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Food Aid Quality Review Phase II: Quarterly Technical Report No. 15

July 2019-September 2019

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Acronyms

ACF	Action Against Hunger (<i>Action contre la Faim</i>)
ASSIST	Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (USAID)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
FACET	Food Assistance Cost-Effectiveness Tool (FAQR Decision Support Tool)
FAQR	Food Aid Quality Review
FBF	Fortified Blended Food
FFP	Office of Food for Peace (USAID)
FY 2019	Fiscal Year 2019
INFORMS	Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MSF	<i>Médecins Sans Frontières</i> (Doctors without Borders)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
REFINE	Research Engagement on Food Innovation for Nutritional Effectiveness
SNF	Specialized Nutritious Food
SNFP	Specialized Nutritious Food Product
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	World Food Programme

Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Phase III: Quarterly Technical Report Summary

I. Summary

Covering the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2019 (FY 2019), this report documents the progress of FAQR, as well as details and communicates the output and impact of FAQR Phase III work.

Since its inception, the goal of the Food Aid Quality Review project has been to support the U.S. Government's humanitarian agenda by establishing evidence-based information systems, tools, and data-gathering and evidence-sharing platforms on food aid for nutrition. FAQR's activities and outputs will enable government-wide actions and public/private engagement around food aid to achieve greater cost-effectiveness for decades to come. For a detailed overview of all FAQR activities, see [Annex I](#).

This quarter, the team advanced FAQR objectives in the following areas:

1. FAQR conducted two beta testing webinars and shared the recordings to gather feedback on the Food Assistance Cost Effectiveness Tool (FACET) interface from partner organizations, including international agencies and implementation NGOs. Feedback has been incorporated into the FACET interface and into the draft FACET User Manual.
2. FAQR conducted two disseminations of findings from the Sierra Leone *Four Foods MAM Treatment Study* in August 2019: one in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which was attended by approximately 100 local project partners, representatives from the national and district governments, and stakeholders from United Nations (UN) agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and one in Washington, DC, which was attended by approximately 25 USAID and NGO partners. The dissemination events provided the FAQR research team with the opportunity to communicate key findings of the study and associated sub-studies to domestic and international partners and other stakeholders before submitting the final report to USAID in the upcoming quarter.
3. The FAQR team disseminated a survey to determine how users are engaging with the Research Engagement on Food Interventions for Nutritional Effectiveness (REFINE) website and to gather feedback on how to make the site more useful for them. Survey respondents recommended including more resources for practitioners, such as program guidance and best practices documents, and adding short summaries of the ongoing trials and publications already included on the website.

FAQR Reports and Manuscripts Published in Quarter 4 of Fiscal Year 2019

1. Cliffer, Ilana, Devika Suri, Breanne Langlois, Ye Shen, Laetitia Nikiema Ouedraogo, Augustin Zeba, Hermann Lanou, Franck Garanet, Stephen Vosti, Shelley Walton, Lindsey Ellis Green, Kenneth Chui, Irwin Rosenberg, Patrick Webb, and Beatrice Rogers. *Comparative Cost-Effectiveness of Four Supplementary Foods in Preventing Stunting and Wasting in Children 6-24 Months in Burkina Faso*. Report to USAID. Boston, MA: Tufts University, 2019. Available: <https://foodaidquality.org/sites/default/files/publications/FAQR%20Burkina%20Faso%20Final%20Report%2022%20May%2020191.pdf>.
2. Green, Lindsey Ellis, Ilana Cliffer, Devika Suri, Kristine Caiafa, Beatrice Rogers, and Patrick Webb on behalf of the Food Aid Quality Review Project. "Advancing Nutrition in the International Food Assistance Agenda: Progress and Future Directions Identified at the 2018 Food Assistance for Nutrition Evidence Summit." *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* (September 2019). Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0379572119871715>.
3. Inter-Agency Working Group for Specialized Nutritious Food Products. *12th Annual Meeting Communique*. Prepared for the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Phase III, 2019. (Not publicly available.)

II. Key Activities for the Period July 1, 2019-September 30, 2019

The activities listed below are selected to showcase some of the major accomplishments during the quarter. All workstreams had ongoing activities during this quarter.

A. FACET Interface and User Manual Updates

Two additional beta testing webinars for the Food Assistance Cost Effectiveness Tool (FACET) were hosted during the quarter in order to give interested stakeholders an opportunity to learn about FACET and to provide feedback on the interface. The beta testing events also helped identify potential FACET uses from the perspectives of partner organizations. The first of these webinars was hosted on July 30 for international partners, including Action Against Hunger (ACF), Doctors without Borders (MSF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and USAID. The second was held on August 19 for USAID/FFP's implementation partners, including Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision, and Food for the Hungry. A recording of this webinar was provided to those who could not attend live.

In addition to these webinars, a separate meeting was organized on July 25 with the costing consultant from the WFP Nutrition's Knowledge Management team and several WFP programmatic staff from the field to discuss potential synergies and complementary uses between FACET and the WFP Treatment of MAM Costing Tool.

After the external feedback period closed on August 31, feedback from participants in all previous beta testing sessions was incorporated into the updated FACET interface. In addition to making

substantial changes to the FACET interface, the FAQR Cost Specialist/Data Analyst worked with the FACET User Manual Research Assistant to develop a draft of the FACET user manual.

B. Dissemination of Sierra Leone Treatment Study Findings

The FAQR team hosted two meetings to disseminate findings from the Sierra Leone *Four Foods MAM Treatment Study* in August. The first of these disseminations was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on August 22. Nineteen community leaders were invited from Pujehun District, where the study was conducted, as well as nine staff members from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau, and Statistics Sierra Leone; more than 40 partners from Washington University, Caritas Bo, and Project Peanut Butter; and 20 local representatives from UN agencies, international NGOs, and USAID. At the meeting, Aminata Koroma of the Directorate for Food and Nutrition within the Ministry of Health and Sanitation served as the opening speaker as well as the Master of Ceremonies. Also represented were Miriam Lutz, the USAID representative in Sierra Leone, and Zainab Mansaray of the World Food Programme. The research team presented the findings of the main study on cost-effectiveness, made presentations on the sub-studies, and gave participants the opportunity to ask questions. At this half-day event, participants raised questions about translating evidence to policy and the opportunities for building research capacity within Sierra Leone.

The second dissemination event was held at the USAID/FFP offices in Washington, DC, on August 28. The study results were presented by the full FAQR Sierra Leone research team in front of approximately 25 representatives from FFP, the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) project, and other stakeholders, including World Vision, MHS Consulting, LLC, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, participating in person or via the WebEx platform. FFP's Brian Bacon gave the opening remarks on behalf of the study, highlighting the need to continue the fight against acute malnutrition with evidence-based interventions. Points that arose during the presentation included the need for understanding displacement of breastmilk in supplemental feeding programs as well as the longer-term need for understanding fit-for-purpose commodities and delivery mechanisms.

C. REFINE User Survey Results

The Research Engagement on Food Interventions for Nutritional Effectiveness (REFINE) web database serves as a repository of information about ongoing research, published studies, and other key documents relating to food-supported nutrition interventions for the purposes of facilitating knowledge sharing and supporting research activities related to food assistance with evidence. In order to better understand how users are currently engaging with the REFINE website and to determine what changes might enhance its effectiveness for users, a user survey was developed and disseminated to individuals who had previously signed up to receive informational updates related to FAQR and/or REFINE.

Seventeen individuals responded to the survey, representing USAID, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector. Nine of the respondents reported having used the REFINE website in the past. When asked “How could REFINE broaden its reach and facilitate greater conversation regarding food aid for nutrition research?” respondents suggested: increased Twitter activity (1), increased frequency of Resource Review updates via email (4), increased emails with information content (6), web-based/in-person facilitated topical meetings and conversations (7), and partnering with other major nutrition news sources (2).

Comments from respondents highlighted the need to make REFINE more practitioner-friendly by including programmatic guidance documents and other resources for implementers, a desire for short summaries of each ongoing trial and published study included on the website, and a suggestion to revise the filters to make them more user-friendly. The REFINE team is currently considering making adjustments to the website based on these suggestions and distributing the user survey more broadly in hopes of receiving additional feedback.

III. Plans for the Coming Quarter (October 2019-December 2019)

The matrix below highlights some of the key planned activities for the coming quarter:

A. USAID/FFP Commodity Resource Website
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize USAID/FFP Website Recommendations Report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share final report and content map of existing USAID/FFP Food Assistance commodity website pages with USAID. ○ Receive and integrate feedback from USAID.
B. Food Aid Safety and Quality Systems: Supply Chain Oversight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply Chain Oversight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Present at two session of 2019 Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS) Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present abbreviated Ethiopia scenario manuscript as finalist in Doing Good with Good Operations Research Student Paper Competition. ▪ Present warehouse model framework in Supply Chain Innovations session. ○ Scenario building and analysis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Run first scenario for warehouse model with previously-identified potential global warehouse locations. ▪ Prepare additional scenarios for Ethiopia, including a second scenario with multiple commodities, a scenario involving two Eritrean discharge ports for food distribution to Ethiopia, and a scenario that evaluates the capacity for accurate demand prediction. ○ Manuscripts based on scenario results. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submit first Ethiopia scenario manuscript for publication.
C. Cost-Effectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Assistance Cost-Effectiveness Tool (FACET): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete draft of FACET User Manual. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meet with FFP Nutrition Team to review user manual and updated interface. ▪ Incorporate FAQR team and FFP Nutrition Team feedback into user manual. ▪ Provide copyedited draft to external technical expert review panel and incorporate feedback into final version. ○ Develop video tutorials. ○ Explore development of an offline version of the interface.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost Methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draft cost-effectiveness manuscripts for Sierra Leone trial.

D. Field Research

- Sierra Leone MAM Treatment Study:
 - Draft reports will be completed and submitted to USAID for comment.
 - Manuscripts will be drafted.

E. Interagency Communications and Harmonization

- U.S. Interagency:
 - Conduct working group meeting to discuss progress since last meeting and other updates related to product specifications, packaging, food safety and quality assurance measures, and research.
 - Complete and submit sustainability report to document collaboration and achievements of working group to date and provide recommendations for sustaining efforts going forward.
- U.S.-Global Interagency (Harmonization):
 - Schedule next working group meeting, to be hosted by WFP.
 - Initiate discussions with working group members to share updates since last meeting and to determine preliminary agenda for upcoming meeting.
 - Continue discussion of Secretariat transition with Inter-Agency members.

F. Knowledge Sharing

- REFINE:
 - Web Platform Management.
 - Plan website improvements based on user survey responses.
 - Draft website updates to coincide with upcoming Resource Review.
 - Continue sustainability planning for REFINE website.
 - Complete Lessons Learned from FAQR field research report.
- Communications and Dissemination:
 - Share final Sierra Leone treatment study reports on FAQR website and Twitter.

Annex I.

Overview of the Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) Phase III Activities

For more information on FAQR Phase III, please visit the [FAQR website](#)¹.

I. Background

The Food Aid Quality Review (FAQR) provides the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) and its partners with actionable recommendations on ways to improve nutrition among vulnerable people for whom the direct distribution of food aid can make a significant impact. FAQR Phase I recommendations were published in *Delivering Improved Nutrition: Recommendations for Changes to U.S. Food Aid Products and Programs*². This report led to FAQR Phase II's focus on reformulating fortified blended foods (FBFs), the inclusion of lipid-based products in FFP's commodity list and testing new products under field conditions. A full summary of FAQR Phase II accomplishments is highlighted in the [Food Aid Quality Review Phase II Closeout Report](#)³.

FAQR Phase III⁴ focuses on generating links between research on food product formulation and recommendations on cost-effective programming and policy-level action among national and multilateral institutions engaged in food assistance. Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy is working closely with several domestic and international collaborators, including USAID, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and United Nations (UN) partners, all of whom are committed to strengthening the evidence base for the use of specialized nutritious foods (SNFs) for targeted nutrition goals. The work of FAQR Phase III is framed under three major topics related to food aid: **1) Products, 2) Programming and 3) Processes**.

Products

With a view to making actionable recommendations to USAID, Tufts is examining a number of priority issues, such as how food matrices ("the nutrient and non-nutrient components of foods and their molecular relationship to each other"⁵) affect bioavailability of nutrients and digestibility of products; the potential for thermal/non-thermal processing technologies to improve food matrices; potential roles for existing products which are rarely used today, as well as new products (which may include fortificant powders) and novel packaging technologies to improve resistance to infestation, shelf life, and efficiency of handling; dual-use products for emergency response; and completion of the data collection, analysis and reporting on field studies which assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of newly-formulated food products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition in children.

¹ <http://foodaidquality.org>

² pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadz842.pdf

³ pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00M9B8.pdf

⁴ Contract awarded to Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy for the period covering Feb. 1, 2016-Jan. 31, 2019 with two option years.

⁵ Source: United States Department of Agriculture: National Agricultural Library (<https://agclass.nal.usda.gov>)

Programming

One important focus of FAQR field research and statistical modeling is the cost-effectiveness of various products used in operational settings. This includes strategy development for pre-positioned SNFPs, guidance on options for their use, elaboration of a strategy for responding to food needs in the initial stages of a sudden onset emergency, and dissemination of cost and cost-effectiveness calculation tools. FAQR is generating improved technical guidance, sharing details on research protocols used in testing new food aid products in the field, and making further progress in harmonizing product specifications among food aid donors.

Processes

FAQR Phase III provides recommendations to USAID on institutional and industry processes for capacity building, including the institutionalization and strengthening of interagency technical collaborations and mechanisms to ensure greater policy and product harmonization domestically and internationally. This work provides recommendations for enhanced supply chain oversight, establishes stronger and more user-friendly quality assurance feedback loops, and promotes food safety and quality standards which can also be applied to local and regional food procurement.

FAQR Phase III organizes its ongoing activities into the following workstreams:

([Additional information is available on the FAQR website⁶](#))

A	USAID/FFP Commodity Resource Website
B	Food Aid Safety and Quality Systems: Supply Chain Oversight
C	Cost-Effectiveness
D	Field Research
E	Interagency Communications and Harmonization
F	Knowledge Sharing

⁶ <https://foodaidquality.org/what-we-do>

Annex 2. Meetings and Events during the Period July 1, 2019-September 30, 2019

Select meetings include the following:

- **FACET Meeting with WFP to Discuss Potential Synergies of Costing Tools (July 25, 2019)**

The FAQR Cost Specialist participated in a remote meeting with WFP Nutrition's Knowledge Management Costing Consultant and WFP programmatic field staff to discuss potential synergies related to costing tools. More details can be found in [Section A](#).

- **FACET Beta Testing Webinar for International Partners (July 30, 2019)**

The FAQR Cost Specialist conducted a webinar to introduce FACET to and to solicit feedback on the interface from various international partners, including ACF, MSF, WFP, and USAID. More details can be found in [Section A](#).

- **FACET Beta Testing Webinar for FFP Implementation Partners (August 19, 2019)**

The FAQR Cost Specialist conducted a webinar to introduce FACET to and to solicit feedback on the interface from FFP's implementation partners, including CRS, World Vision, and Food for the Hungry. A recording of this webinar was made available to those partners who could not participate directly. More details can be found in [Section A](#).

- **Sierra Leone MAM Treatment Study: Dissemination in Freetown, Sierra Leone (August 22, 2019)**

Chaired by the Director of the Directorate of Food and Nutrition within the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the dissemination event held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, was well attended by stakeholders from Pujehun District and Freetown. The half-day event was held at the Bintumani Hotel. Key highlights included encouraging country ownership and building local capacity for high-quality research. More details can be found in [Section B](#).

- **Sierra Leone MAM Treatment Study: Dissemination in Washington, DC (August 28, 2019)**

With opening remarks by FFP's Brian Bacon, the dissemination event in Washington, DC, was well attended by team members from USAID Food For Peace and other members of the nutrition community both in person and via the WebEx platform. Discussion centered on the role of complementary feeding and evidence of effectiveness of delivery modalities. More detail will be forthcoming in the comprehensive reports. More details can be found in [Section B](#).

Annex 3. REFINE Twitter and Website Analytics

@REFINEnutrition Twitter Analytics for this quarter:

Total Followers: 317

	Tweets ⁷	Retweets ⁸	Likes ⁹	Link Clicks ¹⁰	Tweet Impressions ¹¹
July	2	0	2	N/A	582
August	3	0	2	N/A	965
September	2	1	2	N/A	494
TOTAL	7	1	6	N/A	2,041

www.refinenutrition.org Google Analytics for this quarter:

	Total Number of Sessions ¹²	New Sessions ¹³	Average Pages Per Session ¹⁴
July	124	154	2.39
August	238	273	1.18
September	115	138	1.06
TOTAL	477	565	1.54
April-June 2019	565	453	1.87

⁷ "Tweet:" a post made on Twitter.

⁸ "Retweet:" a repost or forwarding of a Tweet.

⁹ "Like:" an appreciation of a Tweet.

¹⁰ "Links Clicked:" the total number of clicks on a URL in a Tweet.

¹¹ "Impressions:" the total number of account Twitter streams a Tweet was delivered to.

¹² "Session:" a user's interaction on the site from the time a user logs onto the site until they are inactive on the site for 30 minutes.

¹³ "New Session:" a user's first visit to the site during that period of Google analytics.

¹⁴ "Average Pages Per Session:" average number of pages visited by a user during one session.

Annex 4. FAQR Twitter and Website Analytics

@foodaidquality Twitter Analytics for this quarter:

Total Followers: 229

	Tweets¹⁵	Retweets¹⁶	Likes¹⁷	Link Clicks¹⁸	Tweet Impressions¹⁹
July	19	14	19	13	10,400
August	14	8	26	17	9,457
September	1	0	0	0	3,852
TOTAL	34	22	45	30	23,709

www.foodaidquality.org Google Analytics for this quarter:

	Total Number of Sessions²⁰	New Sessions²¹	Average Pages Per Session²²
July	207	132	3.36
August	241	181	1.98
September	169	139	1.79
TOTAL	617	452	2.37
April 2019 - June 2019	698	505	2.42
January 2017-September 2019	9,370*	6,100	2.57

¹⁵ "Tweet:" a posting made on Twitter

¹⁶ "Retweet:" a repost or forwarding of a Tweet

¹⁷ "Like:" an appreciation of a Tweet

¹⁸ "Links Clicked:" the total number of clicks on a URL in a Tweet

¹⁹ "Impressions:" the total number of account Twitter streams a Tweet was delivered to

²⁰ "Session:" a user's interaction on the site from the time a user logs onto the site until they are inactive on the site for 30 minutes

²¹ "New Session:" a user's first visit to the site during that period of Google analytics

²² "Average Pages Per Session:" average number of pages visited by a user during one session

⁸ Adjusted to correct for error in reporting in previous reports