



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Meet the Experts: Bringing Technical Expertise in Nutrition to Mozambique



Edna Possolo

A Feed the Future-supported scholar, Possolo speaks at a Ministry of Health nutrition workshop in Mozambique she helped facilitate as part of her studies.

Meet Edna Possolo, the previous Department Head for Nutrition in Mozambique's Ministry of Health and now a scholar in the [Borlaug Higher Education for Research and Development Program](#), implemented by Michigan State University and supported by USAID under the Feed the Future initiative.

Possolo, who earned her Bachelor of Science in nutrition from Brazil's Federal University of Pernambuco, is working toward her Master's degree in international nutrition at Cornell University, where she is building skills that will enable her to help improve the quality of nutrition interventions in her home country. Read on for her insights on building a better future through improved nutrition.

1. Tell us a little about yourself: How did you become interested in nutrition and what are your plans once you finish your degree?

Since adolescence I've wanted to be involved in public health programs targeting vulnerable and impoverished people. My mother worked in the health sector and my father in education and later for the World Food Program. Being born in a poor country like Mozambique also influenced my decision to study nutrition in Brazil.

When I finish my degree at Cornell, I plan to continue strengthening and scaling nutrition programs while advocating for nutrition-sensitive interventions. Since my current research has focused on implementation science, strategic planning and evaluation, I am also hoping to share my knowledge in those areas and set up a support system to implement projects from the central to community level, using a participatory approach that is shaped in part by target communities.

2. What do you see as the biggest challenge(s) to improving nutrition on a large scale? What are the most important things that governments, private companies, researchers, and/or civil society can do to help accelerate progress in fighting malnutrition?

A famous nutrition expert, Roger Shrimpton, said: “Nutrition is everyone’s business, but no one’s responsibility.” Most malnutrition problems are hidden problems: a person doesn’t go to the hospital because he or she is malnourished, but because of ailments caused or exacerbated by malnourishment. So these problems are not “visible” and are caused by many interrelated factors requiring different strategies. This makes it difficult to address malnutrition in any form: wasting, stunting, obesity, etc.

For a long time, nutrition was seen only as a health problem, it has become clearer that nutrition problems reflect socioeconomic conditions and that an integrated, multisectoral approach is essential to reduce malnutrition in the long term. It’s important to emphasize that by addressing malnutrition we’re improving human capital, which contributes to individual health and prosperity. So there is a reciprocal relationship between nutrition and other sectors.

But bringing many sectors together to be more “nutrition-sensitive” is not easy. A sustained multisectoral approach requires that nutrition top the agenda of governments, international and regional governing bodies, and development partners. Researchers and academia play an important role in providing the evidence base for nutrition interventions and shaping education and training programs that equip professionals to address the current challenges. Civil society can help advocate for the nutrition agenda and support critical communication and behavior change programs. And the private sector can play an important role in facilitating access to more nutritious products through markets.

3. A lot of people are interested in what development experts like to call “agriculture-nutrition linkages.” Can you explain in layperson terms what that means and why it’s important?

The underlying concept is that agriculture can contribute to better nutrition and vice versa. Ironically, since the challenges in both fields have historically been addressed separately, regions with the highest levels of chronic undernutrition are also the ones where agriculture contributes most heavily to GDP. Small-scale farmers and their families, who often produce only one or two types of crops for little income, are often least able to consume a diverse diet, which is essential for health. Seasonal variability, poor access to water and sanitation, and other factors also affect agricultural production and contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty that puts good nutrition out of reach for many.

On the other hand, agriculture plays an important role in improving nutrition by producing more nutritious and safer foods. For example, nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices like biofortification make it possible to produce crops that can reduce micronutrient deficiencies and improve farmer incomes as demand for these crops grows. Similarly, nutrition plays an important role in improving agriculture. For instance, nutrition-specific interventions in the health sector that support children’s growth and development will strengthen an individual’s capacity to be productive, whether in agriculture or another economic activity.

That is why it is so important to work together in a collaborative manner – a multisectoral approach is urgently needed to address the nutrition challenges we face today.

4. Why do you think training and higher education are so important for improving food security and nutrition in developing countries? Can you tell us how your new skills and experience will help make an impact in Mozambique?

Think about it this way: Where do we have the best training and higher education in the world? Answer: In the richest, most developed countries.

And where do we have the least qualified professionals and training programs? Answer: In poor and less developed countries.

So education is an essential factor associated with poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition. Better education and training enable an individual to earn more, but even more important is that more qualified nutrition professionals at all levels and across sectors are essential to address the particular challenges in each country or region. Higher education also builds the critical thinking skills that drive demand for better policies.

I am eager to go back home soon and apply the knowledge I have gained through my training in the United States. I was lucky that this scholarship allowed me to conduct research in my home country while also supporting the implementation process of a new nutrition intervention that Mozambique’s Ministry of Health and other stakeholders have been working on together for five years. My role was to develop a national implementation strategy for this intervention using a systematic and participatory planning approach. I hope I will be able to continue this type of work, while at the same time producing

local evidence to help inform decision-makers on how best to improve, scale up or scale down programs related to nutrition and food security.