



USAID Nawiri June 2021 Learning Brief: Strategic Actor Engagement in Turkana and Samburu counties



Background: At the onset, USAID Nawiri continuously questioned its assumptions about how things should be done and who should do them - challenging its stakeholders to do the same. This held true in USAID Nawiri’s work with county-led Multi-sector Platforms for Nutrition (MSP-N) and responding to the COVID-19 crisis. In doing so, USAID Nawiri facilitated new partnerships with and between county actors, including county government, like-minded NGOs, media and the private sector. Engagement of key actors at all levels is critical to finding new ways to design, conduct, expand and sustain effective and equitable health policies, programs and related interventions.

“Nawiri’s business unusual approach to working with government has meant that the community see the government is leading, not Nawiri.” - Director of Health, Samburu County

Introduction: USAID Nawiri rallied key actors to action, particularly working with government sector representatives, media, social media influencers, PREG partners and the private sector to co-create solutions.

This was accomplished through stakeholder engagement in the program inception, research statement of work (SoW) design, implementation, COVID-19 Response, sensitization, quality assurance, learning & adaptation sessions, as well as strengthening coordination structures within government systems.

Technical county government staff engaged in defining areas of inquiry and designing research SoWs. Represented sectors include Water, Health, Education, Finance & Economic Planning, Gender, Youth, Sports and Social services, Agriculture & Livestock and Fisheries, Environment & Natural Resources, Road & Infrastructure, and Trade. Technical staff hold sector leadership positions, have strong ownership in the program, and are not affected by political transitions, which is a critical factor in planning for sustainability. This approach facilitated the government in driving the agenda for advancing nutrition.

Lessons Learned

- Advancing a multi-sectoral approach throughout the planning cycle contributed to the promotion of evidence-based decision-making for sector planning and resource allocation. The revival of the MSP-N was a critical step in the process. USAID Nawiri advocated for high level county government leadership to chair the Multi-Sectoral Platform and reduce reliance on development partner support. In addition, coordination with UNICEF helped to further establish ways to ensure sustainable operations. As a result, county governments took the lead and appointed senior members to serve on the MSP-N forum. Steps have been taken to strengthen the functional mandate of the MSP-N,

including the validation of the Terms of Reference, creating greater accountability through a results framework, and building policy and legal frameworks.

- The incremental process of continuously engaging with government at various levels and participation in key forums elevated interest and broadened understanding in the importance of using research to inform programming. Stronger partnerships with county government led to greater engagement during the co-creation of the program inception, research SoW design, implementation, and analysis of collected evidence. County government stakeholders have been critical in identifying evidence gaps, providing contextual insight, and shaping the research agenda. They remain keen to align and engage in interventions that add value to government priorities.

“Our participation in Statements of Work as government is critical in identification of critical health and nutrition gaps through research and hopefully jointly co-creating of solutions that will have a high impact in reducing Persistent Acute Malnutrition. We have to move together through all the stages of USAID Nawiri project implementation,” - Cynthia Lokidor, Turkana County Nutrition Coordinator

- USAID Nawiri held kick-off meetings with county, sub-county, ward administrators, and chiefs to build critical stakeholder involvement and community buy-in to the program. Government representatives took part (and later led) daily reflection, learning and adaptation discussions on optimizing their program engagement. This resulted in the government taking greater ownership in the program’s approach and collaborating in introducing the program directly to communities.
- The USAID Nawiri COVID-19 Response developed Learning Sprints to purposefully incorporate technical leads from key government departments to support in the design and execution of interventions that responded to emerging COVID-19 implications on service delivery. Activities were rolled out with County Departments to address immediate concerns and ensure longer-term impact on continued services to the communities. Learning Sprints included indicators to monitor progress, while incorporating regular learning and adaptation. The design resulted in more innovative ways to deliver programming, and a transfer of knowledge/skills to technical leaders, as well as front line workers. Many of the adaptations related to post-MUAC family screening meetings, gender dynamics within the household, and community dialogue, are still in use.
- During the COVID-19 response activities, USAID Nawiri engaged multiple key actors that included government, like-minded NGOs (like UNICEF), media, social media influencers and the private sector to co-create solutions to reach a wider audience. For instance, media and social media influencers played a critical role in facilitating two-way communication closing the feedback loop, ensuring misconceptions were addressed, and relations between government and its citizens were strengthened. The willingness of government to adapt and use social media to engage community members was very effective. During the COVID-19 response in Samburu County, government officials used platforms provided by Social Media Influencers such as Facebook Live for the first time, to interact with community members, especially young people, and respond to their concerns in real time.

Applying Lessons Learned: Taking time to reflect and adapt is a routine and fundamental component of how USAID Nawiri works, and allows us to remain agile and responsive to changing circumstances. Prioritizing routine pause and reflect moments within and across teams and stakeholders helps surface opportunities. USAID Nawiri is modelling the adaptive learning culture and contributing to the enabling environment in Turkana and Samburu, which it believes, will result in transformative change.

Figure I: Key adaptations and implications

Lesson Learned	Adaptation or implication
Reorienting the leadership structure of MSP to be chaired by senior members of the County Government and less reliant on development partner support provided a strategic and sustainable opportunity for cross-sectoral initiatives targeting reduction of PAM in the counties.	Anchoring MSP-N into policy and legislation will secure legitimacy and ensure sustainability. In addition, it can further elevate policy advocacy and support greater resource allocations across sectors.
The use of social media platforms (influencers) and community radios are a first step to exploring opportunities with youth in the virtual world.	USAID Nawiri will explore technology-based options that could enrich communication and coordination that the government can adopt that is responsive to youth.
Sub-County/Constituency Political leadership active in community sensitization and rollout gave the program greater legitimacy, political good will and active support, especially with the legislative arm.	USAID Nawiri is expanding its engagement to better secure technical support and resourcing of evidence-based initiatives with both arms of the government (Legislative and Executive).

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