**PROGRAM OVERVIEW** Nutrition at the Center (N@C) is an innovative five-year (2013-2017) program designed to develop, document, and disseminate highly effective and efficient integrated approaches that substantially and sustainably improve nutritional outcomes for mothers and children. With generous support from the Sall Family Foundation, N@C aims to reduce anemia in women (age 15-49 years) and stunting and anemia children (age 0-24 months) in Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, and Zambia by integrating maternal, infant and young child nutrition and health (MIYCN), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security, and women’s empowerment.

**Nutrition at the Center in Benin**
In Benin, N@C works primarily with Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) throughout 32 villages in Bonou and Dangbo to improve the nutritional status of women and children. Engaging with local NGOs, Autre Vie and FADeC, N@C is increasing access to credit for women while providing education on nutrition issues through the VSLAs. Knowing that women can not do it all alone, N@C reaches out to husbands, local leaders, and mothers-in-law encouraging them to support the community’s mothers.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**
- An effective and integrated intervention model of malnutrition prevention, care, treatment and support will be developed with the goal of a **13% reduction in anemia** in women and children and a **9% decrease in child stunting**.
- Form and equip **224 VSLAs** (128 women’s groups, 32 mixed groups, 32 men’s groups, 32 influential persons groups) reaching **5,600 direct** and **5,600 indirect beneficiaries** with health, nutrition, gender equity, WASH, and food security.
- Strengthen the capacity of **400+ volunteers** and **30+ government staff** on the integrated nutrition focus areas.
Program Implementation at a Glance

N@C in Benin is focusing on strengthening partnerships with local communities and research institutions to bring large-scale change to improve the nutritional status of women and children.

MATERINAL, INFANT, AND YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION

Nearly 200 catalysts, or group leaders, have been trained on improved food and nutrition practices for infant and young child feeding (IYCF) which has allowed the catalysts to support Autre Vie and FADeC in sharing IYCF information and providing cooking demonstrations for more than 2,000 households. N@C’s observance of World Breastfeeding Week has increased active participation from government officials and radio stations, engaging more than 2,200 breastfeeding women at one time across 32 villages to improve educational outcomes as women’s groups compete to contribute creative songs encouraging exclusive breastfeeding.

WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

In an effort to improve WASH practices in target communities, N@C engages VSLA members in building household handwashing systems such as ‘tippy-taps’ — a makeshift hand washing station made from a water bottle or can suspended by a rope. Approximately 3,050 VSLA members that have been trained on water storage and sanitation; and in engaging with other community members, many non-target households have also improved their WASH practices.

On an institutional level, the Institute of Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Benin has taken interest in N@C’s Environmental Enteropathy (EE) study given the success N@C had in Zambia helping communities keep babies from mouthing feces which is linked to malnutrition; and has invited CARE to participate in the testing of groundbreaking EE detection technology with the potential to change global nutrition programming.

FOOD SECURITY

N@C has trained 55 catalysts in Bonou and 56 catalysts in Dangbo on food security and agriculture. Following the training, N@C supported the catalysts in setting up 111 home gardens and provided tomato and green vegetable seeds. The catalysts, then, shared seedlings with members of their VSLA to assist in setting up their own household gardens, reaching more than 150 families to date. Complementing the field-level work, N@C staff participated in a Nutrition, Food Security and Adaptation to Climate Change workshop, helping them to better define and enforce these existing food security activities.

PARTICIPATORY DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

The CARE N@C team in Benin developed the Participant Diagnostic Tool as an alternative to externally “imposed” development projects for communities, which are often not sustainable. The tool enables communities to identify underlying causes of malnutrition and empowers them to develop plans to address root causes. The tool builds cohesion and empowers community members by promoting ownership and providing opportunities to engage in local government planning and budgeting processes. To date, the tool has been used in 12 villages with significant results, including the allocation of funds by the district government for the construction of a health facility in one remote community. To date, more than 350 households have committed to “household challenge books,” which outline their specific household commitment within the Village Development Plan and actions required to improve nutrition by setting targets for food security, health and economic strengthening. The success of the Participant Diagnostic Tool, as used in N@C’s integrated approach, has attracted the interest of the World Bank for potential scale-up.