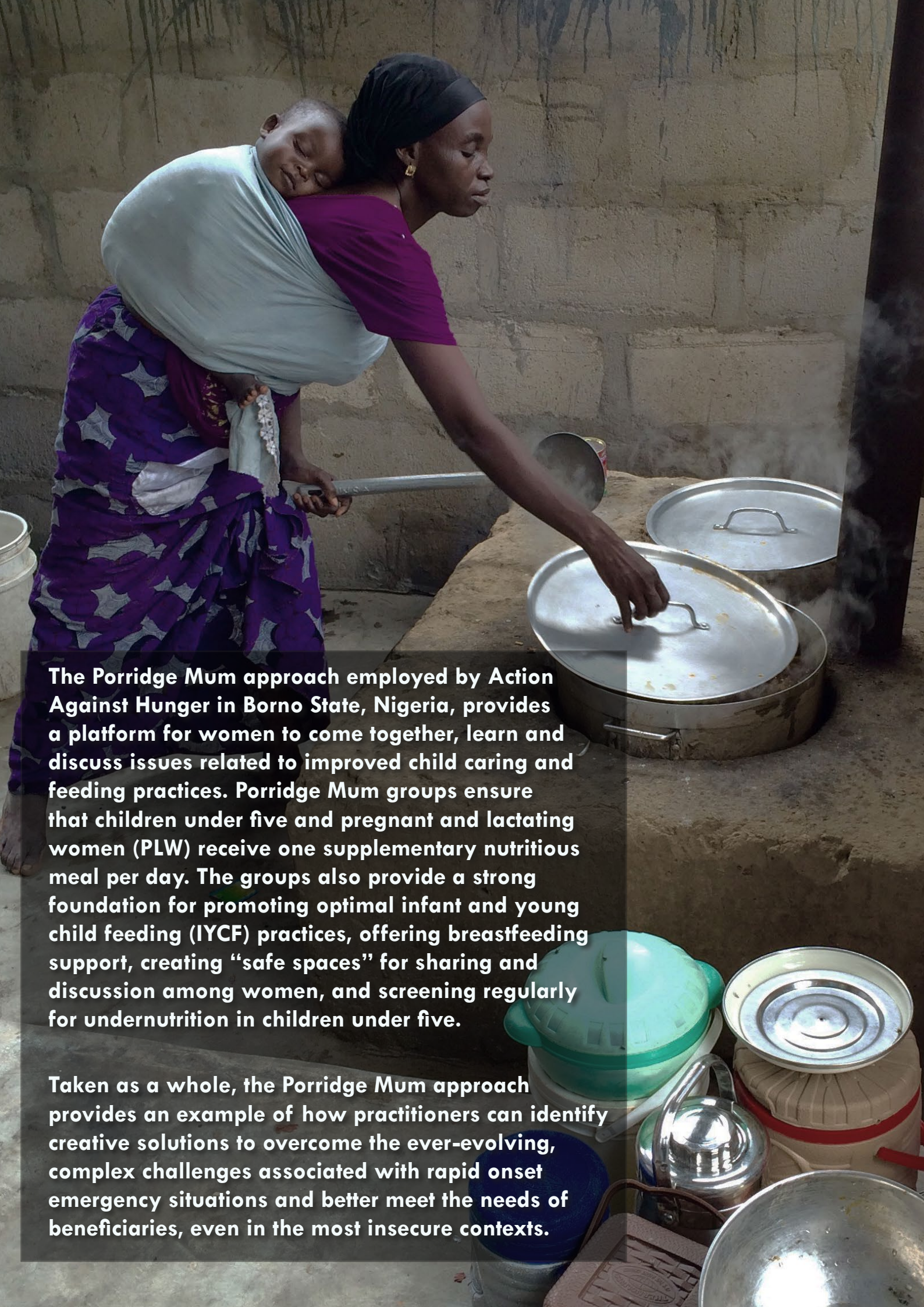




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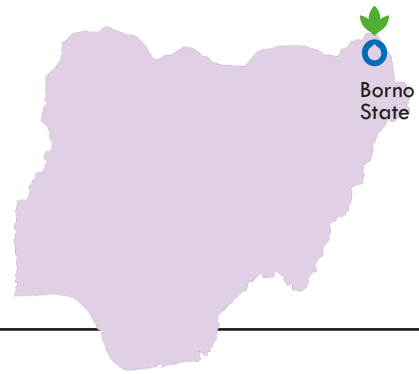
UTILIZING THE PORRIDGE MUM APPROACH
IN RAPID ONSET EMERGENCY SITUATIONS





The Porridge Mum approach employed by Action Against Hunger in Borno State, Nigeria, provides a platform for women to come together, learn and discuss issues related to improved child caring and feeding practices. Porridge Mum groups ensure that children under five and pregnant and lactating women (PLW) receive one supplementary nutritious meal per day. The groups also provide a strong foundation for promoting optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, offering breastfeeding support, creating “safe spaces” for sharing and discussion among women, and screening regularly for undernutrition in children under five.

Taken as a whole, the Porridge Mum approach provides an example of how practitioners can identify creative solutions to overcome the ever-evolving, complex challenges associated with rapid onset emergency situations and better meet the needs of beneficiaries, even in the most insecure contexts.



Humanitarian Context and Program Overview

Background

Since 2009, populations living in northeastern Nigeria have been deeply affected by the continued violence and insecurity resulting from the Boko Haram insurgency, and in May 2013, the Government of Nigeria declared a State of Emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States, those regions worst affected by the armed conflict.

The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) August 2016 Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)¹ starkly demonstrates that Borno continues to host the most internally displaced persons (IDPs) – nearly 1.5 million people – with repeated attacks overwhelming the ability of the Government to deliver basic services and the ability of local populations to carry on with productive livelihoods.

The vulnerability of these IDPs has only continued to increase over the last eight years of conflict, with many households facing precarious food and nutrition conditions, their coping capacities depleted, and hope for improvement limited.

Further, the greater majority of IDPs are not located within traditional displacement camps – over 81% of IDPs in northeastern Nigeria live within host communities and have already been displaced for a year or more.

Even before the current crisis, high levels of chronic poverty were prevalent across the northeastern states, with 67% of the population living with less than \$1.25 USD per day².

Borno was also amongst the most vulnerable states in the country, with alarming levels of global acute malnutrition (GAM) and severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

The current IDP crisis has only exacerbated this precarious livelihood and nutrition situation, both among the displaced and host communities.

In an effort to provide some relief, Action Against Hunger Nigeria has been implementing the “Protecting and Promoting the Food and Nutrition Security of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Borno State, North-Eastern Nigeria” program since 2015.

Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP), the program is comprised of two main elements:

- (1) the provision of cash assistance intended to ensure that households have reliable access to a nutritious food basket, and
- (2) the formation of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) support groups called “Porridge Mums,” within which children under five and pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) receive a daily complementary nutritious meal.

Both the Porridge Mums component and the larger FFP cash assistance program are implemented in the Maiduguri Municipality Council (MMC) and Jere Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Borno State, northeastern Nigeria, with the aim of reaching IDPs living in informal settlements.





Design and Implementation

The Porridge Mums' approach was developed specifically to address those needs identified by a March 2015 assessment, which indicated very low dietary diversity among children under 5 years of age as a key contributor to existing undernutrition levels in IDP and host communities.

Lack of access to food at the household level, hygiene behavior and facilities, knowledge and practices around complementary feeding, and psycho-social trauma's effects on caregiving practices were also found to be drivers of undernutrition in the region.

As a result of this needs assessment, Action Against Hunger designed a comprehensive intervention package that would: provide a full meal to address undernutrition among vulnerable populations, encourage joint preparation of the meal by mothers/caretakers themselves, and ensure the uptake of nutrition education and related training messages (e.g. hygienic preparation and handling).

Additionally, the safe spaces created by the groups support the trauma these families have gone through, addressing protection and mental health aspects, in particular for breastfeeding mothers.

The design is based upon a modified Care Group model for mother-to-mother support in emergency settings and an adapted fuel-efficient stove model for the cooking of nutritious complementary meals.

The approach was also intended to capitalize upon those nutritious recipes already generated within Action Against Hunger's "Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN)" program in Yobe State, as well as WINNN complementary feeding cards and the Nigerian National IYCF guidelines. Pilots for the Porridge Mum groups began in February 2016 and the project concluded in August 2016.

Group Targeting and Functioning

Pilot Porridge Mum groups contained approximately twenty-five women per group, but Action Against Hunger's assessment quickly demonstrated that this group size was too large to function effectively.

Therefore, all of the groups were re-structured around a lower ratio of women per group, with an ideal range of twelve to fifteen women per group, with inclusion according to strict eligibility criteria (PLW with children under 5 years of age or the caregiver of a child under 5 years of age). Each group had two identified group leaders – a secretary and a treasurer.

Together, the secretary and treasurer were responsible for managing the group's resources, including: recording and utilizing food purchases, as well as recording the number of beneficiaries receiving a meal each day.

Kitchen Design

Action Against Hunger adjusted the "Lorena Stove" design to the local context and, after a review of various design options, settled on one specific model for which designs were created and local contractors hired for production.

The large kitchen design was intended to provide shade and sufficient space for gathering, as well as a stove that would allow for the cooking of large quantities of food, whilst still ensuring cooking efficiency (less smoke and fuel).

Action Against Hunger led the site selection process for the Porridge Mum kitchens in each community, working with and through either the Porridge Mums or local leaders to identify specific locations. Permissions were sought from land owners and in most cases, approval was readily given for construction. The seeking of permissions was essential in a situation where displaced populations are settled in host communities, and where property is already owned or claimed.



Technical Approach

The Porridge Mum approach is comprised of two main technical elements:

- (1) the provision of one complementary nutritious meal daily, and
- (2) nutritional lessons that are provided by Action Against Hunger to each group on a monthly basis.

In order to purchase the foods for their complementary meal, each Porridge Mum group received an electronic voucher transfer using a closed loop smart card, which was restricted to commodities associated with the recipes from the WINNN program's "Food Demonstration Manual".

The e-vouchers could be redeemed at a variety of local vendor shops³. Alongside the voucher, Action Against Hunger also provided an allocation for other costs that the group incurred in the process of meeting together, purchasing food at market and cooking.

These additional items include transport costs (for two group members, to ensure transparency), fire wood, grinding services, and water. A lesson plan for the Porridge Mums groups was developed in the initial stages of

the project by Action Against Hunger nutrition staff, based upon the national IYCF guidelines and the WINNN-specific IYCF community-based education materials.

Facilitation of the lesson plan was intended to encourage mothers to participate actively – sharing their experiences and concerns with each other, as well as discussing practical solutions to overcome the challenges they confront.

Action Against Hunger's Nutrition Assistants would start each session by asking the group for their own existing knowledge about the theme of the month. The Nutrition Assistant would then deliver the full lesson, encouraging questions from the group members and asking whether they might have more information to add.

The monthly session would conclude with the Nutrition Assistant explaining the dangers of current practices (if any) and providing a counseling card, which the group used for follow-up discussions during their daily cooking sessions.

In practice, the beneficiaries have appreciated the information given to them as part of these educational sessions. One area identified as "new" knowledge consistently cited across groups was the various breastfeeding positions that helped women to understand the diversity of different positions available to them, so long as the baby's position was proper to ensure it suckled well.

Other areas the women identified as particularly helpful for them were in terms of determining the consistency of the porridge (e.g. not making it too watery), how to tell if the baby may be unhealthy (e.g. rashes) and if/when they should seek treatment, practices to improve personal hygiene (including critical times to wash hands), and which types of food fall into each "food group", including what this means for nutrition overall.

In addition, the women enjoyed the learning of how to make the recipes themselves, and many even cited that they have continued to use the recipes in their home cooking for their individual families. Beneficiaries also reported using the information used in each lesson plan as a topic for discussion with non-beneficiary community members, to educate additional members within the wider population.



Main Factors Influencing Outcomes

Sharing

There is evidence that sharing of food is occurring in the Porridge Mum groups, leading to a number of indirect project beneficiaries, although the degree of sharing varies from group to group and there is no indication that it is shared widely or broadly within communities. Many of these communities receive little assistance from other humanitarian organizations and therefore, this project carries a high profile. Given the nature of sharing and the near unavoidability of a minimal level of sharing, implementing agencies must take this into account when designing and monitoring programs of this type.

Gender

Gender plays a critical role in community dynamics, especially in relation to behavior change. Porridge Mum groups have been specifically targeted to pregnant and lactating women with children under five years of age, or the immediate caregivers of children under five. However, no husbands or community members have been involved in the sensitization process around IYCF, despite their cultural roles influencing decision-making regarding mother's practices.

While the barriers have become clearer, efforts need to be improved to ensure a gender-sensitive approach that also integrates the needs and perspectives of all community members, including men and boys. Future programs should consider joint gender-sensitive educational sessions, creating a space where family members can hear from and communicate with each other on the best care practices for their children.

Place of Origin

One key area of learning was in the diversity of community composition. In some Porridge Mum groups, mothers and caretakers were from the same places of origin (many even with familial relationships); meanwhile in other groups, composition was much more mixed, with

little if any of the relationships bound by pre-existing family ties. Especially in these groups with a diverse composition, social ties seemed to have been strengthened by the Porridge Mum group, which appeared to offer more peer-to-peer support than some of the other groups. This was especially the case when women had lost their husbands, either through conflict, sickness, or other causes.

Local Leadership

Community leaders expressed a clear interest to be more involved in the project, especially at the beginning stages, when groups are formed and construction sites are chosen, but as well when care practice messages are promoted. In many of these displaced communities, traditional leaders are also struggling to maintain their positions within traditional cultural norms and practices. Therefore, by proactively involving community leaders in the process and allowing for a certain level of adaptive management, depending on the needs of each community, community leaders can provide a useful platform for the implementation and sustainability of the Porridge Mum groups over time.

Training

As is so often the case in rapid onset emergency contexts, existing capacity at a local level might not be sufficient to ramp-up emergency programs to scale. In the Porridge Mums' case, it was particularly complex, given that local humanitarian capacities were minimal and nutrition capacities were non-existent. Nutrition Assistants were trained on mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements, and received an orientation on the operational modalities of Porridge Mum groups, as well as the IYCF sessions.

However, there is a need to emphasize that the Nutrition Assistants have a critical role to play in motivating the learning of and changing the behaviors of beneficiaries. Nutrition Assistants, or any other agency's community mobilizers, are truly the front line of quality program

implementation. Even in emergencies, where conditions are not ideal, we must ensure all necessary skills are activated and transferred to program staff. Further, support to local teams should not stop at training and line management; they should be clear about their overall importance in the project, their role in its success and its sustainability.

Adaptation

Lastly, project staff have been remarkably alert to the needs of the beneficiaries, as well as flexible and nimble in their reactivity to potential needs and changes in the field. This was feasible due to the close relationship and understanding between the project team and the Porridge Mum groups, and the high commitment of the team to resolve the real-world challenges associated with implementation.

However, it would not have been feasible without a flexible donor who was supporting the piloting and the adoption of a new approach in a highly complex and fluid context. Finally, the success of the project also benefitted from the ability of the Nigeria project staff to synergize resources across projects, to address the specific local needs of each area. For example, resources from the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) were able to support the construction of a number of latrines and bathing areas, co-located in those areas where Porridge Mum kitchens were constructed.

This synergy of resources, especially staff inputs and expertise, across projects has been of enormous benefit for the Porridge Mums groups and the same level of success would not have been possible otherwise.



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The views expressed in this document are the responsibility of Action Against Hunger and should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of its partners and donors.

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¹ IOM DTM Nigeria Report Round 11, August 2016.

² World Bank, 2013.

³ The cash-based food assistance program had a large range of vendors contracted to participate in the electronic smart card food assistance transfers, the Porridge Mum vendors were a subset of total vendors participating in the cash-based program.

