



THE RIGHT START TO LIFE

Stories of Nourishing the First 1000 Days

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Municipal Health Office team of Carles together with their local government officials — the people behind accelerating BFIKD in the municipality.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



With an aim to enhance, accelerate and expand nutrition interventions in Philippines, Nutrition International has been working with the Government of Philippines and Helen Keller International to strengthen the country's health and nutrition programs. Nutrition International's work includes boosting government health systems and service delivery, building capacity of healthcare workers, and improving knowledge of caregivers on key nutrition interventions and their uptake of nutrition services and commodities.

In 2018, Nutrition International launched the Right Start Initiative in the provinces of Antique, Iloilo, Cebu and Bohol to support the Department of Health's (DOH) National Nutrition Program.

The initiative aimed to:

- (i)** Strengthen DOH systems in the delivery of nutrition services as part of maternal nutrition and child health and nutrition (MNCHN) strategy;
- (ii)** Strengthen local government units' (LGU) capacity in planning, implementing and managing nutrition specific services; and
- (iii)** Increase the coverage of iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation, community-level promotion and support for exclusive breastfeeding among infants aged 0-5 months, and increase coverage of micronutrient powder (MNP) supplementation for infants aged 6-23 months to reduce micronutrient deficiencies.

The project laid out interventions that scaled up, and led to the birth

of the Barangay First 1000 Days (BF1KD) program.

The BF1KD program is a barangay-led mother-to-mother support group for all pregnant women and lactating mothers with children aged 0-23 months. While it serves to complement facility-based services, the program also caters to nutrition education, skill-building activities, distribution of nutrition commodities and tracking its consumption, and uptake of desired nutrition friendly behaviours.

The BF1KD program utilizes a behaviour change communication strategy that focuses on interactions among mothers to facilitate learning and desired behaviour change. The strategy also makes use of information, education and communication materials that support facilitation and counselling.

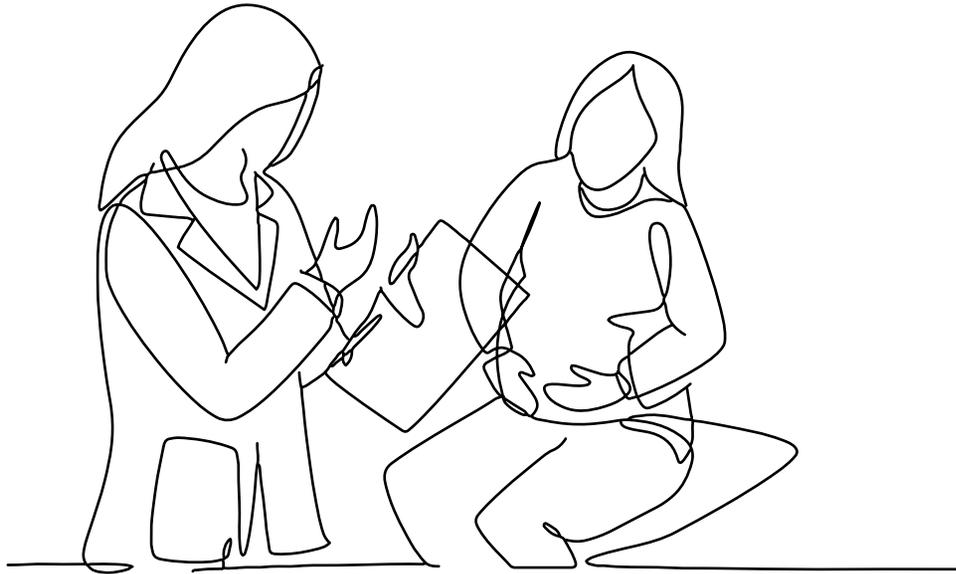
As the project guides the desired behaviour change, frontline health workers are trained to track the nutrition behaviour and practices of pregnant and lactating women.

Data gathered from the tracking process is used for course correction and to manage the health of beneficiaries identified as nutritionally at-risk.

The data is consolidated in a dashboard which is presented during nutrition review meetings, where discussions are held to compare strategies that worked well in the respective LGUs and challenges

Young mothers posing with iron & folic acid (IFA) compliance calendars distributed during a BFIKD meeting. These calendars help mothers keep track of their IFA tablet consumption.





Right Start Initiative by **Nutrition International** aims to:

- » Strengthen the delivery of nutrition services as part of maternal nutrition and child health and nutrition
- » Help local government units in planning, implementing and managing nutrition specific services
- » Increase the coverage of iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation, community-level promotion and support for exclusive breastfeeding among infants aged 0-5 months, and increase coverage of micronutrient powder (MNP)

encountered during implementation. The LGUs utilize the summary of these discussions to strengthen implementation of FIKD interventions.

As part of its program, Nutrition International aims to institutionalize BFIKD at the local level, which has accelerated to the drafting of ordinances and resolutions on FIKD. This has ensured sustainability of the program even in the absence of technical assistance from non-government organizations.

This compendium captures the stories and experiences of frontline workers and barangays' leaders during the program implementation. It narrates the impact of interventions on the lives of children, parents, health workers, local government officials and units, as well as the struggles they encountered along the way.

The compendium also features stories of change and support in the FIKD implementation as the community adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to the new normal. It highlights how partner provinces and municipalities persisted in promoting FIKD nutrition education as deemed significant alongside the pandemic.

Gender sensitivity also features in the compendium, as fathers shed light on their perception and involvement in the FIKD journey of their children. This reflects the inclusivity of FIKD responsibility amongst parents, and even communities.

Altogether, this compendium encapsulates how the Right Start Initiative made an impact, overcame challenges, and elevated FIKD over time, thereby paving the way to better health and nutrition for the children of Philippines.

A woman with dark hair tied back is sitting on a red patterned mat, breastfeeding her baby. She is wearing a colorful patterned top. The baby is wearing a white tank top and blue socks. The background shows a wall made of mud bricks and a window with a view of the outdoors. A blue water container is visible on the left side of the frame.

**“Breastfeeding
is already part of my
lifestyle. It’s a mother’s
instinct to [breast]
feed her child.”**

Mary Chris Balayo,
mother

Breastfeeding comes first to this FIRST-TIME MOM

Mary Chris Balayo always knew the importance of breastmilk. But, like all new mothers, she too faced troubles initiating breastfeeding to her newborn son, Zheus. Her fellow mothers from BF1KD meetings helped her by demonstrating correct breastfeeding positions and latching techniques which they had learned during BF1KD meetings.



As a first-time mother, Mary Chris was eager to learn practices that would support Zheus' optimal growth. Her engagement at the Barangay First 1,000 Days (F1KD) meetings taught her much about motherhood and F1KD. She found the session on exclusive breastfeeding very relevant to her priority to nurture Zheus. Mary Chris knew that exclusive breastfeeding would boost his immune system; an added bonus is that it is economical practice. Purchasing formula is unnecessary, especially when the mother's breastmilk contains all the nutrients required by a growing 0-5-month child.

"I delivered my baby during the pandemic. This unique experience of becoming a mother for the first time, in a pandemic, made things difficult. But I knew that, with precautions, several practices must be followed, specifically breastfeeding," shared Mary Chris. Other mothers, part of the BF1KD meetings, often talked about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding in the child's F1KD journey. Now that she was breastfeeding herself, Mary Chris understood these lessons. She trusted that exclusive breastfeeding provides the best protection she can offer to her little boy. Like most mothers, Mary Chris experienced issues in breastfeeding during the first days of motherhood, such as lack of breastmilk, as well as pain or discomfort while feeding. The

demonstrations of appropriate breastfeeding positions and proper latching that were performed during the BF1KD meetings were effective in resolving her problems. She conditioned her mind and body to build a positive mindset towards breastfeeding and looked forward to feeding Zheus with her breastmilk each day. But, after all, it takes more than a positive outlook. To practice breastfeeding regularly, Mary Chris needed support from her community and family. The mothers who took part in the BF1KD meetings became her guides and motivated her throughout her F1KD journey. At home, her husband extended unending support right from when Mary Chris conceived, throughout her pregnancy and when Zheus was born. From taking responsibility for household chores to cooking nutritious food for his wife, Nicky ensures his active involvement in every step of their F1KD journey.

While Mary Chris continues to breastfeed Zheus, she feels grateful to have a strong support system including the BF1KD mother-to-mother support group and a caring husband. The support group enhanced her knowledge of breastfeeding. She received huge support and assistance from the mentors and participants of the group. Mary Chris feels that every mother should have a similar support system like she had, as they navigate the F1KD journey together.

Health Workers registering pregnant mothers at a BFKD meeting.



The strong pillars of NUTRITION GOVERNANCE

Realizing the importance of FIKD and the impact it can have in reducing malnutrition in the Antique province, the Provincial Health Office extended full support to facilitate methodical tracking of the receipt and consumption of nutrition commodities and the compliance to nutrition practices.



Nutrition International values the impact of nutrition governance in heightening awareness on the first 1,000 days (FIKD). When it launched the Right Start Initiative in four provinces of the Philippines in 2018, the intervention began with the engagement of local government units (LGU) and their leaders. These local chief executives participated in advocacy meetings, coordination meetings, monitoring and evaluation, and ordinance formulation.

While Nutrition International, in partnership with Helen Keller International, implemented the BF1KD program in Philippines, one of the project's provinces—Antique—demonstrated exemplary governance support towards scaling up the BF1KD practices. Constant communication with the Provincial Health Office (PHO) of Antique further reinforced the commitment of the LGUs towards the project.

Realizing the importance of FIKD and the impact it can have in reducing malnutrition in the province, the PHO extended full

support to facilitate capacity building, advocacy meetings and monitoring activities. Jocelyn Morano, the PHO's District Nutrition Program Coordinator often accompanied the project team in the BF1KD activities.

While observing various monitoring activities, the PHO witnessed how Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) and Barangay Health Workers (BHW) were educated on facilitating BF1KD meetings through a series of capacity-building workshops. They observed how mothers actively participated in the meetings and shared their FIKD experiences. From the discussions at the meetings, the LGUs realized how to strengthen service delivery and health management of pregnant and lactating women. With such tracking mechanisms, the LGUs gained data that they could translate to action to improve the implementation process.

Based on the learnings from the data analysis, the provincial government of Antique advanced the approval of the FIKD provincial

A Barangay Health Worker interacting with an expecting mother during a BFKD meeting.



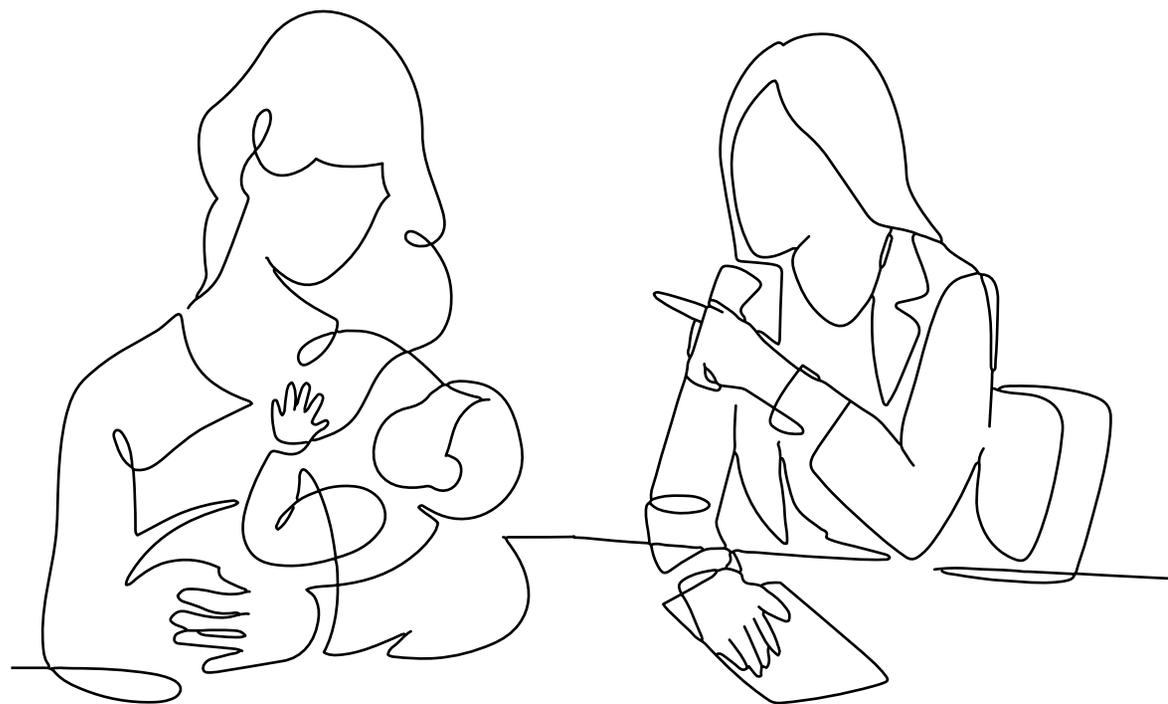
ordinance directing the institutionalization of the BF1KD project in the province. With this, the PHO's Provincial Nutrition Committee (PNC) was able to allocate a budget for the expansion of BF1KD project to five additional municipalities in Antique: Anini-y, Barbaza, Laua-an, Libertad and Tibiao.

Like other municipalities, Mildred Mario, Municipal Nutrition Action Officer of Tibiao is grateful that her municipality was included in the expansion as this would improve the nutrition of their children and pregnant women.

However, to achieve this vision she emphasizes the importance of each stakeholder to perform their responsibility dedicatedly. "If everyone focused on FIKD, we could address all nutrition problems. No child would remain malnourished. Parents need to commit to learn and practice the desired nutrition behaviors, frontline health workers must facilitate nutrition education, and LGUs must support the health and nutrition programs" Mario says while hinting at a multi-stakeholder partnership.

Manuel Delgado, Municipal Nutrition Action Officer of Anini-y Municipality shares a similar perspective. He says, "The project can help widen the FIKD knowledge of both frontline health workers and mothers." Manuel anticipates that this expansion would empower the BNS and BHW in delivering FIKD messages to beneficiaries and support effective counselling.

The expansion of BF1KD program in the additional municipalities is now in full swing. The orientation and capacity-building trainings are underway. The PNC and the respective LGUs are funding the expansion, which will enable the BF1KD program to reach 18,339 pregnant women and mothers of children aged 0-23 months in 15 municipalities within Antique.



 FIKD is very significant because all nutrition problems that would surface beyond two years of age depend on the first 1,000 days of the child. 

Mildred Mario, Municipal Nutrition Action Officer of Tibiao Municipality

Provincial Health Office of Iloilo provided breastfeeding kits to the winners of the Nutri-mom Quiz, a segment on Nutrition Diary episodes.



Connecting Mothers via NUTRITION DIARIES

Nutrition Diary, a virtual talk show hosted on the Iloilo PHO Facebook page focused on educating pregnant women, lactating mothers and health workers about the importance of nutrition during COVID-19 and to ensure that they did not overlook their FIKD journey due to fear of infection.



A critical window of opportunity for an infant and young child, the first 1,000 days (FIKD) is an ongoing nutrition intervention that cannot be interrupted even by a pandemic. In March 2020, when COVID-19 hit Philippines, it was crucial to ensure that the FIKD interventions persisted, despite the pandemic restrictions.

Fighting all odds, the Iloilo province health office envisioned innovative means to traverse the limitations of the new normal. Leni Causing, the Provincial Nutrition Coordinator of the Provincial Health Office (PHO), shared some of the challenging hurdles to executing health and nutrition interventions amidst the pandemic. “We do not have the means to go out and perform the routine health and nutrition activities and advocate for investment in nutrition,” said Leni.

Supported by Nutrition International and Hellen Keller International, the PHO examined alternative platforms to reach target beneficiaries and health workers. The team decided to migrate to online platforms to disseminate nutrition messages. This led to the conception of

Nutrition Diary, a virtual talk show hosted on the Iloilo PHO Facebook page. The purpose of the show was to educate pregnant women, lactating mothers and health workers about the importance of nutrition during COVID-19 and to ensure that they did not overlook their FIKD journey due to fear of infection. The first show celebrated Nutrition Month in July 2021, and live episodes aired daily on the Facebook page.

Nutrition Diary invited health and nutrition professionals to discuss FIKD-related topics. Episodes focused on a range of topics including oral health of pregnant women, birth planning during an emergency, breastfeeding, complementary feeding for children aged 6-23 months, food handling and preparation during COVID-19. Like the BFIKD meetings, Nutrition Diary also prioritized mothers’ preferences on upcoming topics by asking the audience what topics they wanted to discuss based on their current needs. Some of the most popular episodes featured mental health experts discussing issues and experiences faced by pregnant women, as well as agriculturists who explored food security in relation to complementary feeding.

A question being shown on a placard during the Nutri-Mom Quiz, part of the Nutrition Dairy show.



NUTRI-MOM-QUIZ ONLINE

Question #1

**ANO ANG TATLO KA STAGES
SANG 1000 DAYS OF LIFE
SANG ISA KA BATA?**

True to the mother-to-mother approach, Nutrition Diary featured a Nutri-Mom Quiz in every episode, where the PHO posed assessment questions to the mothers who responded through live comments. The talk show also made specific hashtags for each episode to index the topics and boost engagement during the live premiere. In an episode discussing the importance of breastfeeding among infants and young children, Nutrition Diary used the hashtag '#IAmThankfulFor' in the comment section to compel personal thoughts of the audience. To engage more mothers in this talk show, the PHO also provided incentives like household items and breastfeeding kits to the winners of the online quiz.

The final episode of Nutrition Diary aired on August 13, 2021. However, the PHO continues to leverage the show's popularity. Soon, the PHO will launch virtual courses on scaling up nutrition programs. These courses will help enable health workers to deliver maternal nutrition services within their communities.



 As we continued with Nutrition Diary, we realized that more and more mothers began to wait for each episode and anticipate the health and nutrition information and updates imparted through the show. 

Leni Causing,
Provincial Nutrition Coordinator

 I am thankful for today's blessing, good health, healthy body, and the knowledge and information I get from this show. Thank you so much to all the PHO staff who live-stream Nutrition Diary every day and to all the speakers for sharing meaningful information with mothers like me. 

Conie Solis, Mother of a four-month-old baby



FROM GARDEN TO TABLE: Feeding nutritious food during the pandemic

Nutrition International traced the beneficiaries of the backyard gardening project and with the help of Department of Agriculture distributed seedlings to pregnant women and lactating mothers, encouraging to build and maintain their own backyard gardens from where they can daily source nutritious food like vegetables and fruits.



One cannot speak of malnutrition without discussing food consumption. The critical window of the first 1,000 days (F1KD) underscores the vital importance of adequate food intake, from conception until the child reaches two years of age. Trailing the causes of inadequate food intake during F1KD, food insecurity emerges as one of the underlying determinants. Through the Barangay F1KD (BF1KD) program, Nutrition International has been attempting to build linkages among different community sectors to ensure food security to nutritionally high-need community members.

From the outset, Nutrition International has endeavoured a multidisciplinary approach in its program activities. Evaluating the interventions of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Nutrition International traced the beneficiaries of the backyard gardening

project to be the same as the beneficiaries of the BF1KD program. By distributing seedlings to pregnant women and lactating mothers, DA encourages them to build their own backyard gardens. With this initiative, DA aims to provide households with easy access, budget-friendly and nutritious food sources.

Linking the program with DA's initiative, BF1KD meetings also started promoting backyard gardening in discussions, especially during the complementary feeding sessions. The facilitators—Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) and Barangay Health Workers (BHW)—encourage participants to build and maintain their own backyard gardens from where they can daily source nutritious food like vegetables and fruits.

The initiative became even more valuable for many families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Michelle Pelina's family depends on the money

A lady watering the fruits and vegetables grown in the backyard garden, part of the Backyard Gardening project.



her husband Janrix earns from commercial fishing. Like many, the Pelina family struggled to get back when income-generation halted during the months-long lockdowns of the pandemic. Thanks to their backyard garden—planted with the seedlings provided by DA—Michelle and her family had access to nutritious food during these testing times.

Some of the plants that Michelle grew in their backyard garden included kamote (sweet potato), okra (lady finger), talong (eggplant), ampalaya (bitter gourd), malunggay (horseradish), kalabasa (squash), and papaya. Every morning, Michelle checked the garden for weeds, which she diligently removed, to maintain good soil and steady growth of her plants. Learning from their mother, Michelle's two children also got involved in caring for the garden and helped water the plants. Under Michelle's supervision, her children started spending time in the garden every day.

Michelle had participated in the BF1KD program when she was pregnant with her second child. The program familiarized her with complementary feeding sessions, which encouraged her to provide appropriate and adequate food items to her children. Learning from the food demonstrations about preparing enticing food for children without compromising its nutritional content, Michelle still practices the “no-junk” rule religiously. Her children love Michelle's garden-to-table recipes, like squash with coconut milk (in which she often adds malunggay for added nutrition) and the local dish called laswa which is a soup made of okra, talong and kalabasa. Observing her children's happiness when they eat these dishes, Michelle knows these dishes taste good and provide a variety of nutritious vegetables and fruits in one meal.

“Our household can harvest crops in our backyard anytime and thereby offer adequate nutrition to our children,” says Michelle proudly. She is happy that her children can eat nutritious food and that they are healthy and active. She is delighted to have attended the BF1KD meetings where she learned not only about healthy F1KD practices, but also about growing a backyard garden. Thanks to BF1KD, Michelle and many mothers like her are scaling up these essential nutrition practices at home to support their growing families.

It's [backyard garden] convenient because we can immediately harvest vegetables and fruits and can eat them daily.

Michelle Pelina, Mother of two children



A Barangay Nutrition Scholar prepares for the radio show - 'BF1KD-on-Air'.



Barangay First 1000 Days Program GOES ON AIR

Radio technology aids in continuing the BFIKD program in Carles, despite the challenges and restrictions posed by COVID-19.



When he introduced a special episode on COVID-19 and nutrition on the BFIKD on Air Radio Show, Dr. Wendel Marcelo said, “Nutrition cannot wait. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, nutrition services should continue. At the very least, nutrition education should persist.” While the pandemic put restrictions on communities and limited physical interactions with mothers, Dr. Marcelo—the Municipal Nutrition Action Officer of the Carles municipality in Iloilo province—found creative ways to convert these limitations into opportunities.

Carles is home to 33 barangays—18 of which are located on islands. In April 2021, stricter restrictions were imposed in the municipality, which made meeting mothers even more difficult than before considering the lockdowns and quarantines. This meant that the municipality could not conduct workshops to educate mothers on breastfeeding, newborn care, feeding practices, and self-care. However, the municipality’s nutrition officers were adamant in their drive to ensure the good health of the mothers in their region. They explored radio technology to impart education on health and nutrition and launched a radio show dedicated to the topics—BFIKD on Air.

This new show airs on DYTC 92.1 FM, and focuses on providing nutrition education about the first 1,000 days (F1KD). It proved to be an excellent platform to deliver significant messages to pregnant women and mothers of infants aged 0–23 months. The BFIKD Facilitators’ Guide, distributed by Nutrition International and Helen Keller International as one of the program’s behaviour change communication materials, became the guiding force for producing each radio episode. The guide consists of 18 topics ranging from pregnancy, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, consumption of iron folic acid tablets and micronutrient powder, COVID-19, and more. An episode is developed on each topic from the guide and special guests including doctors, nutritionists and program experts were invited to discuss each topic and deliver important messages on maternal and newborn care and nutrition. At the end of every episode, the hosts sign off with their signature tagline, “Sa F1KD, bida si mommy at si baby”, which translates to “The mother and the baby are the key players in F1KD journey.”

The Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) and Barangay Health Workers (BHW) who were trained as facilitators in the BFIKD program learned how to moderate the discussions as co-anchors with the host. “We were actually nervous. It was our first time to sit as anchors in a radio



YTC 92.1 FM
Timbo-ok

Truly Cares

PBS
PHILIPPINE BROADCASTING SERVICES
BUREAU OF BROADCAST SERVICES

RPI
RADYO PILIPINAS

MUNICIPALITY of CARLES
Municipal Health Office

BF1KD-ON-AIR
Barangay First 1000 Days via Radyo Timbo-ok

RADYO TIMBO-OK 92.1 FM
CARLES HEALTH & NUTRITION HOUR
Wednesday & Friday | 4:00 - 5:00 PM

Nutrition education sessions on First 1000 Days via Radyo Timbo-ok hosted by BNS & BHA (BF1KD) facilitators.

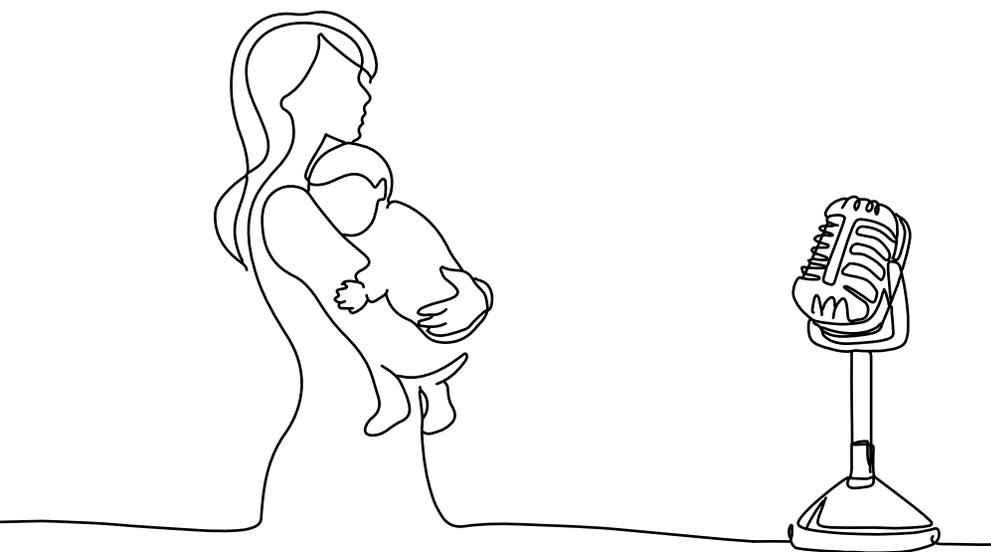
Canada **NUTRITION** INTERNATIONAL
Helen Keller INTERNATIONAL

BF1KD trained Barangay Health Worker and Barangay Nutrition Scholar hosts the BF1KD-on-Air episode and addressing their radio listeners.

booth. To reduce my anxiety of being on air, I just imagined that I am facilitating an actual BF1KD meeting with the mothers,” says Jeneth Hangor Bandojo, BNS.

The radio show also invited mothers to share their experiences of the BF1KD program and what they learned from it. Listeners were engaged by posing questions which they responded to by calling the telephone hotline and by commenting on the show’s Facebook page. In addition to broadcasting on the radio every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, the show aired live on Facebook to reach a wider audience.

BF1KD on Air has garnered the appreciation of the community and the local government. People from all barangays of Carles, neighbouring municipalities in the fifth district of Iloilo, and some areas in Capiz and Masbate listen to each episode of the show. What started as a pilot show to be aired once a week is now broadcasting thrice every week, with the audience growing with every episode. BF1KD on Air is successfully sensitizing the community about F1KD and the role every listener plays in ensuring safe and healthy motherhood and childhood.



“ FIKD is a critical window of life. That’s why it is important for the child to receive enough care and proper nutrition to avoid getting sick.”

18 years old **Joshua Grace Rosal**, a listener and caller at the show

“ Without proper nutrition during FIKD, the child will be malnourished and have delayed developments in all aspects. The child will be prone to more sickness as s/he grows.”

Llanesa Gonzales, 29 years old a listener and caller at the show



Felix playing with his 18-month-old son, Franchiss while Kacy looks on.

The first 1,000 days from a FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

“Men must play active role in childcare,” says Felix Candedesimo, father of 1.5 years old Franchiss, who believes that dads like him need to earnestly participate in the growth and development of their child. He steers clear from the accustomed beliefs of the society and desires to be present throughout his son’s FIKD journey.



Society constructed notions may hint that nutrition practices for infants and young children are a feminine role. However, the BFIKD program emphasizes the joint responsibility and commitment of all caregivers surrounding the child. “Men must take an active role in childcare,” says Felix Candedesimo, father of 18-month-old Franchiss. Felix believes that dads like him must be earnest participants in the growth and development of their children. He steers clear from the accustomed beliefs of society and desires to be present throughout his son’s FIKD journey.

Felix and his wife Kacy are enthusiastic about parenting their firstborn. Despite this new chapter of their lives being alien to them, they strive to provide for all of their son’s physical and emotional needs.

As Felix confidently shares his daily routine, he does not act like the stereotypical working father. He loves holding Franchiss in his arms and feels that holding him provides comfort and safety to both father

and child. “I am the one who often holds our son,” says Felix proudly as he describes learning the right technique of holding an infant many years ago with his nieces.

Together with his wife, Felix alternately takes charge of feeding Franchiss. From the lessons Kacy learned at BFIKD meetings, she taught Felix to not provide commercial instant cereals to Franchiss as they do not have any nutritional value. They decided to opt for locally available nutritious foods, which they serve in family meals like fish, meat and vegetables. Attending BFIKD meetings helped them understand that a growing child needs to consume items from different food groups to get the necessary nutrients. Felix cooks ginataang kalabasa (squash in coconut milk) and sinabawang mungo (mung bean soup) which Franchiss likes the most. For breakfast or snacks, the couple works together to prepare porridge with sliced eggs.

Devoted to parenthood and his son’s wellbeing, Felix religiously accompanies his wife and son to the health centres for routine health



Felix preparing food to feed his son, Franchiss.

check-ups. He often stands out as the only father in a crowd of mothers. At every check-up, the couple brings The Mother and Child Book, which is distributed by the Rural Health Unit to pregnant women during their first prenatal check-up. Felix finds this book essential since it documents the health and nutrition information of his wife during pregnancy and of Franchiss after birth. The book includes a tracking and monitoring form for prenatal, postnatal and post-delivery care, which Felix finds very useful to monitor his family's progress during F1KD and as a reminder for health check-ups and immunizations.

Felix is glad that he and Kacy learned the lessons imparted during the BF1KD program and practiced each of them with Franchiss. The couple initiated complementary feeding for Franchiss at the right time. They understand the long-term effects of good F1KD practices and are delighted to see their son growing happy and healthy with a strong immune system.



 Raising a child is a very difficult responsibility. I had to learn special techniques for bathing Franchiss, feeding him, and tucking him to sleep—all were physically tiring. Now, as Franchiss grows older, he has become more active and playful. However, seeing my son healthy and happy eases all the exhaustion and struggles. Yes, it [childcare] is difficult, but it is soothing after a long tiring day.

Felix Candedesimo, 
father of a 18-month-old boy



BFIKD team sits with the local chief executives of Borbon to discuss their affirmative actions and suggest resolutions to implementation challenges

Local governance is the fuel to successfully implementing NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

A legislation which included interventions on pregnancy, breastfeeding, birth, the newborn period, and nutrition of infants aged six months to two years was well disseminated and implemented at the barangay level.



While nutrition interventions need champions, it is local governance that fuels operations and implementation of those interventions. Their leadership influences the initiatives of technical working groups and interest from constituents. The BF1KD program is one such example of leadership, which materialized through ownership and participation of local government units (LGU).

Borbon, Cebu is one of the municipalities where the BF1KD program was implemented. When Nutrition International introduced the Right Start Initiative to the municipality, local officials realized the potential of BF1KD as a platform for mothers to learn and re-learn important health and nutrition information. “The Borbon LGU is always supportive to all the projects of the Department of Health and other non-government organizations, which help us reduce malnutrition,” said Dr. Corazon Dotillos, the municipality’s Municipal Nutrition Action Officer. The encouraging program reception compelled the Local Chief Executives (LCE) and officials to take ownership and sustain F1KD interventions.

In 2018, Borbon continued its commitment to nutrition by passing an ordinance to scale up nutrition for F1KD. The legislation included interventions on pregnancy, breastfeeding, birth, the newborn period, and nutrition of infants aged six months to two years. Together with Nutrition International and Helen Keller International, Borbon initiated a covenant signing with its barangay captains to ensure that the ordinance was well disseminated and implemented at the barangay level.

After the successful dissemination, the BF1KD program was moved ahead for integration in the Municipal Nutrition Action Plan and Annual Investment Plan. This granted a specific budget allocation to BF1KD interventions. Due to the dedication of the LGU officials like Dr. Dotillos to ensure that nutrition programs have enough financial support for its operations, nutrition interventions alone received a budget of Php 2 million from the Gender and Development (GAD) appropriations. Further, Dr. Dotillos included BF1KD as one of the agenda items at the regular meetings of the Municipal Nutrition

Nutrition International and Helen Keller International together with the Municipal Health Office team which leads BFKD implementation in Borbon.



Committee (MNC), where officials review updates of BF1KD implementation and course correct operations as needed.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, it strained the Borbon municipality and disrupted the platforms to implement BF1KD interventions. However, even with a small number of mothers present at the physical workshops, the facilitators were eager to provide accurate information—all while maintaining safety precautions. The program appointed Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) as the main facilitators of BF1KD meetings. To acknowledge their dedication through compensation, the LGU approved a monthly honorarium of Php 1,000, and a year-end incentive of Php 5,000 and Php 4,000 from the municipality and the province, respectively.

These BNS regularly report on the progress and challenges of the BF1KD meetings. One of the most significant challenges they faced was the mothers' inconsistent attendance. To motivate mothers to attend all meetings, the LGU adopted varied solutions—they added an award of Php 1,000 for mothers who completed all sessions, provided snacks during BF1KD meetings and offered transportation services for mothers residing in distant areas.

The institutional efforts of Borbon to scale up F1KD interventions won the municipality the Good Nutrition Project Award, while the Bingay Barangay (one of the partner barangays) won the Best Performing Barangay Nutrition Council Award.

Moving forward, the LGU seeks to heighten the involvement of their barangay captains during the MNC meetings—where the dashboards quantifying BF1KD progress are presented to the technical working group. This way, officials and frontline health workers will understand the gravity of their responsibility to influence the mothers' attitudes and behaviours.

Continuing their F1KD advocacy, Borbon walks with the challenge of involving the community, especially the mothers, in this cause. The LGU continues to stay true to its efforts and scaling them up, as they believe that “the more information the mother gains, the better it will be for the children.”

 We saw that the BF1KD program generates education and facilitates behaviour adaptation among mothers, which is highly important for them. 

Dr. Corazon Dotillos,
Municipal Nutrition Action Officer,
Borbon Municipality



Mothers and Barangay Nutrition Scholars posing for a picture at one of the Moving Up Ceremonies.



Mothers celebrate THE FIKD JOURNEY

Moving Up Ceremony acknowledged mothers who had participated in the BF1KD meetings, learned from the sessions and completed a life stage in FIKD. It signified each mother's transition as she moved on to the next life stage of childcare.



A critical window opportunity of life, the first 1,000 days (FIKD) begin the moment the child is conceived and continue after birth until the child reaches the age of two years. This golden period carries on even while breastfeeding and complementary feeding continues. Nutritional practices undertaken during this period make up a significant nutrition intervention that has a lifelong impact on the growth and development of the child.

Nutrition International and Helen Keller International anchored the Barangay (BF1KD) program on the improvement of FIKD services and behaviours in the communities of the Philippines. When the program was implemented within the barangays, the program team faced its own share of challenges and responsibilities.

“[At the start] Not all mothers consistently attended the meetings. Some excused themselves because of their household duties and responsibilities of attending to their child,” said Evelyn Roa, the Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS) in Barangay Cambus-oc.

In the monthly tracking and consolidation reports, the program team observed inconsistent attendance at the BF1KD meetings across the four provinces. The facilitators invested their utmost efforts to invite mothers through text brigade (announcement through phone messages) and purok-style (cluster of mothers) meetings. Local government units provided transportation services for mothers residing in remote areas. However, the inconsistent attendance persisted.

This prompted Nutrition International and Helen Keller International to innovate an action point to complement initiatives at the barangay level, which led to the inauguration of the Moving Up Ceremony. This special ceremony acknowledged mothers who had participated in the BF1KD meetings, learned from the sessions and completed a life stage in FIKD. It signified each mother's transition as she moved on to the next life stage of childcare. The Moving Up Ceremony also functioned as a reward, with the hope that it would reinforce interest and motivation among mothers so they would consistently attend the BF1KD meetings while they were pregnant, lactating and caring for children aged 6-23 months.

A mother receiving the Certificate of Appreciation at the Moving Up Ceremony in Tobias Fornier.



In September 2019, one of the barangays in the municipality of Tobias Fornier conducted the Moving Up Ceremony wherein Mary Je Favila was recognized for completing the F1KD journey and participating in BF1KD meetings. Their barangay captain, together with the midwife and the Municipal Nutrition Action Officer delivered words of encouragement to the group. Mary Je received a Certificate of Appreciation and a tumbler as a reward for her regular attendance and dedication.

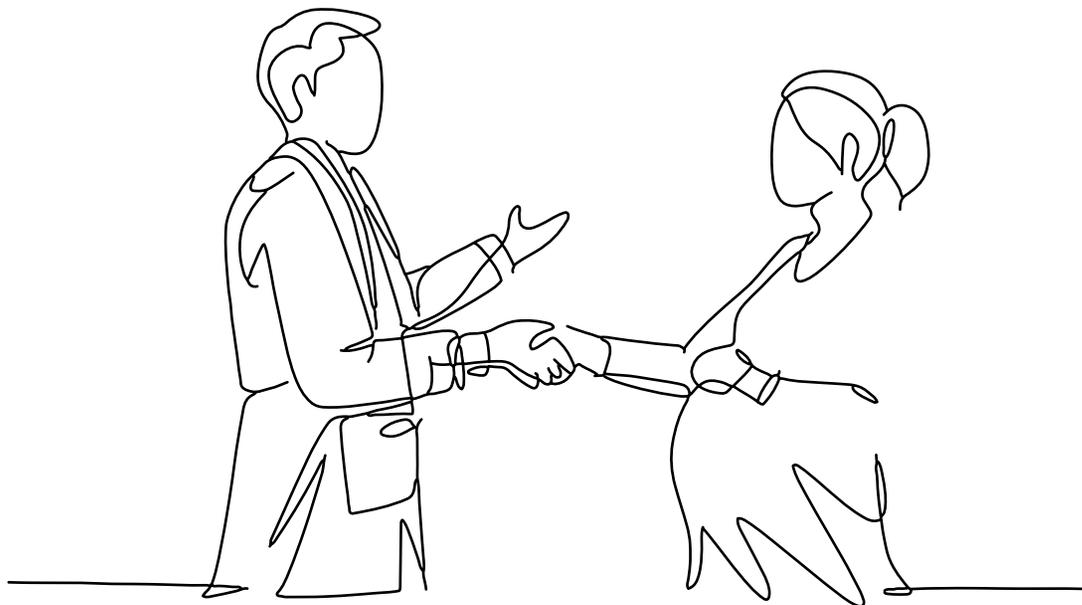
Similarly, the Cambus-oc Barangay also acknowledged five mothers at their first Moving Up Ceremony. It was attended by other mothers, local officials and the resident doctor of the rural health unit. Alongside certificates of appreciation, the mothers also received rice, sardines and tumblers as a reward for their dedication to providing healthy and nutritious F1KD to their children. The facilitators also prepared a simple meal for the group to celebrate. After acknowledging five mothers in 2019, the barangay aims to recognize 13 more mothers by the end of 2021.

“Moving Up Ceremonies mark the end of the F1KD journey. It pays off the dedication and commitment of mothers in completing the journey as well as participating in the BF1KD meetings. Through this ceremony, other mothers will have something to look forward to at the end of the 1,000 days.” says Ms. Evelyn Roa, the BNS in Barangay Cambus-oc.

Mothers who were recognized during the Moving Up Ceremony are still welcome to attend BF1KD meetings. Their knowledge and experiences encourage other pregnant and lactating women to stay committed to ensuring a healthy F1KD journey for their children.

 Mothers were excited when they heard about the Moving Up Ceremony. They were now eager to complete their attendance in the BF1KD meetings, as they looked forward to the awards and tokens they could receive [at the ceremony]. 

Ms. Jeneth Bandojo,
Barangay Nutrition Scholar, Carles Municipality





Arlie feeding his 11-month-old daughter Khariv, an activity that he loves performing as part of his daily routine.

“BFIKD has significantly contributed to our parenting practices. We learned about the food that our children should eat. My wife shares with me her learnings and takeaways from attending BFIKD meetings which I find helpful. So, I encourage her to attend all meetings.”

**Arlie Solas,
father of four children**

CHILDCARE KNOWS NO GENDER

“Childcare is not exclusive to mothers, but a shared responsibility of both parents, including fathers,” shares Arlie Solas, father of 11-month-old Khariv.



Society has labelled childcare as a feminine task, which leaves fathers out of the picture. When Nutrition International launched the Barangay First 1,000 Days (BF1KD) program in partnership with Helen Keller International, gender equality was one of the prime concerns. BF1KD meetings were designed to welcome all genders in the discussion, including males of the families.

“Childcare is not exclusive to mothers, but a shared responsibility of both parents, including fathers,” shares Arlie Solas, father of 11-month-old Khariv. Arlie lives with his family in Barangay Sapao of Dumangas, Iloilo. His wife, Dea, has been attending BF1KD meetings after giving birth to Khariv where she gained knowledge about the significance of the F1KD and the appropriate nutrition practices for their daughter.

In his 44 years, Arlie often perceived societal stereotypes regarding the involvement of fathers in childcare and development. But he was determined to break beyond such notions and take an equal part in nurturing his children. Arlie has been active in childcare ever since their first child was born. Now that the couple has four children, he stays true to his commitment to taking full participation in the F1KD journey.

When Dea was still recovering from a caesarian section, Arlie carried out all household chores and childcare. “Now, my wife and I take turns

in feeding, bathing, and tucking our child [Khariv] to sleep. I am their father as well as a husband who desires to help his wife in the unending household errands,” he says.

Part of his daily routine is to bathe Khariv, while his wife prepares breakfast. For Arlie, bathing Khariv goes beyond simply attending to her needs. He believes that this small act makes room for a stronger father-daughter relationship. Upon returning home from his tiring work of driving a public utility tricycle, Arlie devotes all his time to his children. Watching Khariv play actively around their house makes him forget his fatigue. Feeding Khariv is one of Arlie’s favourite times of the day because he gets to spend time with his daughter and can also monitor what she eats. Both parents are dedicated to providing only healthy and nutritious food to their children.

Dea feels grateful and proud to see Arlie investing so much time and effort in their children. As much as her husband willingly shares household responsibilities with her, she reciprocates with imparting F1KD knowledge to him that she learns at the BF1KD meetings. She often apprises Arlie about the benefits of practicing breastfeeding and complementary feeding. Arlie understands that F1KD is a critical window of opportunity for Khariv and does not want to falter at any step. His dedication to his daughter is louder than the voices of society that claims childcare is a feminine chore.

Children enjoying dishes prepared with Micronutrient Powder.



MICRONUTRIENT POWDER for holistic nutrition during the first 1,000 days

BF1KD platform became a place to distribute nutrition commodities, particularly iron and folic acid tablets, and micronutrient powder, reinforced with nutrition education. It was a leap forward in eradicating the triple burden of malnutrition in Philippines.



In 2010, the Department of Health (DOH) released a memorandum listing the guidelines on the distribution of various micronutrient supplements including the micronutrient powder (MNP). These micronutrient supplies, reinforced with nutrition education, was a leap forward in eradicating the triple burden of malnutrition in Philippines.

In 2018, when Nutrition International and Helen Keller International launched the Barangay First 1,000 Days (BF1KD) program in four provinces of Philippines, the barangays secured an organized mother-to-mother support groups. These groups served as a platform where the program team and barangays' representatives could discuss with mothers the nutrition interventions needed during the First 1,000 Days (F1KD). Soon the BF1KD platform became a place to distribute nutrition commodities, particularly iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets, and MNP, and disseminate education about the benefits of consuming these supplements.

In-depth discussions on consuming MNP alongside complementary feeding were integrated into the modules that guided BF1KD meetings. At these sessions, facilitators educated mothers on preparing food appropriate for children aged 6-23 months and explained the benefits and proper method of mixing MNP with the child's food. Experience sharing sessions among mothers were matched with food preparation demonstrations, so participants could practice the preparation techniques back home.

Elvira Ysulat, the Public Health Nurse and BF1KD coordinator of the Tobias Fornier municipality had participated in the Training of Trainers on BF1KD program organized by Nutrition International and Helen Keller International, where she learned about the significance and use of MNP. She passed on these lessons to many mothers during the BF1KD meetings, including Louise Manalo, mother to two-year-old Kylie. Louise says, "I started giving MNP to Kylie before she turned eight months. I mix it in her breakfast every day.

A BFIKD Coordinator distributing MNP sachets to young mothers.



Ever since I started using MNP, I've noticed that my daughter catches fever and colds less frequently. I believe that the MNP has a role in boosting her immunity, making her healthier." Now that Kylie is older, she consistently consumes nutritious food like apple, banana, chesa fruit (canistel), nalta jute (saluyot), okra (gumbo) and meat. Louise is glad to see Kylie healthy and active.

The MNP intervention of the BF1KD program does not end with handing the commodities over to mothers and nutrition education. The commodity supply chain was one of the key action points that needed improvement. Nutrition International supported this aspect by regularly coordinating with the DOH to ensure availability of supplies in the provinces. Further, the program introduced a monitoring strategy using a checklist and a dashboard to record the receipt and consumption of IFA tablets and MNPs. This helped the DOH track stocks, manage supplies and identify mothers who required additional counselling about consuming IFA and MNP.

Geraldine Cabal, the Provincial Project Coordinator of Bohol, proudly says, "Because of the project, there was an increase in IFA and MNP supplies in the province, thereby allowing a wider reach to more beneficiaries."

Thanks to the wealth of nutrition that MNPs provide, they have become a critical component of the BF1KD program. As the program scales up to other provinces and additional barangays, the nutrition benefits of MNPs will reach more and more mothers and children, contributing to their healthy growth and laying the foundation for a healthy future.

 I have my trust in MNP. I understand how much it benefits a child. It has lots of vitamins and minerals that help boost the immune system of a child.


Louise Manalo,
mother of one child



A Barangay Nutrition Scholar explaining the importance of IFA to a pregnant lady during a regular ante natal care visit.



ONE-ON-ONE WITH FIKD MOMS

As a way of strengthening health and nutrition practices mothers can be the entry point. Hence one-on-one counselling and prioritization of FIKD nutrition education among mothers—especially first-time mothers—would help build a healthier society.



Health and nutrition during the First 1,000 Days (FIKD) have been a top priority for the Philippines government. Signed in 2018, the Republic Act 11148 or Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act encourages the scaling of national and local health and nutrition programs through a strengthened strategy to integrate FIKD practices into nutrition programs. However, the government's efforts alone will not address health and nutrition issues. In individual homes, parents have an equal responsibility as nutrition catalysts to scale up the desired FIKD behaviours.

Jacqueline Sariego, one of the Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) in Hamtic, Antique, understands that not all local government units (LGU) have adequate budget and resources to conduct health and nutrition activities. She says, “We have to innovate. We need activities which can be sustained within the limited budget.”

As a way of strengthening health and nutrition practices in her barangay, Jacqueline says that mothers can be the entry point for bringing about the desired behaviour change. She feels that

prioritization of FIKD nutrition education among mothers—especially first-time mothers—would help LGUs build a healthier society.

LGUs offer antenatal care and immunization services to pregnant women and mothers of infants aged 0-23 months. During these routine health services at the Rural Health Unit, Jacqueline conducts Barangay First 1,000 Days (BFIKD) meetings in small groups and provides one-on-one counselling to mothers who need it most. During one-on-one counselling, Jacqueline uses flip cards and key messages on iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation and micronutrient powders that were developed by Nutrition International, which she finds very convenient. “The flip cards are handy. We can carry them in our bags whenever we go for house visits. The size is also appropriate for the mothers to observe and understand the key message, even while we both maintain social distancing,” says Jacqueline.

Often, pregnant women have questions about the food and supplements they should consume. It is through these counselling sessions that the BNS is able to discuss the benefits of IFA supplementation to pregnant women and explain the consequences of



A Barangay Health Worker using charts and flip cards to explain to a young mother the benefits of healthy, home-made nutritious food, alongside supplementing the diet with MNPs.

not consuming it. Prior the launch of BF1KD projects, LGUs did not have organized mother-to-mother support groups where in-depth learning on F1KD nutrition interventions could transpire. The key messages and behaviour change intervention material provided by Nutrition International helped facilitators communicate with mothers about their issues and concerns. These materials and the trainings provided as part of the project further supported health workers, giving them the skills needed to confidently discuss F1KD practices and explain them vividly, so mothers could remember them at home.

In her 20 years of experience in community nutrition, Jacqueline realized that mothers understand proper food preparation techniques and the nutrition requirements of their children. What they lack is the motivation to perform the desired behaviour. Thus, during one-on-one consultations, Jacqueline never ceases to encourage mothers to feed their children with appropriate and adequate foods. She often says to mothers, “Devote time for your child. Be conscious of the food you give them. Focus on your child now [during the F1KD] to save yourself from regrets later.”

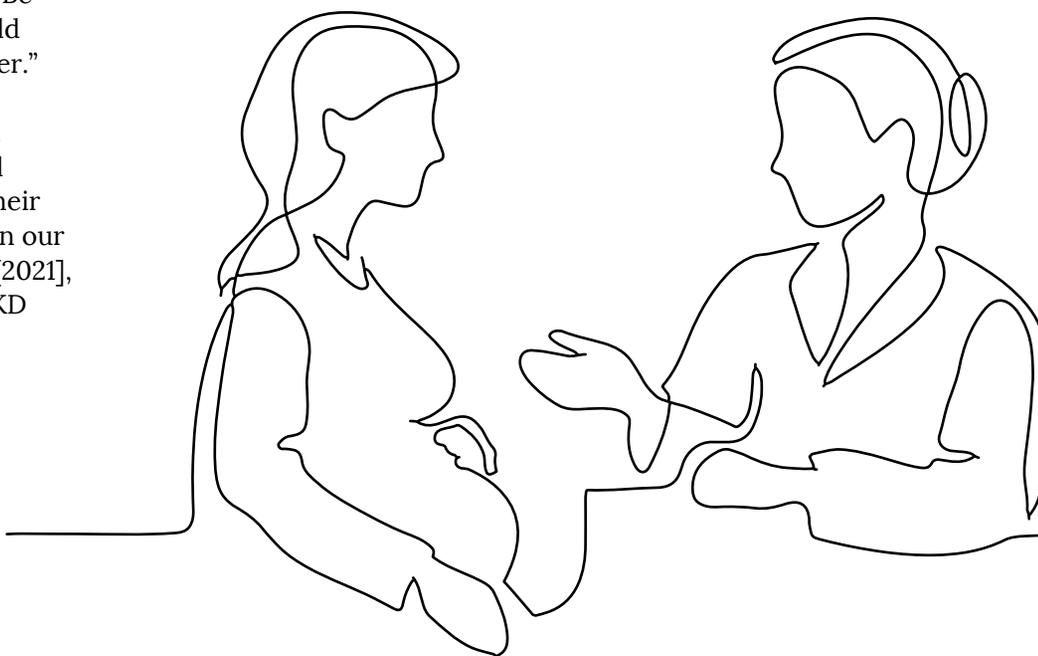
Jacqueline has faith that these counselling sessions and BF1KD meetings with mothers are two of the successful strategies that led to the reduction of malnutrition in their municipality. She stated, “Before the launch of project in our area, we had 69 malnourished children. As of this year [2021], it has dropped to 10. I attribute this to the impact of F1KD nutrition education among mothers.”



**BF1KD is a big help.
Mothers know that their
investment to BF1KD is not
for us, but for the benefit of
their young child.**



Jacqueline Sariego,
Barangay Nutrition Scholar







NUTRITION
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