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# Story of change

## ENN's role in the development of the **Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies**



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# Abbreviations

<b>AAH</b>	Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim)
<b>ENN</b>	Emergency Nutrition Network
<b>FEX</b>	Field Exchange
<b>GNC</b>	Global Nutrition Cluster
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human immunodeficiency virus infection & acquired immune deficiency syndrome
<b>IBFAN-GIFA</b>	International Baby Food Action Network-Geneva Infant Feeding Association
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IFE</b>	Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies
<b>IMC</b>	International Medical Corps
<b>IOCC</b>	International Orthodox Christian Charities
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>IYCF</b>	Infant and Young Child Feeding
<b>MAMI</b>	Management of At risk Mothers and Infants < 6 months
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>OFDA</b>	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
<b>OG-IFE</b>	Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies
<b>PLW</b>	Pregnant and lactating women
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SOC</b>	Story of Change
<b>SUN</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNSCN</b>	United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WHA</b>	World Health Assembly
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme



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# Executive summary

Supporting appropriate infant and young child feeding practices has been repeatedly identified as a critical target area necessary to reduce infant and young child mortality globally; emergencies are a particularly challenging context to deliver on this. Gaps and challenges in infant and young child feeding programming in emergencies (IFE) in the late nineties led to the creation of an informal, inter-agency group to fill critical guidance gaps; this became a collective known as the IFE Core Group, involving ENN since 1999 and coordinated by ENN since 2004.

The IFE Core Group has produced guidance and resource materials on IFE, advocated for their use

and examined implementation experiences that have informed updates. The key policy document produced by the group is the *Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies* (OG-IFE), now widely referred to in humanitarian programming and policy, including Sphere standards. The OG-IFE provides concise, practical guidance on how to ensure appropriate IFE. It is aimed at policy-makers and programmers working in emergency preparedness and response, across sectors, with a particular focus on the needs of infants and children under two years of age and pregnant and lactating women. ENN has managed development of all resources to date, in collaboration with other group members and experts.

Stories of change provide a framework to highlight key processes, findings, developments and accomplishments from a retrospective viewpoint. A narrative approach was used to chart ENN's involvement with the OG-IFE (and by default, the IFE Core Group) over nearly two decades, through a series of interviews with key informants from outside the organisation. Key objectives were to establish evidence of the impact of ENN's role in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE and related influence on policy, programming and research and to identify changes in the policy/programming landscape that may have implications for ENN's continued work in this area.

The OG-IFE has grown from a 21-page document of 'dos and don'ts' (Version 1.0, first published in 2001) to a 52-page comprehensive guidance document (Version 3.0) published in October 2017, addressing issues of the day. Interviewees were unanimous in confirming that ENN's role had been critical in this process. As an organisation, it had combined facilitation skills (organising meetings, coordinating discussions, sending out drafts, etc.) with technical brokerage (including conflict resolution), networking and advocacy that had ensured the impact of the IFE-OG. ENN has shown strong leadership, both internally and externally, and technically and politically, forging key strategic engagements, such as with WHO. ENN has helped catalyse change; policy progress would have been slower and less reflective of programming needs without its involvement. ENN's 'IFE role' has been bolstered by the organisation's complementary work areas, including its publication Field Exchange and online platform en-net, which have helped capture experiences and served as a 'stop gap' with technical guidance. During this investigation, particular mention was made of the central role played by one of ENN's Technical Directors, who has been involved throughout the process. Features of ENN that may have hindered progress include limited capacity; this may be related to limited funding, coupled with the enormity of the task. As ENN is not operational (i.e. is not directly involved in the field), there may be a 'perception gap' among donors regarding its role and value. While noting that it is hard to distinguish ENN's impact from that of the collective, and the challenge of capturing impact at country level, key

achievements highlighted were the World Health Assembly (WHA) endorsement of the OG-IFE (2010) and the incorporation of IYCF standards, based on the OG-IFE, into Sphere guidance (2011).

Shifts in policy and programming mean that IFE is no longer a neglected topic, partly attributable to the work of ENN and the IFE Core Group. The OG-IFE now reflects a more sophisticated understanding of IFE, such as addressing the needs of the non-breastfed infant and the inclusion of sectors beyond nutrition. Some interviewees questioned whether ENN's active work in this area meant that agencies avoided their natural/mandated role to lead on IFE, and if this was the time for a larger organisation (with secure funding and greater capacity) to 'step up'. Yet respondents also voiced concerns regarding risks inherent in this scenario – ENN's strengths (agility due to its smaller size, independence, objectivity, technical expertise and institutional memory) have enabled it to achieve more than other agencies and the majority of participants wanted ENN to continue to play a strong role in IFE.

The development and maintenance of the OG-IFE has spanned nearly two decades and undergone a number of phases and developments. Described by interviewees during this investigation as having "given birth" to the original guidance, ENN has provided institutional memory and considerable stamina throughout this period to effect policy development of operational relevance in a manner described by interviewees as "technically incisive and inclusive". Despite this, it is wise and opportune to take stock; the publication of the latest version (3.0) offers both ENN and the IFE Core Group an opportunity for a strategic pause in which to consider all roles and responsibilities going forward and possible new ways of working in the next critical phase of OG-IFE rollout and future resource development. UNICEF was highlighted as having a key role. ENN's "neutral leadership, overview, commitment and knowledge" could be complemented by operational agency partnerships. Succession planning, should ENN not continue in a coordination role, would be critical. More predictable sustained funding is necessary to secure the IFE Core Group's continued impact.

# Background

## Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IFE)

Supporting appropriate infant feeding practice has been repeatedly identified as a critical target area necessary to reduce infant and young child mortality globally (Bhutta et al, 2013). Undernutrition, including sub-optimum breastfeeding, stunting, wasting, vitamin A and zinc deficiencies and foetal growth restriction, causes 45% of child deaths or 3.1 million deaths annually (Black et al, 2013). Sub-optimum breastfeeding – in particular, lack of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life – contributes to increased infant and childhood morbidity and mortality, compounded by inappropriate complementary feeding practices. Feeding infants and children in exceptionally difficult circumstances, e.g. those who are malnourished, low birth weight infants and those in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence, makes achieving global targets such as the World Health

Assembly (WHA) targets (2025) to improve maternal, infant and young child nutrition<sup>1</sup> and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), even more of a challenge.

Complex emergencies, often characterised by displacement, food insecurity and conflict, further compromise the care and feeding of infants and young children. Compromised breastfeeding, inappropriate or inadequate complementary feeding, inconsistent support to non-breastfed infants and uncontrolled distribution of infant formula all heighten the risk of malnutrition, illness and mortality, especially in the face of disrupted and/or poor water and sanitation conditions that typify acute emergency situations.

<sup>1</sup> [www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/)

## IFE Core Group

The Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Core Group is an inter-agency/individual collaboration formed in 1999 to address gaps observed by programmers in infant feeding support in emergencies. The group collaboratively develops guidance and resource materials, including training manuals; documents lessons learned; and builds aspects of capacity for IFE.

The strength of the group is the strong representation of operational agencies to bring challenges and issues to the collective for peer

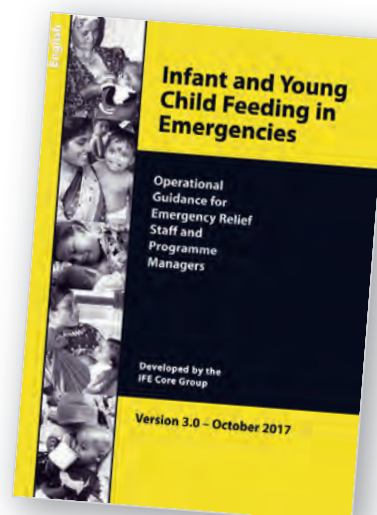
support and guidance and to facilitate application of updated experiences to their operations and the connection between on-the-ground experiences with agency and global policy guidance development. Current members of the IFE Core Group are UNICEF, WHO, WFP, UNHCR, GNC, AAH Network, Save the Children, IRC, IMC, Concern Worldwide, World Vision, Goal, ICRC, IFRC, IOCC, IBFAN-GIFA, ENN and several independent individuals. The IFE Core Group does not directly implement programmes.

# Operational Guidance on IFE (OG-IFE)

The *Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies* (hereon referred to as the OG-IFE) is a key policy guidance document produced by the IFE Core Group. It aims to provide concise, practical (but non-technical) guidance on how to ensure appropriate IFE and is widely used in humanitarian operations and as the basis of Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Sphere standards<sup>2</sup>. The OG-IFE applies to emergency preparedness, response and recovery worldwide to minimise infant and young child morbidity and mortality risks associated with feeding practices and to maximise child nutrition, health and development. It has positively influenced agency policy, guidance, training materials and humanitarian action.

The OG-IFE assists with the practical application of the *Guiding Principles for Feeding Infants and Young Children in Emergencies*<sup>3</sup> and the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (WHO 1981) and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions (“the Code”)<sup>4</sup>. The target populations for interventions are infants and children under two years of age (0- 23 months) and pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Target users are policy-makers, decision-makers and programmers working in emergency preparedness and response, including governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donors, volunteer groups and the private/business sector.

First produced by the IFE Core Group in 2001, the OG-IFE (Version 1.0) was revised in May 2006 (Version 2.0) to reflect operational experiences and needs and guidance. Version 2.0 was closely followed by the third update (Version 2.1, February 2007) to reflect experiences in implementation during the Lebanon crisis and the WHO consensus statement on infant feeding and HIV/AIDS (WHO, 2006). Other additions to this version included clarification on the use of micronutrients in malarial



contexts. Version 2 was made available in 13 languages. An Addendum in 2010 updated content on breastmilk substitute supplies. Also in 2010, the OG-IFE was endorsed in a World Health Assembly Resolution (WHA 63.23)<sup>5</sup>. Version 3 was produced in October 2017.

Experiences from emergencies since 2010, in particular the Syria crisis response, highlighted the need to update the OG-IFE to reflect developments in normative guidance and address gaps in current content throughout the programme cycle, from assessment and advocacy through to monitoring and evaluation. In particular, there was an urgent need to assess and address needs during an emergency of non-breastfed infants, complementary feeding and maternal mental health and psychosocial support. Over a two-year period (2016/17), the IFE Core Group worked to update the OG-IFE in consultation with international, country and regional informants. The process was co-led by ENN and UNICEF and coordinated by ENN, with funding from the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA). Published in October 2017, key features of the latest version (Version 3.0)<sup>6</sup> include: greater and more balanced content to address needs of non-breastfed infants; more content on emergency preparedness; updates to reflect latest global guidance; and greater coverage of sectors beyond nutrition and more explicit actions to take.

<sup>2</sup> [www.spherehandbook.org/en/infant-and-young-child-feeding-standard-1-policy-guidance-and-coordination/](http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/infant-and-young-child-feeding-standard-1-policy-guidance-and-coordination/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.who.int/nutrition/publications/emergencies/9241546069/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/emergencies/9241546069/en/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.ibfan.org/the-full-code](http://www.ibfan.org/the-full-code)

<sup>5</sup> [apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA63/A63\\_R23-en.pdf](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA63/A63_R23-en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [s3.ennonline.net/attachments/2671/Ops-G\\_2017\\_WEB.pdf](http://s3.ennonline.net/attachments/2671/Ops-G_2017_WEB.pdf)

# Overview of ENNs involvement in IFE Core Group and OG-IFE

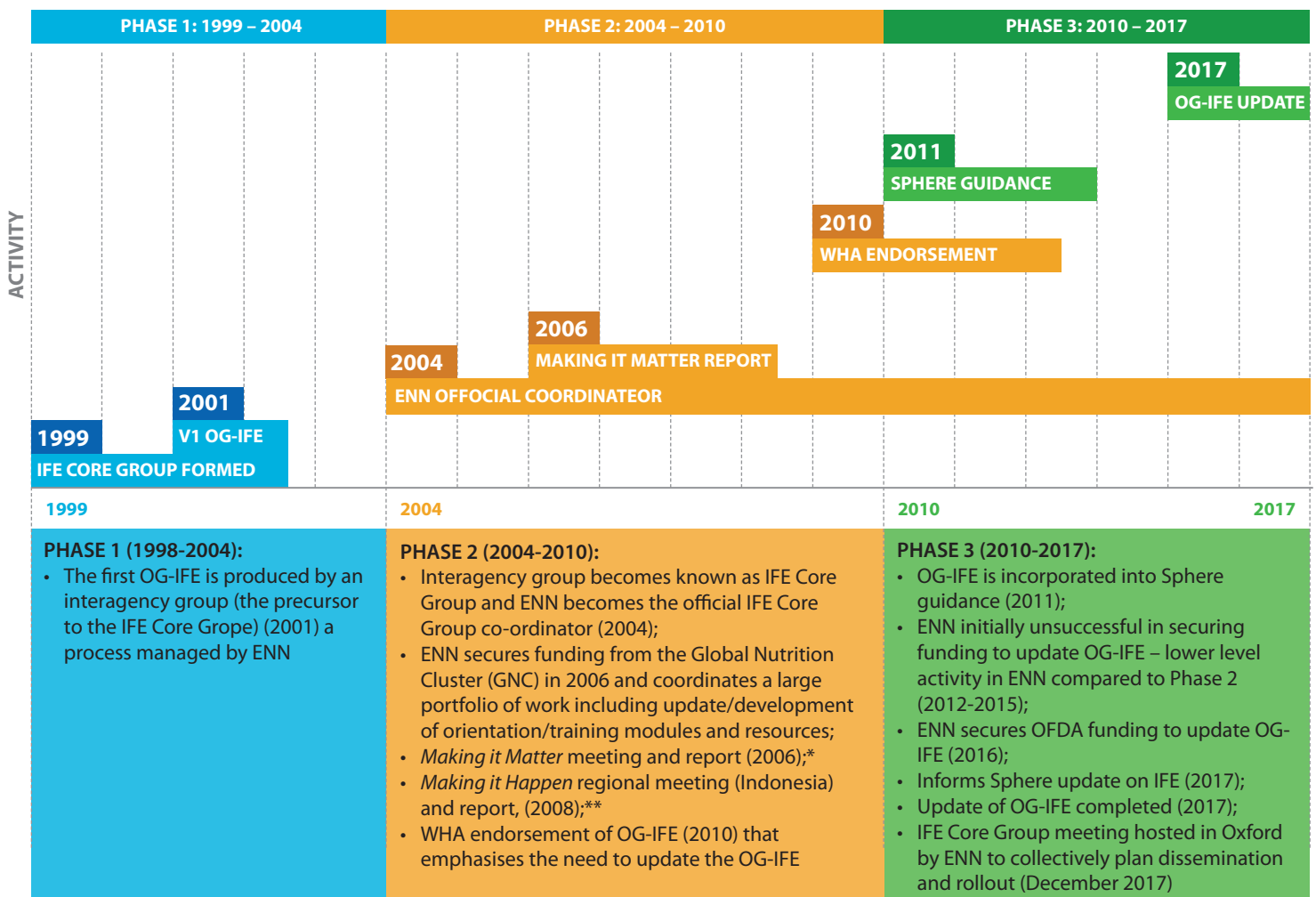
ENN is the facilitator and institutional home of the IFE Core Group. The organisation's role in the Group includes technical brokerage and technical input to ensure operational challenges are adequately catered for, and programming lessons reflected, in policy guidance. ENN has produced all IFE Core Group publications/online learning to date, including the OG-IFE, and manages an IFE resource library. The story of the OG-IFE's birth and subsequent development has been divided into three phases, with emphasis on ENN's role in each phase, as shown in the timeline below.



UNICEF/URC-CHS accessed from the USAID/SPRING-UNICEF IYCF Image Bank (iycf.spring-nutrition.org).

## Timeline

## Key events in development of OG-IFE



\* s3.ennonline.net/attachments/24/making-it-matter-2006.pdf

\*\* s3.ennonline.net/attachments/842/ife-bali-report-web-final.pdf





A group teaching session in the IYCF caravan

# Aims and objectives

As part of ENN's five-year strategy (2015-2020), it has developed a results framework to monitor strategic progress and achievements outlined in the theory of change<sup>7</sup>. To monitor outcome 5, "more effective nutrition policy, programming and institutional architecture" necessary to capture evidence of ENN's wider influence. One of the methods for this is through developing a 'story of change' for important projects and activities in which it is involved, which may have been implemented either during the strategic period, or before, or both – as in the case of the OG-IFE.

The aim of this study is to develop a story of change regarding ENN's role in IFE, with specific consideration of the OG-IFE, which demonstrate plausible contributions (or otherwise) by ENN to changes in programming, policy and institutional architecture.

## Specific objectives

- To identify the key processes, findings, developments and accomplishments of ENN's

role in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE (and by default, the IFE Core Group)<sup>8</sup> and anything specific that facilitated adoption of the OG-IFE as international policy;

- To identify evidence of the impact of ENN's role (both as part of the collective as well as its specific role) on policy, programming and research;
- To identify changes in the policy/programming landscape since 2001 that impact on the role (if any) for ENN regarding IFE;
- To identify specific/unique attributes of ENN that have enabled and/or hindered progress in this area;
- To establish if there is a need for ENN to continue work on IFE (is there demand?) and if so, why ENN? (what are the risks/benefits, in what areas, and requiring what level of commitment?)

<sup>7</sup> ENN Strategy (2016-2020) [www.enonline.net/enstrategy](http://www.enonline.net/enstrategy).

<sup>8</sup> ENN has and remains directly engaged with WHO normative guidance development related to HIV and infant feeding in emergencies, breastfeeding in the context of Ebola and Zika virus, and breastfeeding counselling. These areas of influence were not specifically examined in this SoC.

# Methodology

The story-of-change methodology is a retrospective way of describing the impact pathways of an activity. As such it provides an opportunity to highlight key processes, findings, developments and accomplishments, as well as answering some of the more difficult 'So what?' type of questions. Research has shown that studies with a narrative approach can convey the drivers and pathways of success in nutrition in different contexts and at different times since they show connections between things and cut through complexity (Gillespie et al, 2017).

An independent review of the 'story' of OG-IFE and ENN's role in this (and by association with the IFE Core Group) was conducted through a series of interviews with key informants between August and September 2017. Qualitative data from these interviews was used for two key purposes:

- To inform the background story of the development of the OG between 1998-2017 (supplemented by a review of relevant literature and key documents);
- To provide analysis of ENN's part in this story, as observed from the perspective of those outside the organisation; and
- To make recommendations to inform future plans for the IFE Core Group and ENN's role in this.

A list of potential interviewees was supplied by ENN Technical Directors and IFE Core Group members. Purposive sampling was used to select interviewees who were likely to generate useful, appropriate and in-depth data and who were available to be interviewed. The final list generated 16 stakeholders from NGOs, UN agencies, government agencies, regional and country representatives, academia and independent consultants.

The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, using a questionnaire to guide the

interviews (see Annex 1). Key questions were developed by the consultant, based on the objectives highlighted above and with guidance from ENN Directors. Informed consent (written and/or oral) was obtained from the study participants before the interviews took place with the understanding that data findings would be anonymised. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and/or interview notes were written up. This information was then coded in an Excel matrix using categories representing the main themes. Data analysis and write-up was based on information captured in the matrix.

## Strengths and limitations of the study

This study aimed to investigate the perspectives of stakeholders on the role of ENN in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE (and by association the IFE Core Group) through semi-structured interviews to evaluate a story of change (1999-2017). The research was strengthened by the breadth of interviewees' positions and roles, including those involved in the process for the entire time period.

This was a qualitative study involving a small number of participants; therefore it is difficult to draw generalisations and broader conclusions. It is possible that the experiences and understanding of respondents who chose not to participate in the study (those contacted by email who did not reply to interview requests) differed significantly from those who did. There may also have been some bias in the fact that the list of participants was drawn up by ENN. However, on balance, this study offered insights into the story of change that may contribute to evidence of ENN's role, both past and present, and to inform discussions for the future.



# Results

Findings from the stakeholder interviews are presented in alignment with the structure of the questionnaire (see Annex 1) that was used in the study.

## Position and type of agency during any (or all) of the phases (as described in Background)

Study participants had held, or were still holding, various positions and represented a range of agencies covering at least one of the phases in the development of the OG-IFE. Four out of 15 interviewees had been involved with ENN in the process for all of the phases (from 1998-2017), although their positions and the agencies they worked for had changed during this period. This was also the case with a number of other interviewees: people had worn different 'hats' during different time periods and roles had also altered and evolved.

Positions held included: nutrition advisor (either agency, country, regional or independent consultant), IYCF coordinator, programme coordinator and regional training coordinator. Agencies have been defined as the ones where participants predominantly worked during their involvement with the OG-IFE, as follows: four from UN agencies; three from government agencies; two from NGOs; five regional or country representatives; one academic; one independent.

# Roles (and that of the agency/ies) in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE (and changes over time)

Similarly, roles of the different agencies in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE covered a range of activities during different time periods. These were described by interviewees as: providing technical input to both the OG-IFE and related materials, such as training modules; providing inputs during the crafting and revision process based on country perspectives; reporting on the need for guidance updates based on operational experiences; contributions to the political process behind the OG-IFE (for example, WHA adoption); championing adoption and uptake of the OG-IFE for all agencies in the field and in country; ensuring dissemination in wider circles, including academia; and helping to secure funding for the work.

Roles during Phase 1 (1998-2004) were primarily described as involvement in a consensus-building process among key actors on issues concerned with IFE. The number of emergencies around the world exploded in the late nineties but, according to one interviewee, *“Lots of issues such as IFE were inadequately addressed at all levels.”* Some agencies may have had policies about giving donations and food in affected regions or communities, but *“there was no reasonable or coherent policy in place”*. Phase 1 participants had all been part of an inter-agency technical working group, called together (under the auspices of the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN)) to develop a training manual on ‘dos and don’ts’ for IFE to help people understand the issue and develop a practical response for those in the field. This was the origin of both the first collaborative group (the IFE Core Group) and the OG-IFE (Version 1.0), which ENN was commissioned to develop.

Once the Guidance was completed, the next step was dissemination (an ongoing process throughout all phases). Those actively involved in both the Core Group and others who had received training on the OG-IFE described this as a key

activity. *“This involves making sure that people in the field know about it, and that if there is any new information, that they’re trained in it and are putting it to use. Every time we had people going out, we made sure they got the OG-IFE and in different languages,”* according to one interviewee from a government agency.

During Phase 2 those interviewees working particularly in operational agencies claimed their role was to report back to the Core Group when international guidance on IFE was not matching what they were seeing in the field. *“As people in the field, we were having to work out how the OG-IFE was translated into programming responses, how to manage teams and how to work with governments to move them in the direction of the standards.”* (NGO respondent). And when international guidance and field realities were not aligned, participants pressed for guidance updates from the Core Group (for example, in the case of a lack of guidance on populations in transit, where almost all infants were being artificially fed). Other interviewees mentioned their roles in requesting guidance and updates on other issues, such as HIV/AIDs and Ebola. Country and regional representatives played a key part in utilising the IFE-CG for technical assistance to programme managers, via training and with technical support from ENN.

Another key role throughout all phases (cited by government and UN agency participants in particular) was ENNs role in securing funding for all aspects of the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE (from initial conception and updates, development of associated materials and training, and meetings, etc.)

## Role of ENN in the process

How did participants view ENN's role? The organisation had taken up IFE as an important issue before anyone else, according to those who had been involved through all phases. Particularly in the early days, ENN was described as advocating to ensure research came together to help set up normative guidance not previously in place. As one respondent put it, *"IFE used to feel like a neglected topic, which was one of reasons why it was really important that someone took it on. ENN really did and now people understand what you're talking about"*. The strength of ENN has been: *"to pull together a community where there were lots of different partners working on one small piece but there wasn't a central place where it lived; being able to take lessons learnt from people in the field trying to address this issue."* Most participants agreed that if ENN had not taken on the leadership and found funding in the beginning, it would have taken many more years to have coordinated and produced the first OG-IFE.

ENN has provided strong leadership, within the group and externally, both technically and politically, in terms of developing relationships with other influential organisations. For nearly half of interviewees (7/16), however, this role was synonymous with one person within ENN (Technical Director Marie McGrath), rather than with the whole of ENN itself. One respondent confirmed, *"Marie sits in on a number of technical advisory groups – she has raised the profile of the IFE Core Group's engagement with UN and government agencies."* As another put it, *"I believe it's really important for the Core Group to have champions... the role of ENN is to lead but also to push forward and make sure IFE is acknowledged. Of course, all members have a crucial role in research and advocacy, but you need a dynamo and in my head, the ENN is Marie."*

The part played by ENN as facilitator and coordinator of information was recognised as key in terms of developing and maintaining the IFE-OG. ENN was seen as the agency that organised meetings and discussions and sent out drafts, essentially enabling the work of the Core Group and

managing the whole process. ENN was a 'linchpin' in bringing together diverse actors and consolidating different points of view. *"In our meetings, we have all these IFE specialists in the room and we throw ideas all over the place. ENN has been instrumental in putting them on paper."* This perspective was reiterated by other IFE-CG members, who described ENN's ability to unite "warring parties". The role has involved "walking a tight-rope" at times. On the one hand, skilful co-ordination involves listening to differing views without taking sides to arrive at the final solution and phrasing to include in the OG-IFE. Conversely, a small number of respondents (2/16) questioned whether it should be up to ENN to have the final say on 'wordsmithing', since one word could change everything: *"Is it ENN's role to have final say on something so controversial as giving infant formula to a mother who's asking for that during emergencies?"*

Almost all participants acknowledged that IFE was in danger of becoming an 'orphan issue' if ENN had not taken on many of the coordination processes. As one interviewee put it, *"Other agencies work on IFE but just looking at guidance when everything is hunky-dory, not when everything is going badly and when the optimal [situation] does not apply in the field"*. ENN has demonstrated considerable stamina in remaining involved with the issue, a point raised by three interviewees, and has been proactive in dealing with the difficult questions that have arisen from experiences on the ground. *"It [ENN] sees what's happening in the field and asks, 'How are we going to deal with this?'"* Among country and regional respondents, ENN's role was primarily viewed as a platform for technical support and the guidelines and updates were particularly important for training and emergency preparedness work. Other resources, such as en-net and ENN's availability for Skype calls to discuss particular technical issues, were also recognised as important support mechanisms for those working on IFE.

# Evidence of impact of ENN's role as part of the collective on policy, programming and research and its specific role in the same

Most interviewees found it hard to distinguish between ENN and the IFE Core Group and between what constituted impact as part of the collective as opposed to examples of ENN's specific role. There was also reticence on the part of some participants to describe their observations as "evidence" of impact. But where the distinction could be made, interviewees gave a number of examples.

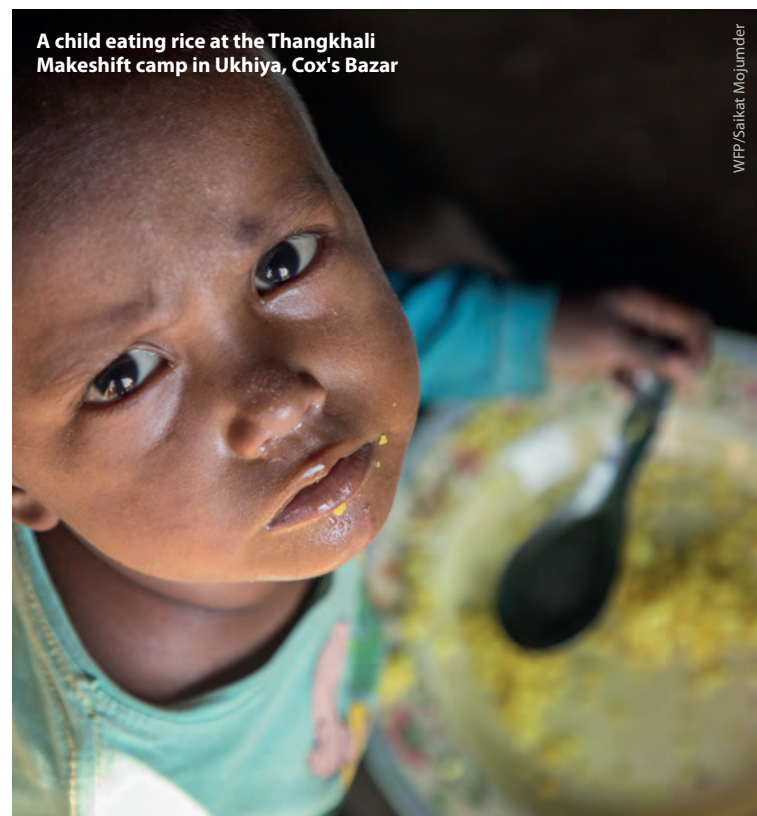
In terms of policy, the greatest impact of ENN's role as part of the collective was cited in two specific cases: the adoption of OG-IFE as a WHA resolution in 2010 and the IFE-OG's incorporation into the Sphere manual. ENN's advocacy role and networking were seen as crucial in catalysing these processes. However, it was ENN's specific role (for example, Marie McGrath's representation of the Core Group at technical groups for WHO) in understanding the potential of making such links that helped to drive policy change. *"Marie was very clued in to the Sphere process. We were trying to make sure we [the Core Group and the IFE-CG] were not a standalone exercise that we enjoyed but ultimately nobody [else] knew about,"* according to one interviewee.

Moreover, ENN has been very active and quick to grasp the importance of the UN clusters when the new system was developed. *"You can see impact on these global policy processes and at the national level that the OG-IFE has been registered in a number of countries, although not sufficiently."* Two regional participants mentioned the fact that the OG-IFE was referred to by the Nutrition Cluster as a policy reference.

However, a number of interviewees felt that it was difficult to judge impact at the country level. *"ENN is not a field-based organisation responsible for what the governments are doing – it's too much to expect that somebody from Oxford can make somebody in South Africa (or anywhere else) do something."* ENN's impact is in providing comprehensive, up-to-

date information, guidance and materials that *"people can take and run with."* Most participants agreed that, collectively, there was sufficient representation from operational agencies within the Core Group itself. One interviewee confirmed the interplay between those in the field and the impact of their programming experience on the IFE-OG. *"I had personal evidence of numerous occasions when I needed to seek advice from ENN or was asked for my own input on what was going on in a specific situation. I really felt that my input was used – you could see in the OG-IFE where your field experience had been included; where the key questions that hadn't been asked and needed to be asked. It was a hugely responsive process."*

Additionally, there were other specific examples from different topic areas, such as Ebola: *"Everyone was doing a little bit here and there [on Ebola], but then ENN gets us all together and starts a discussion through the IFE group. Some of us didn't*



A child eating rice at the Thangkhalī Makeshift camp in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar

WFP/Saikhat Mojumder

*have the capacity but by bringing us all together, collectively we came up with a recommendation. If ENN wasn't taking that leadership, we wouldn't have coordinated the policy."*

What has been ENN's role in terms of research? Several participants referred to the use of ENN's publication Field Exchange (FEX) to stimulate debate on IFE through case studies, articles and operational research. *"ENN has understood the importance of operational research before a lot of academic institutions and the UN – that we have to build research from operations that are ongoing ... and that we need to get the information to go with*

*our 'best view' of a situation until there's a reason not to believe in this."* The fact that Marie McGrath was one of the editors of FEX was raised by interviewees as further evidence of ENN's specific role in that it gave her a particularly broad overview of issues across many different content areas.

Yet, in the view of one participant, although ENN and the Core Group had played a critical role in advocacy and keeping the issue of IFE on the agenda, it had not made enough progress as a collective. *"IFE is a huge issue and one of great collective interest, but the availability of resources and brainpower behind it are not as much as is needed."*

## Specific/unique attributes of ENN that have enabled and/or hindered progress in this area

Participants identified a number of unique qualities that had contributed to ENN's ability to develop the OG-IFE. Conversely, some of these same attributes may have also created some barriers to progress.

ENN's 'neutrality' as an organisation was mentioned as a key enabler by a third of respondents (5/16); *"ENN is like Switzerland... it's a huge benefit that they're not perceived as a single operational agency and [are] independent of single donor support."* Instead, ENN was 'living up to its name' in terms of effective networking and operating as a hub for the Core Group, involving a diverse range of actors normally found outside IFE debates. Others confirmed ENN's strong capacity to build relationships and bring people together through its coordination and facilitation of the IFE Core Group: *"Through lots of respect, a willingness to listen to different views, a sense of belonging and continuous effort, ENN has created a bond among colleagues who trust each other that we will go for that one goal: to have fewer kids exposed to bad practices in terrible circumstances".*

Moreover, being small and agile – and therefore able to respond quickly – was seen as a specific advantage over other stakeholders. *"When we look at WHO and normative guidance, the joke is that it's going to take five years to get anything out of it.*

*What's really nice about ENN is that it was a network of people willing to help you make decisions, to go out on a limb. It's independent, not top-heavy."* Although small, ENN was perceived as having a wealth of experience and a 'big picture view' that enabled it to consider a range of contexts. Its in-house technical expertise and connections with other technical networks were viewed as a matrix that played a critical role in developing the OG-IFE. *"ENN has some very critical brains attached to different projects who are able to see connectedness and partnering links. Others may not have the same role across different initiatives."*

Participants saw ENN as comprising different parts involved in a variety of projects, such as the management of acute malnutrition in infants <6 months (MAMI), linked to broader knowledge management work in emergencies. Although ENN is not directly operational, FEX and the en-net online platform in particular enable it to make the link between people involved in operating and managing programmes and the writing and crafting of the OG-IFE.

As described earlier, a number of the unique qualities of ENN were seen as attributable in particular to ENN's Technical Director, Marie McGrath. As one respondent put it, *"There has*

*been a lot of challenging stuff around infant feeding in relation to the adaptation and updating of materials. It was particularly interesting to see Marie's mindshift following the Syria response... her ability to step back and see the bigger picture, without the drama and emotion linked to the response, is quite particular."*

What unique features of ENN have hindered progress? While enabling flexibility and other positive traits, the organisation's small size could also be regarded as a barrier. A quarter of respondents (4/16) felt that opportunities to highlight either IFE or the OG-IFE may have been missed (by both ENN and the IFE Core Group) because there was always too little money and too few people working on the issue. There was a perception gap (particularly in the US) that ENN was not as well known in development circles for its work in IFE as, for example, larger organisations such as Save the Children. This may also have a

potential knock-on effect in that donors find it difficult to have lots of small funding arrangements with smaller organisations. Although ENN had proved itself adept at finding funding for developing materials over the years, it was noted that resources had become more constrained. There may also be a perception that because ENN was not operational, it may be seen as having a limited role to play: *"Having less day-to-day engagement with donors may limit ENN's ability to secure funding. This is the reality of funding cycles."*

Moreover, interviewees commented on a potential mismatch between ENN's capacity and the enormity of the task. *"[Updating the guidance]... is a huge job that does need someone totally dedicated to it, following up with people to provide feedback. Marie has been doing this but she has other things to do – perhaps it needed one person focused on the job."* As another respondent put it, ten years was a long time to wait for an update.

## Changes in the policy/programming landscape since 2001 that impact on the role (if any) for ENN regarding IFE now (compared to the early days)

**T**he last 16 years were described as bringing cataclysmic changes in the way nutrition (and IFE) were considered – changes that have continued at a rapid pace up to the present day. *"When we were first drafting the OG-IFE, our understanding on IFE was patchy at best. We had a general understanding around breastfeeding and formula, but there is no comparison to the sophistication of understanding we have now; about the need for psychosocial support, stimulation, women's rights and empowerment within a whole framework of broader landscape of feeding children, nutrition-sensitive programming, etc."* The same interviewee explained that it was not that any of the initial ideas in the original guidance had become outdated, but rather that these ideas had been augmented by a deeper understanding of how infant care fits into the whole nutrition cycle. Those who had been involved in all three phases of the IFE-OG's evolution had weathered a cycle of issues (around HIV, Ebola,



SPRING accessed from the USAID/SPRING-UNICEF IYCF Image Bank ([iycf.spring-nutrition.org](http://iycf.spring-nutrition.org)).



artificial feeding, etc): *“Our understanding is so much deeper today, rather than just some guidelines on what you need to do.”*

How did the greater awareness of IFE impact on ENN's role going forward? All participants agreed that IFE was no longer a 'neglected topic.' But with the huge changes in the programme and policy landscape came a greater need to broaden the scope – and sophistication – of the IFE Core Group itself. One interviewee claimed that the Group had not started out as a technical advisory body, yet at times it had played that role, and there was a need for more clarity on the IFE-CG's strategic direction and what it aims to accomplish. *“The Group doesn't meet that often – it is a forum for agencies to get together and discuss things, but when you only do that once or twice a year, it's hard to feel that the CG is a group. The role may be clear on paper but materialising it has been*

*more erratic. There haven't been any regular calls in the last couple of years. It's more ad hoc stuff.”*

Was there now either more UN ownership or agency capacity (ie; with greater resources and capacity than ENN's) to address IFE than before? Half the participants (8/16) raised the issue whether it was a role that the UN agencies should now be taking on, although opinion was divided on whether this was a good idea. What everyone did agree on was that increased awareness of IFE since the early days had not galvanised donor interest. Finding funding for ongoing work was potentially as much of a challenge today as in the past. As one participant explained, *“Government agencies such as USAID still tend to fund implementers, such as Save the Children, that are on the ground. The perception that there's strategy, policy and analysis behind those responses that might also need to be funded is not widely understood.”*

## Benefits and/or risks of ENN's continued work on IFE in the future

**A**s with enablers and obstacles previously discussed, benefits and risks were often viewed as the same side of the coin. ENN's unique qualities – its agility and potential role as a 'bridge' between the humanitarian and the emergency sectors – were viewed as definite reasons for the organisation to continue its work. Key benefits were that ENN was a reliable, known entity with a proven track record: *“It has provided an umbrella, not a coalition but a mechanism around which things keep moving.”*

For some participants, the benefits of ENN's continued engagement on IFE were counterbalanced by the risk that it might be an excuse for other agencies to opt out. By taking on the IFE mantle – and continuing this work – ENN may have occupied a role that other agencies (possibly with more secure funding and with greater capacity) should be doing. Opinion was divided on this. A number of interviewees (4/16) identified UNICEF as the UN agency with a clear mandate for the role and claimed it was

*“disappointing”* that UNICEF had not taken on the work. Others (3/16) were equally adamant that this was not the solution, since UN and other agencies had their own priorities (although the current contributions of both UNICEF and Save the Children to the Core Group were acknowledged). A number of interviewees expressed concern that there was a risk of IFE being dropped or “taking a back seat” if ENN did not carry on the work.

A huge benefit to ENN's continued role in IFE was its institutional memory, the extensive networks and depth of knowledge and experience built up over the last two decades. To some interviewees this also constituted a potential risk since the institutional memory was invested in one person in particular: *“Marie McGrath is amazing and we are going to be in a difficult position if she takes extended holidays for ten years – how can we ensure that such massive learning, experience and connectedness is broadened out across other people and, where appropriate, across other agencies, because it is a huge threat to the overall direction of the community*

*if there's such heavy reliance on the expertise of one person within one agency?"* Other participants also acknowledged that ENN's networks were of huge benefit in terms of the Core Group's profile and representation within wider circles, including links with the SUN Movement (through its SUN Knowledge Management project); however, it would be even more beneficial and add greater depth to the group itself if others could be mentored to share the role in the future. The IFE-CG's nurturing of up-coming talent – particularly regionally-based talent – was seen as important and this was beginning to happen.

Finally, the fact that ENN is not directly operational itself, even though it deals with operational people and issues, was viewed by one participant as a "double-edged sword". The risk was that the organisation was moving from identification of best practice to influencing uptake on the ground but without any accountability as to whether that happens or not: *"It's fair enough as they're not operational but it means they need to be very clear on their role."*

## Need for work to continue on IFE (is there demand?) If yes, why ENN, on what areas and requiring what level of commitment?

The answer to whether there was still a need to work on IFE was an unequivocal "yes" from all interviewees. One likened the topic to peeling an onion – there was always another layer, since contexts were constantly changing for IFE responses. The OG-IFE update (Version 3.0) had been completed, but there was now a need to increase awareness and rollout and for feedback on its application in the next emergency.

As one participant put it, "The question [posed here] is why ENN, but really it could be why not ENN?" The justifications for the organisation to continue were numerous, such as its connectedness, institutional memory and independence (as outlined in previous sections on specific attributes and benefits). The predominant view was summed up by one participant: *"Those who have been involved in the process so far have walked a wise path in terms of steering the group; the way they've managed that, invited others in and enabled them to contribute actively. There might be a consortium that could accomplish the same thing, but it would not be as efficient or effective."*

Yet if ENN felt, for internal reasons, that it was now ready to 'hand over the torch' for this work, interviewees expressed a strong desire for a clear succession plan to be put in place. "What doesn't

seem like a great plan is for ENN to feel their work is done – IFE needs a succession plan to clarify who's going to step up to the plate." Another participant recommended a "strategic pause", regardless whether ENN wanted to continue the work, in order to clarify the Core Group's identity going forward and to review the specific contributions of all members. This review could also inform the areas and level of commitment required (by ENN and others), particularly on what was needed to ensure that the rollout of the latest OG-IFE was a success.

Participants identified a number of other areas for further investigation, including: training; how to develop capacity for an emergency response in a non-emergency setting; and the convergence between emergency and development sectors. However, no specific thoughts on ENN's role in this future work were offered. One interviewee claimed: *"There is a lot of confusion right now about NIE [Nutrition in Emergencies] and how that relates to nutrition in development. People could begin to underestimate the life-saving stuff that must happen in an emergency. For example, in the Middle East at the moment there is so much misunderstanding of how to feed children. We are at risk of losing momentum and everything we've gained if we think our work is done in IFE."*

## Is there another agency that might be well placed to take over ENN's role?

A number of organisations (and specific individuals) were offered as potential alternatives to ENN in its current role. For some respondents, UNICEF had a clear mandate for the role since it was also an operational agency and accountable to member states. Others expressed concern that IFE ran the risk of becoming lost as an internal policy if it were taken on by one of the larger agencies, including UNICEF. The NGO most frequently mentioned was Save the Children, which was felt to have experience in the area and to be well placed to take over from ENN. This would obviously be subject to availability of time, money and staff. Interviewees were concerned, however, that the issue may be subsumed by other priorities within these agencies or lose visibility due to changes in personnel. Another concern was that operational NGOs might find it difficult to juggle implementation activities with the more intellectual work needed to develop the OG-IFE.

One option raised by a few participants was the possibility of splitting ENN's role, with ENN in a

more academic/policy role and another agency in an operational role. One participant mentioned discussions with the Nutrition Cluster about forming an NIE technical body, which could become an IFE clearing house for issues that arise on technical guidance. On the implementation side, agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR and Save the Children might offer dedicated expertise and a role in ensuring rollout of the OG-IFE. Was there a coordinating role for ENN around IFE within this framework?

The majority of respondents (10/16) did not see another organisation with the neutral leadership, overview, commitment and knowledge to take over ENN's role. As one summed it up: *"If I could make a wish, I would wish that ENN would keep this role that they have been playing for two decades. I wish that NGOs and the donor sector would realise its importance so ENN don't have to scramble for funding all the time and I really think that without them IFE would have a less bright future than with them."*



a refugee child living in the Thangkhal  
Makeshift in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar.

# Discussion

**S**tories of change aim to shed light on the drivers and pathways of change through documenting the 'real-time' experiences of policy-makers, nutrition leaders, programme managers and implementers. This particular story – the development and maintenance of the Operational Guidance for IFE – has spanned nearly two decades and undergone a number of phases and developments. ENN (and Technical Director Marie McGrath in particular), as well as a third of study participants, have been constant features of the process.

Findings from key informant interviews identified ENN's role as crucial in 'giving birth' (in 2001) to the original guidance at a time when there was no coordinated group or guidelines for those engaged in IFE. In the subsequent phases of the story, participants attested to ENN's skilful facilitation of the IFE Core Group as enabling members and others in the wider community to keep abreast of developing challenges, such as those posed by HIV, Ebola and issues raised by the Syria response around artificial feeding. The fruits of such efforts were evidenced in the corresponding updates, development of materials, manuals and associated trainings, and most recently, the updated OG-IFE (Version 3.0). The IFE-OG had grown from a 21-page document of 'do's and don'ts' in IFE to a 52-page guidance document, with greater content on areas such as emergency preparedness, actions for sectors other than nutrition and addressing the needs of the non-breastfed child. The process of developing the guidance (throughout all versions) was described as technically incisive and inclusive and incorporating differing viewpoints to reach definitive conclusions; all qualities attributed to ENN.

ENN's strong leadership of the Core Group was seen as pivotal in raising awareness of IFE and the Group's work. The issue had gone from relative obscurity to wide recognition among policy-makers and implementers. As one respondent put it,

*"Thanks to this guidance, you won't find a credible nutrition organisation that doesn't now have IFE included as a major part of what they're doing."*

Much of the credit for this transformation was attributed to ENN's stamina in 'sticking' with the issue, through the highs and lows of policy and programming cycles. Other milestones in the story of the OG-IFE were its adoption as international policy through the WHA resolution and its incorporation into Sphere guidance. ENN's wide networks of agencies and organisations (including UN, government and NGOs) and its awareness of political processes were key to such successes. The Core Group was also represented via ENN on influential technical groups, helping it to leverage support and awareness.

Conversely, some of the factors that led to success in the past may constitute risks for the future if ENN remains at the helm. Its size and independence has enabled it to respond to changes in the policy and programming landscape over the last 20 years, but these have become more complex. With greater sophistication and understanding of the issues surrounding IFE came greater demands. Although the majority of those interviewed wanted ENN to continue its current role, a few questioned whether the issue is now too great and the role too large to be performed by one agency. Challenges of funding and capacity were raised. Development of the OG-IFE had been achieved to date on a series of ad hoc funding arrangements. There was a risk that, since ENN is not an operational agency and is not as well known among development partners as high-profile operational agencies, it may be missing out on the funding and other opportunities to make connections which are essential for the work to continue. The publication of the latest update of the OG-IFE (Version 3.0) presents an opportunity for all involved in the process to take a strategic pause – and to reassess everyone's roles and responsibilities within the IFE Core Group, including those of ENN.

**Table 1** SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for ENN to continue role (based on interviewees' perceptions)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Size – agility and ability to 'get things done'</li> <li>• Technical brokerage</li> <li>• Technical input</li> <li>• Writing skills</li> <li>• Institutional memory</li> <li>• Connections and networks</li> <li>• Understanding of political processes</li> <li>• Prioritisation of IFE work within ENN</li> <li>• Linking humanitarian and development a broader priority within ENN</li> <li>• Strong strategic and technical links with GNC, SUN Movement and WHO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of organisation – limited capacity (both human and financial)</li> <li>• Size of issue – understanding of IFE has grown, therefore needs larger agency to take it on</li> <li>• Lack of operational presence</li> <li>• Difficult to hold accountable for impact (ie for rollout of IFE-OG)</li> <li>• Heavy dependence on one individual within ENN</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For role to be separated into technical and operational responsibilities</li> <li>• Current level of interest in IFE may help secure funding</li> <li>• IFE Core Group members advocate/help secure funding to support ENN role</li> <li>• UNICEF and ENN co-led the OG-IFE update; examination of how this worked and potential for future collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of IFE commitment may be hindering ENN from work on other issues</li> <li>• Adoption by another agency may see work given less priority</li> <li>• Management by another agency may lead to agency-specific 'branding' that may compromise others' engagement/sharing</li> <li>• ENN role allows others with mandated responsibilities to 'opt out' of heavy lifting needed</li> </ul>

# Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, ENN has played a crucial role over the last two decades in putting the issue of infant feeding in emergencies on the map and keeping it there through its facilitation and leadership of the IFE Core Group and its specific contributions to the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE. This 'story of change' charts, in particular, the growth of the OG-IFE from a small publication, through its rollout and regional training initiatives and adoption as international policy to the latest update (Version 3.0), a comprehensive overview of current issues affecting IFE. After two decades of work, and with new guidance published, this report recommends that the IFE Core

Group is currently well placed to consider a 'strategic pause' in order to review its future direction. Emerging issues to be considered for review include:

1. Taking stock: There is an opportunity to examine everyone's roles and responsibilities within the IFE Core Group in order to determine direction and process.
2. Funding: How could this be secured on a more permanent basis to fund ongoing work?
3. Succession: A contingency plan is needed in the event that ENN steps down from its current role in the future.

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A mother and her five children take shelter at the Thangkhal Make shift camp in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar Bangladesh

# Annex 1

## Questions for ENN story of change: Operational Guidance for Infant Feeding in Emergencies (OG-IFE)

### Views of key stakeholders on ENN's role in the development of the OG-IFE

#### Background

The IFE Core Group (IFE Core Group) is an inter-agency/individual collaboration that formed in 1999 to address gaps observed by programmers around infant feeding support in emergencies. ENN is its facilitator and institutional home. The story of the OG-IFE development has been divided into three phases, with emphasis on ENN's role in each:

- Phase 1 (1998-2004): OG-IFE produced in 2001 by the IFE Core Group and managed by ENN;
- Phase 2 (2004-2010): ENN became official IFE Core Group co-ordinator (2004); secured funding from the GNC and coordinated large portfolio of work, including development of modules and resources; Making it Matter report (2006); regional meeting in Indonesia (2008); WHA endorsement (2010);
- Phase 3 (2010-present): Sphere guidance (2011); ENN lower-level activity compared to Phase 2 (2012-2015); funding secured to update OG-IFE (2016); informing Sphere update on IYCF (2017).

The overall aim is to develop a 'story of change' regarding ENN's role in IFE, with specific consideration of the OG-IFE and other relevant policy guidance development, which demonstrates plausible contribution (or otherwise) by ENN to changes in programming, policy and institutional architecture.

#### Objectives

- To identify the key processes, findings, developments and accomplishments of ENN's role in the development and maintenance of the OGIFE (and by default, the IFE Core Group);
- To identify the key processes, findings, developments and accomplishments of ENN's role in the development of other normative (WHO) and agency policy guidance development;
- To identify key enablers and key obstacles encountered during the processes over the years;
- To identify anything specific that facilitated the OG-IFE to be adopted as international policy;
- To identify the perceived need for, and exact nature of, ENN's involvement in future IFE work (key question: why ENN?)

I am an external reviewer to ENN. Please be reassured that all your responses are CONFIDENTIAL and that all responses will be anonymised and recorded only by an individual's job and type of agency.

## Questions

1. What is (or was) your position and the type of agency you worked for during any (or all) of the phases mentioned above in Background? E.g. nutrition advisor; type of agency (e.g. NGO/UN/government)/ region or country.
2. What do you consider to be your role (and that of your agency/ies) in the development and maintenance of the OG-IFE? Did this change over the years? If so, how?
3. What do you consider to be the role of ENN in this process?
4. Do you think there is evidence of impact of ENN's role as part of the collective process on policy, programming and research? Can you give specific examples?
5. Is there evidence of impact of ENN's specific role on policy, programming and research?
6. Can you describe any specific/unique attributes of ENN that have enabled and/or hindered progress in this area?
7. Are you aware of changes in the policy/programming landscape since 2001 that impact on the role (if any) for ENN regarding IFE now (compared to the early days)?
8. Do you perceive any benefits and/or risks to ENN's continued work on IFE in the future?
9. In your opinion, is there a need for work to continue on IFE? If yes, what is the justification for ENN to continue and on what areas and requiring what level of commitment? Is there another agency that might be well placed to take over ENN's role?
10. Do you have any further observations/comments on ENN's role in either the IFE Core Group or the development of the OG-IFE – or for the future?





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