flour (as well as sugar and salt through parallel project efforts) in the region. These specifications are designed to be easily incorporated into legislation/regulations within each country.
- ◆ National micronutrient fortification committees already existed in Guatemala and Nicaragua before CARMI activities began; however, CARMI has acted as a catalyst for the planning and creation of national committees in El Salvador and Honduras. These are in the process of being established --for private and public sectors, with NGO participation-- to provide a forum for the discussion of micronutrient fortification to advance public health goals, increase trade, and facilitate regional cooperation. In addition, the Committees provide a forum for establishing both a regional and local network of external Quality Control.
- ◆ USAID Bureaus have been united in their support for a fortification and standardization initiative, and have been willing to risk a new approach to technical assistance using a multi-partnership model.
- ◆ The ministries of health, commerce and finance in all four target countries have, with CARMI's help, begun a serious dialogue regarding national and regional fortification regulations.
- ◆ INCAP's role as a technical assistance provider and coordinating body has been strengthened through its association with the initiative.
- ◆ Directly and indirectly, CARMI can be credited with facilitating and enhancing information exchange among the health and nutrition sector, regulatory agencies, and industry. Through its regional assessment, three workshops and the dissemination of its reports, CARMI has contributed significantly to the knowledge and information base of the region.
- ◆ Although it is too early to assess the full health benefits, it is already clear that CARMI's activities have at the very least increased access to micronutrients for Central Americans.
- ◆ Government and industry have begun interacting cooperatively for the good of both, and to the obvious benefit of consumers, particularly women and children who have special nutritional needs which can be met through quality assured and controlled fortification.

Perhaps CARMI's greatest impact was to have brought government and industry to the table to discuss fortification. By interacting across the region, awareness has been raised regarding the need to establish regional standards for fortification. Standards not only contribute to international trade, but more importantly, assure the quality of products intended to improve the health and nutrition of the region's populations. In addition, by encouraging the adoption of the Codex Alimentarius as an official standard against which all products should be measured, CARMI has helped enhance consumer protection. Finally, CARMI's groundbreaking work in the fortification of corn masa flour in a part of the world, which has relied on corn products as a staple, rather than the wheat bread of other regions may prove to be a major legacy.

Despite many early successes and impacts, CARMI has struggled to meet its original, rather ambitious, targets. The complexities inherent in launching an international multi-partner approach with limited resources have posed greater diplomatic and technical challenges than anticipated. Nonetheless, everyone associated with this innovative initiative, including government officials, millers, and technical advisors, agrees that CARMI has made great strides in bringing fortification and industry standardization to the forefront as a priority issue in Central America.

REGIONAL APPROACH

By all accounts a regional approach is the most practical and effective way of addressing fortification and regulation issues. In the context of economic globalization and international trade considerations, it has been essential that the countries involved reach agreement on issues affecting the region as a whole. The potential for impact is even greater when targeting an entire region rather than an individual country.

All participating countries have proved eager to collaborate and share research findings and technical assistance in order to pool resources made available through CARMI and maximize the benefit and impact. This involvement of a group of countries has required careful and close coordination, which by and large has fallen to INCAP. The diplomatic complexities of coordinating among several governments, each with its own national interests and priorities, has created significant challenges. More work remains to be done to improve regional coordination and take advantage of the vast potential for region-wide fortification-related efforts.

It should be noted that these diplomatic complexities have been enhanced by the fact that INCAP's sphere of influence has embraced all seven countries in Central America as opposed to the four with USAID missions officially involved in CARMI. INCAP has understandably preferred to maintain its focus on all seven countries in the region. Other partners have also shared the sense that CARMI should address the entire region of Central America and not only the region focused on by USAID. In fact, USAID's original CARMI manager *did* encourage the inclusion of the other three Central

American countries; however, USAID's funding is limited to the four countries with USAID missions.

MULTI-PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

While undertaking a multi-partnership approach can contribute to a broader, more efficient use of resources, it also means that more players must coordinate activities and agree on how to proceed throughout the life of the program. This has proven to be one of CARMI's greatest strengths, bringing together a number of committed and experienced cooperating groups to implement a major regional micronutrient initiative-- but it has also proven to be one of CARMI's greatest challenges.

To some the CARMI partnership appeared to be created in a loose and somewhat undefined manner, perhaps due to the length of time required to identify appropriate partners for this important endeavor. OMNI was chosen as the original implementer and had to wait while the other cooperating groups were brought on board.

OMNI, SUSTAIN and BASICS were originally identified to form CARMI, but leadership roles and responsibilities have not always been completely clear. This is due, in part, to the fact that different partners have had differing ideas about how best to carry out their roles. In addition, administrative circumstances at USAID resulted in the transfer of management responsibilities for CARMI to three different USAID personnel during the 18-month period. Finally, the USAID managers overseeing CARMI have had competing pressures on their time and have not had the necessary time to devote to CARMI's start-up phase.

When OMNI sub-contracted with INCAP, INCAP's status was well defined on paper but has remained somewhat murky in practice. Perhaps due to USAID's administrative need to channel funding through OMNI, INCAP has perceived that USAID and the partners have not demonstrated adequate respect for INCAP's role. In addition, the USAID/CARMI manager has not had time available for occasional travel to Central America or for maintaining frequent contact with Washington, DC partners during CARMI's critical start-up year, thereby contributing to a lack of clarity regarding partner roles and responsibilities.

Some organizational issues emerged within INCAP early on that may have created some tension. INCAP is organized so that one part of the organization focuses on *program development* and the other on *program implementation*. USAID's first CARMI manager worked quite closely with INCAP's program development manager; however, it may be that the manager on the implementation side felt he should have been more involved in the early discussions. Coordination and communication between these two types of divisions is essential.

In general it appears that communication and planning among the partners was not done as well as it might have been. In retrospect, all the partner organizations have agreed that team-building efforts early on with regards to each player's role would have contributed

greatly towards enhanced communication and cooperation. For example, SUSTAIN and OMNI/INCAP have recognized the need for expanded communication and clarification of roles. BASICS' role remained minimal, as the demand for wheat flour fortification in the region had already been amply researched and documented. However, BASICS has expressed interest in playing a larger role regarding the development of corn masa flour fortification.

During the CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop, participants focused on seven “critical issues” as outlined below. For the complete, original list of all critical issues, please see *APPENDIX C*.

Through a process of prioritization, seven of the most critical issues were selected by workshop participants for further analysis. These issues were listed as follows:

1. INCAP has not been respected as institution.
2. US-based partners have not appreciated previous activities in the region.
3. Distrust and insecurity have not been acknowledged or addressed among OMNI, SUSTAIN & INCAP.
4. INCAP status has never been fully clarified.
5. Lack of clarity has existed relating to partners' roles and responsibilities, and processes.
6. No recognizable leadership has been established to coordinate partners' activities.
7. Competition rather than cooperation has influenced CARMI's partners.

The following list summarizes CARMI-related challenges stemming from workshop discussions and feedback from cooperating partners since the workshop:

<i>CARMI CHALLENGES</i>

- ◆ While there was general approval for the multi-partnership approach, a lack of team building effort, clear communication and consistent oversight has led to stresses and strains between the partners.
- ◆ Instead of producing an overall "partnership plan" or reshaping the guidelines as a team, each partner developed an individual plan for CARMI activities, resulting in a certain amount of overlap. As a result, maximum use has not been made of resources and minor rivalries developed among partners, creating a less effective joint technical assistance effort.
- ◆ Despite efforts made to ensure the presence of all partners, several coordinating meetings were held without everyone's participation.

- ◆ Perceptions regarding INCAP's role have differed among CARMI's partners, leading to some confusion and conflict.
- ◆ CARMI was intended to address a region but funding has covered four Central American countries (However, INCAP has been able to secure additional support to include all seven countries in the region);
- ◆ From USAID's perspective, CARMI has not been part of any strategic objective results framework;
- ◆ From both the partners' and USAID's point of view, the USAID manager has not been able to devote adequate time and travel funds to CARMI activities.
- ◆ There have been some concerns regarding the flow of information among partners and to partners from USAID.
- ◆ Documents in Spanish have not always been translated into English (partly due to cost); and not all involved staff at USAID and cooperating agencies are fluent in Spanish.
- ◆ CARMI's partners have encountered difficulties in promoting CARMI in the region because of the perception of USAID as a political body rather than a technical assistance entity (despite the fact that USAID has demonstrated its interest and ability to support technical assistance efforts in the region).
- ◆ Changes in program management personnel among both the partners and USAID have made program continuity a challenge.
- ◆ USAID's field missions showed some initial resistance to implementing a regional approach, fearing that their programmatic influence might be diluted.

4. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the inevitable ups and downs experienced during the start-up phase, CARMI by all accounts has proved to be an initiative worth building upon and eventually using as a model for other region-wide, multi-partner efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS*

* (A listing of "NEXT STEPS" that emerged from the CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop is also included in this report under *APPENDIX D*.)

- ◆ Re-state a more focused goal and produce a manageable work plan to correct the problem of overall CARMI goals that are too far-reaching. This needs to be a collaborative effort involving all partners.
- ◆ Settle the definition of "region" — as well as funding sources— to each partner's satisfaction. There are concerns that all seven countries in Central America be included in the Initiative or at least taken into consideration when developing a work plan.
- ◆ Continue building on successes, such as focusing on bringing government and industry together to talk, and coordinate efforts relating to fortification.
- ◆ Conduct a team-building workshop during which USAID's leadership and each partner's roles and responsibilities are discussed and clarified (Include the USAID field mission staff to help ensure that they endorse the regional Initiative).
- ◆ Ensure that USAID's upper management acknowledges to USAID staff and cooperating groups funded by USAID that there are some significant *non-programmatic*, communication and coordination challenges inherent in working collaboratively. While USAID's desire not to "micro-manage" its project activities is admirable, it is also important not to lose sight of the need for USAID's CARMI manager to be able to make time to help maintain a smooth, clear flow of communications among cooperating groups. Needless to say, people display different work styles, and different cultures have different ways of understanding and working within a cooperative venture; therefore, misunderstandings, disagreements over areas of expertise and competition rather than cooperation can easily overshadow program efforts. Acknowledging this reality and addressing it directly from the start is essential to ensuring the technical success of this initiative and others like it.

- ◆ Make face-to-face meetings among all the partners (OMNI, INCAP, SUSTAIN, BASICS & USAID) a priority, especially when any new organization or personnel is brought into the picture; and all travel costs should be covered to ensure full participation. If starting up another similar program, plan a 2-3 day meeting for all partners and USAID manager to allow for full participation in activity planning.
- ◆ Ensure that adequate funding is available for the DC-based USAID manager to effectively oversee coordination of CARMI activities -- e.g., the USAID manager needs to be able to travel to the region at least twice a year; and, the s/he needs to be able to devote the necessary time to his/her coordination activities. Another option would be to appoint a manager to oversee CARMI.
- ◆ Make funding available at the start of any CARMI-type regional initiative to ensure 1) a thorough review of all existing projects and activities in the region to ensure full awareness of available resources, and 2) adequate support for local institutions brought into the initiative.
- ◆ Build in enough flexibility to allow for modification of work plan with the agreement of all CARMI partners as the initiative progresses.
- ◆ Highlight the need for partners to be proactive in communicating with one another on a regular basis to help avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- ◆ Take advantage of partners' resources through regular, collaborative activities such as joint assessment, planning, etc.
- ◆ Clarify the exact definitions of "legislation", "regulation", "guidelines" and "specifications" to ensure correct, consistent usage.
- ◆ Focus on strengthening national committees for surveillance of programs.
- ◆ Emphasize public relations component more to educate the consumer and highlight government and industry collaboration.
- ◆ Fortify cereal staple foods such as corn and later, rice; accelerate research; work with MASECA and ask, "What is the fortified products' value to the consumer?"
- ◆ Identify and strengthen Central American labs designated as the public's arm for monitoring and enforcing international standards. This is an important aspect of efforts to maintain the quality of fortification programs in which labs are an important component.
- ◆ Recognize that a great deal has been accomplished in a short time despite numerous obstacles and work patiently to overcome those obstacles in a constructive way. Realize that everyone wants to make CARMI work, but it is unrealistic to expect a multi-partnership regional approach to be implemented without experiencing some conflict.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

CARMI has demonstrated that a regional, multi-partner approach to implementing a micronutrient program can have a significant impact, assuming that the human and financial resources are adequate and that the partners work together in a team-oriented manner under the clear direction of a coordinating body.

The successes listed in the report reflect CARMI's great potential as an innovative and far-reaching micronutrient fortification initiative, ultimately supporting Central Americans as they take the necessary steps to improve their own health status. The challenges outlined here remind us that work remains to be done and that CARMI is still essentially in its start-up phase. Overall, however, the general consensus remains that CARMI's strengths outweigh its weaknesses, and that the time is ripe to build on the work accomplished thus far.

Quotes from CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop Participants

"We were able to achieve in one year what normally would take five years, because the resources were made available to Central American people. Trade activity was going too fast. Micronutrient progress was too slow and we needed to catch up."

"Companies have gotten involved in a new micronutrient program which crosses sectors and allows interaction and networking among industry players, government and donors. Now they can all act as mutual resources."

"We can't get possessive about activities. There are always others who can do good work in the same area."

"It [CARMI] is not seen as an AID program, but an internal reality. AID has kept a low profile, which is good."

"We've contributed to the knowledge and information base for Central American organizations through workshop activities, and dissemination of reports. We've pushed research and using data for action."

FURTHER DOCUMENTATION

For a full documentation of the Initiative, please refer to the following documents, all produced under the aegis of CARMI:

OMNI/ INCAP

Policies and Programs (12/97)

Workshop #1: Monitoring, Quality Control, Norms (Guatemala, 7/97)

Workshop #2: Fortified Foods (Guatemala, 1/98)

SUSTAIN

CARMI Activities (1996-99)

CARMI Activity Time-Line (4/97 -9/98)

Corn Masa Flour: Industry Experience Review (12/97)

Corn Masa Flour Advisory Panel Meeting Summary (12/97)

Site Visit Reports, Dary & McFarlin (Guatemala, 1/98)

CARMI Steering Committee Meeting Minutes (2/98 and 3/98)

Workshop #3 (with INCAP, FUSADES and ESLAMO):

Quality Control/Quality Assurance, Wheat and corn Masa Flour
(El Salvador, 3/98)

BASICS

Assessment of Honduras and Nicaragua (2/97)

Trip Report: Hand Washing/Corn Flour Fortification (Guatemala, 8/97)

Trip Report: Hand Washing Task Force and Corn Flour (Guatemala, 10/97)

PLEASE NOTE:

Please contact SUSTAIN to see a description of activities conducted during the CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop and all newsprint lists/charts recorded.

APPENDIX A

Participant List for Lessons Learned Workshop

PARTICIPANT LIST

CARMI LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP

USAID

Karen Cavanaugh
Sam Kahn
Kristen Marsh
Ellyn Ogden
Timothy Quick

OMNI

Ian Darnton-Hill
Steve Wilbur
Jose Mora
Herb Weinstein

SUSTAIN

Liz Turner
Teresa M. Lozeau
Jim Albrecht

BASICS

Camille Saade
Kim Cervantes

INCAP

Omar Dary

APPENDIX B

CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop Agenda

CARMI LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP
June 10, 1998

AGENDA

- 9:00 a.m. I. Welcome/ Why are we here?
- 9:15 a.m. II. Exercise: A personalized history of CARMI
- 10:30 a.m. III. Who will benefit from “Lessons Learned”? (Audience)
- 10:45 a. m. BREAK***
- 11:00 a.m. IV. Success/ Achievements
- 11:40 a.m. V. Exercise: CRITICAL ISSUES
- 1:00 p. m. LUNCH***
- 2:00 p.m. CRITICAL ISSUES (con’t)
Small Groups (“framing the issues”)
- 2:45 p.m. VI. Conceptualizations: Small Groups
- 3:00 p. m. BREAK***
- 3:15 p.m. Conceptualizations (con’t)
- 3:30 p.m. Small Group Presentations
- 4:00 p.m. NEXT STEPS...*a vision for the future*
- 5:00 p.m. CLOSE

APPENDIX C

Critical Issues

CRITICAL ISSUES

(Based on 18 interviews with conducted by independent workshop facilitator, Dorothy Leroux, with key players. Workshop participants chose seven critical issues to discuss in depth at the workshop—see main report following Budget information.)

- ❖ Should CARMi be managed by a Central American regional body or from Washington DC?
- ❖ CARMi targets only 4 out of 7 Central American countries-- problem for regional policy-making
- ❖ Frequent turn-over at USAID managerial level --3 different styles and foci
- ❖ No established process or protocol for agreements, approvals, implementation of work plans
- ❖ Competition rather than cooperation between OMNI, SUSTAIN and INCAP
- ❖ Institutional rivalries USAID -- UNICEF and PAHO
 SUSTAIN -- OMNI
- ❖ Underlying distrust and insecurity were never addressed among OMNI, SUSTAIN and INCAP.
- ❖ No recognizable leadership
- ❖ Lack of clear guidelines by USAID regarding partners' roles & responsibilities and processes
- ❖ INCAP was not fully respected in its role as a long-established indigenous regional institution
- ❖ OMNI's previous activities in the region were not appreciated or acknowledged.
- ❖ INCAP's status was never clear... partner? sub-contractor?
- ❖ Vision and goals changed

- ❖ What *is* a regional body?
- ❖ Unnecessary bureaucratic delays (i.e., contract signing, approvals, etc.)
- ❖ CARMi was too hastily conceived
- ❖ Project Manager turn-over at SUSTAIN, USAID and OMNI
- ❖ Cultural insensitivity
- ❖ Institutional rigidity
- ❖ INCAP did not supply adequate information on region
- ❖ CARMi generated many “agreements” and insufficient follow-up
- ❖ “Turf wars” between USAID and other funders
- ❖ Budgetary allocations to all partners not transparent
- ❖ USAID seen as a political institution (rather than a technical assistance organization) by developing countries
- ❖ “Partnerships” did not evolve naturally. They were imposed.
- ❖ INCAP had “2 masters”: USAID and Regional governments. Conflicts were inevitable.
- ❖ Resources unequally allocated among partners.

APPENDIX D

Next Steps

NEXT STEPS

(As listed during CARMI Lessons Learned Workshop)

- ❑ What are LONG-TERM objectives?
- ❑ What will the vision be?
- ❑ Continue CARMI to complete what has been started
- ❑ PR component (Why are we fortifying? etc.
 - to educate consumer
 - to highlight government/industry collaboration)
- ❑ Strengthen national committees for surveillance of programs
- ❑ Fortify cereal staple foods (i.e., corn flour)
- ❑ Accelerate research
- ❑ Work with MASECA (fortified corn flour)
- ❑ Test consumer re fortified food: what is its value to consumer?
- ❑ Promote idea of an INCAP “good housekeeping seal of approval”
- ❑ Hire a “management group” outside AID
- ❑ Assure and enhance quality of wheat flour fortification & effective/realistic public sector monitoring and enforcement system.
- ❑ Have small pilot activity to demonstrate impact
- ❑ Assess/evaluate IEC campaigns (Information Education Campaigns)
- ❑ Identify and strengthen labs designated as the public’s arm for monitoring/enforcement towards international standards (Labs should be of value to the industry)
- ❑ Have an impact on fortifying processed foods as well as well as staples
- ❑ Wrap up wheat efforts in the region
- ❑ Continue with corn masa flour fortification efforts in the region
- ❑ Continue with other staples such as rice (i.e., “weaning” foods for older babies)
- ❑ Consumption information needs to be gathered
- ❑ Virtual library on micro-nutrients (in Spanish for INCAP) needs to be established
- ❑ Work to establish closer ties to private industry

SUSTAIN enlists volunteers from U.S. corporations and scientific institutions to enhance the quality, safety, and availability of food in developing countries. In collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development, SUSTAIN helps businesses, community organizations, and other related groups apply appropriate technologies and strengthen skills. SUSTAIN addresses these concerns through problem solving, technical assistance, and training, and by organizing expert advisory panels and conducting scientific studies.

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