



CRESCER (OPERATIONAL RESEARCH AGAINST CHILD MALNUTRITION IN ANGOLA)

SEEKING THE MOST EFFECTIVE, SCALABLE AND SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING CHRONIC MALNUTRITION

In southern Angola, the provinces of Cunene, Huila and Namibe are recurrently hit by droughts and floods and are located in an area characterised by deserts, savannahs and forests. It is a region that is sparsely populated (the three provinces total almost 4 million people, 66% of whom live in rural areas) with many marginalised rural communities, with a low level of economic development. As a result, southern Angola has high levels of food insecurity and around 40% of children under 5 years of age suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Chronic undernutrition has serious short- and long-term consequences for children: it compromises their health, growth and neurocognitive development, increases the risk of death and disease, and is a brake on individual, community and social progress. The complex and multifactorial nature of chronic undernutrition means that responses must also be multi-sectoral and integrated.

In the search for the best strategies to reduce chronic malnutrition, the CRESCER project is conducting a community-based trial comparing the impact of different intervention packages on the reduction of chronic malnutrition and mortality in children under five in the provinces of Huila and Cunene. The objective: to identify the most cost-effective, scalable and sustainable intervention to reduce chronic child malnutrition by acting on the window of opportunity of the 1,000 days, from pregnancy to two years of age.

The different intervention packages compared have in common a "basic package of health promotion and prevention" that includes activities such as hygiene and sanitation promotion, malaria prevention in pregnancy, maternal and child deworming and vitamin A supplementation for children under 5 years of age. This basic package is implemented through the ADECOS (Community and Health Development Agents), a key figure in bringing disease prevention and health promotion to the most remote rural communities. In addition, together with the health technicians of the municipal and communal health units, the ADECOS bring the health and social needs of the population closer to the public administrations.

The CRESCER project is a consortium made up of five entities: the Vall d'He-bron (VHIR), coordinator of the consortium, the Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII- CNMT), Action Against Hunger Spain (ACF) and the local partners FAS- Instituto de Desarrollo Local and the University Mandume Ya Ndemufayo (UMN). In addition, the project is part of the FRESAN programme (Strengthening Resilience and Food and Nutrition Security in Angola), funded by the European Union in a joint initiative with the Government of Angola.

THE OBJECTIVES OF CRESCER

- **Objective 1:** To determine, through operational research, the impact of three high-impact, nutritional and nutrition-sensitive intervention strategies focusing on the 1,000 days opportunity window on the reduction of chronic malnutrition in under-fives in rural areas of the provinces of Huila and Cunene (Angola).
- **Objective 2:** Disseminate the resulting evidence and exchange knowledge and recommendations with the Government of Angola and other strategic multi-sectoral partners to contribute to the scaling up of high-impact strategies to reduce chronic malnutrition in children under 5 years of age.

RESEARCH AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE

The CRESCER team strongly believes in the importance of operational research as a tool to improve people's lives and respond to the needs of communities. For this reason, the CRESCER project works from the outset to involve all stakeholders, especially national actors. The project understands research as an engine for change and seeks to share the knowledge that is generated in a practical, transparent and participatory manner. The direct application of knowledge in the communities improves the lives of the populations, especially the most vulnerable, and also makes it possible to generate evidence to support public policies based on reliable data and with a cost-effectiveness approach. From this perspective, the dissemination of the CRESCER project's results seeks to generate a profound impact that includes:

- Strengthening capacities with an eye to sustainability.



- To boost the existing potential in the country, especially that of the programme for development and health through community agents (ADECOS).
- Involve academic actors.

- Work together with policy makers in institutional strengthening and shift towards policies that make visible and improve the approach to chronic malnutrition in the country.

NEXT STEPS AND SPACES FOR COLLABORATION

The community trial runs until 2025, when all children of mothers participating in the study will be two years old. In such a large study, it is crucial to maintain the quality and rigour of the implementation of the three interventions and the commitment of all actors, from participants to institutions. To this end, CRESCER's next steps include:

- Maintain continuous cascade training of trainers, supervisors and ADECOS.
- Continue to strengthen community and institutional coordination, especially at provincial and municipal level, in order to reinforce the

information and that the needs of the communities identified by ADECOS are adequately addressed.

- Conduct the second of three workshops planned during the project, to further involve and engage all political levels in the strengthening of the ADECOS community programme.

We need to join forces and capacities, building alliances that are committed to a different way of dealing with malnutrition, and with whom we can work together.



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