



USAID Nawiri June 2021 Learning Brief: Elevating Community Voices in Turkana and Samburu Counties



Background: Community engagement and elevating community voices is a priority for the USAID Nawiri program and has been highlighted as one of the key strategies for successful delivery of the program in Turkana and Samburu counties. USAID Nawiri co-created the joint inception of research roll-out and community engagement to prepare for data collection activities. The co-creation was led by the Multi-sector Platform for Nutrition (MSP-N) at the county level who supported similar roll-outs at the sub county and ward levels. Key leaders were engaged from the sub-county and ward administration, who ensured participation of sub-county cross-sectoral technical officers. Mobilization drew broad participation from male and female community members, Civil Society Organizations, community elders, and organized groups such as traders and other private sector actors. The goal was to increase awareness and ownership of the program, improve readiness for research and insight gathering from communities, ensure understanding and involvement in the programs design and implementation actions, and facilitate prioritization of nutrition-supportive actions within local planning processes.

Introduction: USAID Nawiri is very intentional about incorporating learning in the planning, execution, and adaptation of their community engagement activities. Elevating the community voice is a core guiding principle in project design and implementation. In the spirit of sensitizing the community on the research and learning agenda, inception meetings were utilized to share research studies, in a simplified version, with stakeholders. This was done to build stakeholder awareness on the specific evidence gaps that the studies were seeking to address and how the evidence generated will help fill knowledge gaps. This was critical in getting community input into the process of evidence generation. It also sought their input and ownership in the program goal, design, and implementation approach.

"This is the first project to bring all Government Officers and community leaders together. I wish we start this way, continue this way and finish this way, and leave our community better than we found it," -
Community Leader from Katilu, Turkana County

During the sensitization and inception meetings at sub county and ward level, USAID Nawiri shared the program’s vision, while Government officials took an active role in joint planning of sessions and co-creation of presentations. Government officials co-presented, disseminated information, and generated feedback during the meetings. Other actors involved included representatives of youth and women groups, and community members. The process helped to facilitate and strengthen linkages between communities and government, while further building ownership and understanding of USAID Nawiri’s approach.

Lessons Learned

- Community entry and immersion through the co-creation process with county, sub-county and ward level officials and community leaders facilitated a greater understanding the USAID Nawiri Program. The

appreciation of the need to maintain a multi-sectoral view of addressing PAM influenced the formation of the joint team at all levels. Involvement of these officials in co-creation and joint planning of the inception and roll-out sessions helped put emphasis of USAID Nawiri as a partnership initiative that is committed to aspirations of a county-led and managed program. The involvement of county staff in co-creating presentations and feedback-gathering sessions enabled better alignment of the sessions to the context of specific locations.

“As youth, we are always forgotten in many interventions. I am glad that Nawiri saw the need to engage the youth to support content dissemination. We hope our contribution in enhancing a two-way communication among online audiences will go a long way in preventing the spread of coronavirus,” - Social Media Influencer, Samburu County

- The use of a Comment & Feedback tracker and daily debrief sessions throughout the research roll-out and community engagement process allows for integrating learning in community engagement results, quick feedback and adaptation, continuous improvement of the process and in enhancing community participation i.e., mobilization of specific target groups.
- Community engagement is an opportunity to identify program’s community champions. The discussions evidenced a clear excitement and willingness from community members to work together with USAID Nawiri both in the research phase and implementation of interventions. There was commitment from subcounty and ward leaders (administrators, chiefs) to continue sensitizing the community on malnutrition issues during their meetings as well strong buy-in from multi-sectoral platforms for nutrition at lower levels. The visibility of local stakeholders as community champions communicating about malnutrition fosters community trust and buy-in.
- An effective community engagement strategy provides a platform for communities to amplify their voices in defining their problems and proposing solutions, as they understand their context better. For example, the communities in Turkana North, Kibish Sub-County, identified a lack of water as the critical need and major driver of persistent acute malnutrition, despite previous programs focusing on short term priorities - food distribution and cash transfers during drought.
- The understanding of the history of aid in USAID Nawiri’s operating areas is key. Feedback of community experiences demonstrated a dichotomy of reactions between under-served and regularly reached communities, with the former demonstrating expectancy and latter being critical and anxious. The community reception of the roll-out provided useful insights into how to better engage in contexts where previous efforts and programs have promoted aid dependency, accumulation of unfulfilled commitments and community fatigue due to repeated studies. USAID Nawiri’s approach of co-creating the inception roll-out plan and delivery with county stakeholders and gatekeepers enabled building trust among communities who were able to express their concerns openly. As a result of this, it made it easier to engage communities in co-defining long-term contextual challenges and potential solutions.

Applying Lessons Learned: One of the key objectives of USAID Nawiri is to enhance citizen engagement to ensure that citizens and communities play a key role in adding their voices in ensuring that priorities, as far as addressing persistent acute malnutrition is concerned, are aligned with public interests. It is also key to include a diverse set of voices in the process. This is strongly aligned with the journey to self-reliance vision, which provides the conceptual underpinning for all USAID activities. USAID Nawiri achieved this by working with a wide range of stakeholders at the county and community levels.

Figure 1: Key adaptations and implications

Lessons Learned	Adaptation or implication
Elevating community voices requires a community engagement strategy that is	More integrated Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is required to take into

consistent with USAID Nawiri's commitment to engage communities, monitor and facilitate feedback loops on planned interventions that resonates with the community members' context and needs.	account continuous learning and issues emerging from both counties in order to adapt accordingly.
The visibility of local stakeholders as community champions communicating on malnutrition has fostered community trust and requires continuous identification and expansion of key county officials and community level influencers (such as chiefs and elders).	While there is a need to continue working together with key actors to promote synergies, layering, ownership and sustainability mechanisms, stronger community voice can be enhanced through building greater presentation, mobilization, and facilitation capacities at the community level.
Formation of multi-sectoral teams in the inception roll-out sessions at various levels underscored the need to devolve the county multisectoral platform for nutrition to sub-county and ward.	USAID Nawiri is working through the MSP to improve the bottom-up approach in setting priorities and decision-making across all sectors in relation to nutrition at sub-county and ward levels.
Community insights of contextual challenges and potential solutions are key to informing geographical targeting, adaptations to research approaches, and program adaptations.	Adaptations to the research and learning agenda were made to take into account community insights. For example, adjustments with regards to pilot disbursement under REAP and equitable access to markets are key considerations.
The Comment & Feedback tracker was very critical to integrating learning from community engagement and enabled the solicitation of volumes of qualitative feedback that required systematic analysis and responsive actions to be taken.	While the continued use of a Comment & Feedback tracker adds value, a technological solution is needed to facilitate quicker turn-around on analysis, actions and tracking more routinely.
Given the context of dependency on aid interventions, there is a need for USAID Nawiri to apply systems-thinking to a developing or ongoing crisis and ensure Do No Harm principles are adhered to.	The context of dependency requires approaches to crisis interventions that look at sustaining development gains and potential to strengthen them, by ensuring that humanitarian and development interventions are linked.

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