Promoting the Growth of Children: What Works
Rationale and Guidance for Programs

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This report is Tool #4 in the World Bank’s Nutrition Toolkit. The purpose of the Toolkit is to help World Bank staff design and supervise effective and feasible nutrition projects and project components and to carry out comprehensive analysis of sectoral and policy issues affecting food consumption and nutrition.

For more information, contact the Nutrition Group of the Human Development Department, HCDVP at (202) 473-2521.
The teachings of Lukas Hendrata (1941–1994) are reflected throughout this paper, not only because of his writings on growth promotion, but also because of the personal guidance he offered to many of us working in community-based programs. Lukas’ strong belief in improving child health and nutrition through community self-help was infectious and inspired innovations in many growth promotion programs. It is the hope that by putting forward concepts Lukas pioneered, this document will help perpetuate his contributions to child health.
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

1 Introduction: Sustainable improvements in child health and nutrition depend on families and communities being motivated to take timely and appropriate actions and being able to see benefits from these actions.

2 An effective program design for growth promotion begins with clarity on its purposes, its scope, and the circumstances in which it functions well.

A decision guide can illustrate how growth promotion serves to integrate and target components of a program’s strategy to improve health and nutrition.

Growth promotion is best suited to programs with a preventive approach, because it catches growth faltering, an early sign of health and nutrition problems.

Growth promotion works well in programs seeking to improve efficiency and effectiveness by responding to individual and local problems.

3 Guidance on the selection of appropriate actions and the content of counseling is needed to improve child health and nutrition.

Growth promotion offers an excellent opportunity for communities to understand and take action to prevent poor growth.

Growth promotion can enhance the impact of education to improve household practices by providing a framework for individualizing nutrition counseling.
Experience demonstrates that growth promotion increases program efficiency and effectiveness. 31

Program experience shows that families will respond to identified growth deficits by improving practices. 31

Community awareness and action stimulated by growth promotion activities have led to improvements in child nutrition and health. 51

Use of growth promotion as an integrating strategy by programs has been limited primarily to the health sector. 56

Use of growth promotion to identify beneficiaries for supplementary feeding has dramatically improved the efficiency and effective use of this expensive intervention. 58

Growth status statistics have been powerful tools for program monitoring and for advocacy with policy makers. 60

Employing good management principles is as important for effective growth promotion as it is for other program activities. 63

A dedicated worker is critical for community-based growth promotion. 64

Training and supportive supervision are at the heart of a well functioning program. 68

Detailed, area-specific planning, along with flexibility to incorporate innovation, is best for a smoothly run, dynamic program. 73

Continual monitoring should signal any weakness in the process. 74

Commitment is a feature of successful programs, but it is not inherent: it must be built. 75
Cost data, although limited, support growth promotion’s value as a cost-effective tool for targeting interventions. 

Costs of growth promotion depend significantly on population density and the extent to which an existing program already provides effective services.

Costs of growth promotion vary substantially, even in the same country, while the cost of effective growth promotion is not insignificant for many countries, it is within the capability of most.

Available data on cost-effectiveness of growth promotion support its value as a tool for targeting interventions.

Guidelines for assessing growth promotion program design and implementation can identify strengths and weaknesses in activities.

Bibliography

Boxes:

Box 1: The Growth Promotion Package
Box 2: Contrasting Growth Patterns
Box 3: What Is an Adequate Growth Pattern?
Box 4: Sample Growth Charts and the Assessment of Growth Status
Box 5: Examples of What It Means to “Target” Advice
Box 6: Characteristics to Look for in a Growth Chart
Box 7: Examples of Growth Charts Designed for Growth Promotion
Box 8: Examples of Counseling Cards
Box 9: Nutrition Negotiation .................................................. 45
Box 10: Examples of Mother Reminders Used in the Negotiation
Process ................................................................. 50
Box 11: Training Objectives ............................................. 69

Figures:

Figure 1: Sample Decision Guide for Integrating and Targeting
Actions ................................................................. 19
Figure 2: Sample Guide to Discussion with Mothers after Weighing ... 28
Figure 3. The SKDN Chart .................................................. 53
Figure 4. ANEP’s Community Growth Charts Being Analyzed at a
Community Meeting ..................................................... 54
Figure 5: Comparison of Screening and Feeding Costs for
Two Programs .......................................................... 86
Figure 7: Guide for Assessing the Quality of Implementation
of a Growth Promotion Program
   Part A: Response to Growth Failure ............................... 89
   Part B: Level of Operational Management ...................... 90
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

**ANEP**: Applied Nutrition Education Project in the Dominican Republic

**Anthropometry**: The measurement of the body. The measurement can be of length, height, weight, arm circumference, etc. Often measures are expressed in ratios of one to another, e.g. weight-for-height.

**BRAC**: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

**Consultative research**: A combination of rapid, interactive information-gathering methods with mothers and other key people, during which important scientific information and key cultural and personal concerns are examined and “negotiated” to arrive at feasible, acceptable and effective strategies to improve maternal and child-care practices.

**GMP**: Growth monitoring and promotion

**Growth monitoring**: In this paper refers to weighing a child and graphing the weight.

**Growth promotion**: In this paper refers to the process of weighing a child, graphing the weight, assessing the growth, and providing counseling and motivation for other actions to improve growth.

**Growth faltering**: The failure to gain adequate weight for one’s age between two serial weighings.

**ICDS**: Integrated Child Development Scheme, a national program in selected areas of India. In this paper ICDS usually refers to a pilot project carried out in Gujurat and Maharasta States to improve the nutrition component of ICDS.

**INP**: Iringa Nutrition Project in Tanzania
**NCBC:** Nutrition Communication and Behavior Change Project in Indonesia. This was a demonstration project on counseling and enhanced nutrition education for UPGK.

**Nutrition negotiation:** The process of decision making between a counselor and a mother regarding the actions a mother or family will take to correct their child’s faltering growth.

**Nutrition surveillance:** Monitoring the nutrition status of a population. Usually measurements of height and weight are taken periodically (e.g. every year) on a carefully selected, random sample of individuals to monitor trends in their nutrition status over time.

**PEM-PAAMI:** Program to Evaluate and Improve the Maternal and Child Feeding Program in Ecuador

**SD:** Standard deviation

**TINP:** Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Program in India

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children’s Fund

**UPGK:** Family Nutrition Improvement Program in Indonesia

**WHO:** World Health Organization