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THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS ON NUTRITION OUTCOMES

LEARNING BRIEF

INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

Women, men, adolescents, and youth within Samburu and Turkana counties live within complex social systems that dictate their differential roles and responsibilities, vulnerabilities and capacities, relationships and power dynamics that influence nutrition outcomes across their life cycles. While patriarchy is a major influencer of social and gender norms in both counties, the unique socio-cultural, community and livelihood dynamics within ethno-social groups contribute to inequalities, including by gender and age, but also create unique entry points for efforts to address persistent global acute malnutrition (P-GAM). These contextual features are further influenced by factors such as environment and seasonality, livelihood systems and institutions, which ultimately impact nutrition outcomes at the household level. For this reason, the adapted conceptual framework for nutrition causality in Africa's

drylands¹ recognizes the cross-cutting influence of gender and social dynamics on nutrition pathways, and highlights the importance of local contextual analysis to inform understanding of drivers as well as potential interventions to address acute malnutrition.

To deepen our understanding of the ways in which intersecting identities – including gender, age, marital status, social standing, etc. – as well as social, cultural and gender norms and practices impact on nutrition pathways, USAID Nawiri undertook an extensive analysis to understand gender and social dynamics as they relate to P-GAM in Samburu and Turkana counties. Specifically, the study looked to understand how social and gender norms impact gender roles, decision-making power, and access to and use of resources, assets and services at the household and community levels, including across seasonality and times of crisis. This helped identify specific entry points to reduce gender barriers faced by women, girls and other marginalized groups related to food and nutrition security, including through interventions to safely support their empowerment and strengthen formal and informal systems to promote gender equality.

This learning brief traces our learnings over the past two years, bringing together insights from various studies, county consultative meetings and engagement with targeted communities to guide the development of integrated gender responsive interventions. The findings affirmed USAID Nawiri’s overarching hypothesis that attitudes, behaviors, and norms within the targeted counties maintain gender inequities, contribute to gender-based violence (GBV), and are root contributors to malnutrition. Further, the process uncovered significant nuance and contextually specific behaviors, practices and barriers to the access and utilization of resources and strategies that inform targeted approaches to integrate gender and social considerations across USAID Nawiri interventions. Findings and lessons learned emphasize the importance of multi-level programming that reaches beyond target groups and mobilizes key decision-makers and the wider community to adopt supportive gender and social norms and practices that together support an enabling environment for nutrition resilience. This will be achieved through gender transformative policies, plans and strategies for nutrition, rooted in local social institutions and practices.

LEARNING JOURNEY

The gender and social dynamics “evidence-to-action” process began with an internal technical Gender Analysis led by USAID Nawiri research learning and working groups. These provided a forum for joint analysis of findings and an opportunity to provide insights into adaptations for the program’s other specific lines of inquiry. This process was followed by county co-creation sessions with county gender specific and non-gender sector working group members, drawing in representatives from other critical sectors from within the multi-sectoral platform for nutrition, to clarify, validate and disseminate the findings from the Gender Analysis in both counties. The process engaged technical government staff in a facilitated reflection journey to consider how the findings could be incorporated into their respective

¹ Helen Young, “Nutrition in Africa’s Drylands: A conceptual framework for addressing acute malnutrition,” Feinstein International Center, 2020.

work plans and sectoral strategies. These sessions informed the development of the USAID Nawiri Gender Strategy and Action Plan and provided insights for design considerations. This brief is strongly connected to insights pulled from the adolescent sexual reproductive health (ASRH) line of inquiry and the related learning brief.

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

INSIGHT N°1: Adolescence offers a critical window for engaging with boys and girls to shape their educational, social, behavioral and cultural perspectives and expectations in a way that will influence the decisions they make into adulthood.

USAID Nawiri's Gender Analysis, Adolescent Reproductive Health Study, as well as county and community consultations all highlighted adolescence as a critical period in which young people shape their behaviors, expectations, ambitions and decisions in ways that influence the opportunities they access and seize as adults. Beginning in middle childhood and continuing into adolescence, young people begin to form expectations around inter-personal relationships, sexual behaviors, engagement with cultural practices, and to accept or challenge gender and social norms around relationships, violence, and sexual and reproductive practices. As USAID Nawiri looks to engage with adolescents during this critical period, we must understand the specific vulnerabilities male and female adolescents face, and how these are shaped by the intersecting identities of young people. In addition to gender, factors that emerged which influence specific vulnerabilities include if they are pastoralist/non-pastoralist, married/unmarried, pregnant/mother, and engaged or not in moranism, implying differential vulnerabilities that impact the choices available to adolescent boys and girls within the two counties.

Across both counties, adolescent girls and boys expressed desire to pursue educational opportunities, access adolescent- and youth-responsive health services and pursue economic and business opportunities, but they lack the agency to make decisions to shape the availability, quality and accessibility of these services. For example, in pastoral livelihood zones, young boys are often prevented from attending school to look after livestock; and may feel social and cultural pressure to enter into moranism rather than go to school, as moranism confers status and power within the community. For adolescent girls, the situation is more extreme: **adolescent girls are virtually invisible within the community**, especially pregnant and early married girls, suggesting that these girls have extremely limited engagement outside of the household. This has critical implications, as their invisibility within the community limits their ability to shape decisions and outcomes that impact their access to opportunities and services and which will most probably be carried over into their adult life. As USAID Nawiri looks to engage with adolescent girls, our strategy must be two-pronged: 1) to support girls to expand their agency and decision-making around marriage and pregnancy in ways that decrease early pregnancy, and 2) to identify solutions for girls who are already married and mothers, to enhance their agency, self-confidence and decision-making abilities. Further, during insight gathering as part of our human centered design (HCD) process for adolescent and youth reproductive health, marriage was highlighted as an important aspiration of young people from across ethno-ecological landscapes and wealth categories. Any interventions around traditional early marriages must consider how to harness the respectability of marital status and ensure that efforts to keep girls in school and avoid early marriage will not reduce the bride price or preclude girls from eventually getting married.

The importance of engaging with parents, customary leaders ('custodians of culture'), as well as mentors or role models to help shape the perspectives, messages and practices that young people are exposed to emerged as critical insights across both counties. In Samburu, there is an opportunity to engage with the older age set above the current *morans*, who play an important role in passing on cultural and social information to the age set below. Across both counties, parents are critical gate keepers that determine whether adolescents are able to go to school or are subjected to early marriage or pulled out of school to attend to household tasks. Engaging with parents to expand the options available to young people, and helping them to understand and value alternative choices and options, is critical to expanding the agency and outcomes for young people.

Implications: Disrupting cycles of poverty and malnutrition calls for contextually nuanced interventions that have potential for user ownership, scale up and reach to the significant population of adolescent girls and women, adolescent boys and young men in highly vulnerable households. To address these challenges, USAID Nawiri will apply a set of nuanced and integrated approaches to differential vulnerabilities/needs that enhance access to adolescent- and gender-responsive health services, support socio-economic empowerment, and improve school retention for adolescents. USAID Nawiri proposes to adapt the "Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health" (GIRL-H) model, which engages adolescent girls and boys in cohort groups, under the leadership of a mentor and working with parents, guardians and caregivers, to support adolescents in setting goals and to equip them with critical life-skills related to their unique contexts and social norms, livelihood opportunities, and reinforce peer networks, agency, and advocacy skills. Key adaptations to GIRL-H, informed by learning to date, include: Lessons from '*Binti Shujaa*'² incorporating greater diversity and tailoring of transitional economic and social empowerment pathways among in-school and out-of-school girls and boys; focusing on building empathy and trust between and within girls and boys as social capital, including with adolescents from conflicting communities on effect on normalization of violence (see Conflict Learning Brief); facilitating discussions around trauma, inclusive of those induced by hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity; as well as working with child care services to free time for adolescent mothers to participate in other empowerment opportunities (see also Labor Market Learning Brief). This will contribute to transforming the environment that has sustained these vulnerabilities - uniquely for age and gender dynamics - using 'manyatta based' and safe space-based training to reach rural and marginalized out of school adolescents with technical and vocational training, business development and empowerment funds (see Labor Market Learning Brief).

Moreover, through a process of community dialogue that addresses underlying power dynamics and inequity in decision-making, USAID Nawiri will work with community gatekeepers, including parents, traditional and customary leaders, and role models to define together with adolescents and young people solutions to transform social norms to sustainably reduce the marginalization of adolescent girls

² An initiative of USAID-funded Afya Uzazi that uses peer-based mobilization and mentorship approaches to address the health needs of adolescent mothers and their children. The model works with a cadre of facilitators (Binti Shujaas) from among young female members of the community 20-25yrs to champion mobilization of young pregnant adolescents and those with children and link them with appropriate health, education and socio-economic empowerment opportunities.

and boys that helps perpetuate cycles of poverty and undernutrition. Engaging with these stakeholders to expand the options available to young people, and helping them to understand and value alternative choices and options, is critical to expanding the agency and outcomes for young people. As the livelihood systems that entrench these practices are under pressure due to climate change, land degradation, privatization of communal land, and ongoing conflicts, there is a critical opportunity to partner with parents to capitalize on these external changes to drive forward expanded opportunities for young men and women in Samburu and Turkana.

This set of interventions will be closely linked to USAID Nawiri's Governance for Nutrition work through the CATALYSE approach, inclusive of adolescent boys and girls preparing them to be better engaged as citizens and in the accountability building process for service improvements including improved water delivery services that will have a major impact on girls and women as they bear the responsibility of fetching water for the household (see Water Security for Nutrition Learning Brief). USAID Nawiri will also work through youth forums as platforms for transforming perpetrators of violence into socially and economically empowered and networked agents and peace ambassadors such as reformed warriors, to promote "Warriors for Health and Nutrition" (see Conflict Learning Brief).

TOC Reference: Outcome 3.1.1.1 Social networks for marginalized groups (women, youth, adolescent boys and girls) strengthened Outcome 3.1.1.2 Women and adolescent girls effectively participate in community dialogue IO 1.3.2 Adolescent girls' have increased agency to make positive life choices. Outcome 1.3.2.2 Adolescent girls are not pressured into early marriage, early sex or other practices harmful to their health or wellbeing.

INSIGHT N°2: By understanding and working within the distinct cultural practices and institutions of Samburu and Turkana, USAID Nawiri can partner with key gatekeepers to transform gender norms and address harmful traditional practices that perpetuate intergenerational poverty and undernutrition.

The Gender Analysis findings illuminated the influential role of the rich cultural systems within Samburu and Turkana in defining norms and practices across age-specific generational milestones and gender lines. Gender norms and practices are tightly defined by these cultural traditions, in ways that have a formative impact on the opportunities, agency and outcomes of adolescents and adults across the two counties. At no time is this more visible than in middle childhood and adolescence, when cultural practices define the transition to adulthood through rituals and practices that play a critical role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and SRH outcomes with direct implications for gender norms, inter-household and community dynamics, and nutrition outcomes.

For the adolescent and young boys in Samburu, the age-set system is a critical cultural milestone that grooms boys for adulthood. As they graduate from boyhood to *morans* (warriors), boys as young as ten participate in initiation ceremonies over several months during which the older age-set and elders in the community transmit critical attitudes and cultural practices to the next generation, socializing boys to conform to social and cultural expectations and practices. This system is highly patriarchal, entrenching masculine gender norms that dictate male conduct in relation to one another and with women, and define the role of men and women within the household and society. The system enhances social connectedness (bonding social capital) within gender and age sets but reinforces social divides between them. Moranism confers power and privilege to adolescent boys and encourages early sexual initiation, with adolescent girls expected to comply, exposing adolescent girls to sexual and gender-based violence

and resulting in pregnancy and early marriage; children conceived through these sexual encounters are often unsafely aborted, and those born face stigma leaving them extremely vulnerable to malnutrition and other poor outcomes. In Turkana, adolescent boys and young men aged 15-25 are referred to as "N'goroko", or warriors, with the sole purpose of protecting their community. This could include fighting, raiding, or restocking. The community 'seers' (traditional healers) are key influencers of these groups and bless their raids as well as punish the warriors. These seers are part of the tree of men charged with the responsibility of maintaining culture, rituals, and punishment, and play a similar role in initiating and shaping the cultural attitudes and practices of adolescent boys.

Within Turkana, the dowry system emerged as a key cultural institution that entrenches conflict, poverty, and perpetuates harmful practices against women and adolescent girls. The amount of dowry demanded is determined by the size of the extended family of the bride; the larger the family, the higher the bride price that must be paid. This high bride price requires men to undertake a significant investment to acquire the resources needed to pay the dowry- either through building livestock assets or savings, or through cattle raiding. In the case children are born to a woman whose bride price has not been paid, the children are not considered to belong to the man until he pays the bride price, creating a significant social pressure to complete the dowry payment. The high dowry paid has the effect of monetizing the marriage relationship, leading men to view their wives as assets they have acquired and conferring ownership to the man by virtue of the dowry that has been paid. This system has significant implications on efforts to promote women's empowerment and agency at both the household and community level, as men are reluctant to share power and decision-making responsibilities because they view their wives as property. Efforts to build equitable decision-making and to enhance women's agency within Turkana must understand and work within this system. Further engagement with men and key decision-makers is needed to identify opportunities to shape these practices and norms in order to inform interventions that shift notions of ownership toward more equitable systems that create space for women's decision-making.

Implication:

Supporting sustained, locally driven social-change efforts in order to transform gender norms and practices is a priority for USAID Nawiri. Our learning re-affirmed the need to work within these cultural systems, engaging key stakeholders – especially elders who are seen as the 'custodians of culture' – in order to reframe harmful gender and generational norms in ways that highlight the impact of norms on malnutrition and enhance opportunities for positive social and gender transformative change. Critical opportunities that can result in long-term positive change include finding cultural opportunities to allow *Morans* in Samburu and the N'goroko in Turkana to continue to pursue education concurrently with their initiation while adapting the school environment to accommodate multiple identities of the modern boy child; transforming norms that equate sexuality with violence and result in adolescent pregnancy and marriage; and engaging adolescent boys and older mentors in redefining their role in promoting positive nutrition and development outcomes through a rebranding of *Moran/N'goroko* into 'warriors for health and nutrition'. This will be done using tested social analysis and social change methods, community dialogues and peer-based approaches targeting adolescent boys. As many of these interventions involve a focus on reshaping masculinities and the cultural norms and values that underpin harmful masculinities in the two counties, a male engagement strategy will be developed that draws on structural and social behavior change theory for implementation, learning and adaptation. These interventions will be complemented by social change dialogues within communities to

improve women’s participation in local decision-making and create social accountability structures to monitor and drive changes in social norms and practices. Working closely with local institutions, civil society organizations, and community-based organizations will ensure that efforts are locally driven, rooted in local contextual realities, and positioned for sustainability.

These interventions link to the pathway of Outcome 3.1.1.3 Young men (*Moran* and warriors) and adolescent boys effectively participate in community dialogue Outcome 3.1.1.5 / 3.1.2.1 Influencers model gender and generational transformative behavior and are recognized (heroes, seers). IO 3.1.3 Male change agents advocate at household (HH) and community level for expanded agency of women and adolescents to reduce persistent acute malnutrition

INSIGHT N°3: Engaging men in household and community-level poverty alleviation and social change activities, and targeting investments to strengthen the productivity and resilience of their livelihoods, can help to secure them as allies and partners in promoting nutrition gains and avoid alienating them or reinforcing negative masculinities.

While patriarchal gender norms afford men and boys power and privileges over women and girls, they also put pressure on men to conform to masculine ideals. Driven by compounded pressures on traditional livelihood systems, men in Samburu and Turkana face mounting challenges to fulfilling the traditional masculine gender role as providers and protectors of their families. This was particularly true for adolescent boys, youth and men from highly vulnerable households in the context of changing livelihood systems, reduced livelihood opportunities and shrinking assets due to the increased frequency of shocks and stresses. During USAID Nawiri’s county consultations, participants flagged that some humanitarian and development actors may be contributing to this problem by narrowly equating “taking a gender perspective” with “targeting women and girls.” Local stakeholders note that the proliferation of programs focused on women’s empowerment in the name of gender equality has left men feeling excluded and their masculinity threatened. Men’s disempowerment has surfaced as among the most significant, contemporary drivers of conflict in the two counties. Men who are unable to live up to societal norms of masculinity, if their livelihoods are severely threatened by climate-induced shocks for example, may be more likely to engage in violence both inside and outside the home as a way of (re)asserting one’s masculinity and securing assets or symbols associated with manhood (e.g. livestock, access to women, etc.). Anecdotal evidence points to men and boys in Turkana and Samburu turning to alcohol and drugs to cope with the psychological and emotional stress of being unable to conform to societal standards of manhood.

Implications: Efforts to promote women’s social and economic empowerment cannot do so at the expense of men and efforts to address harmful social norms must see men as critical partners in driving this change. For men to support these efforts, they must see opportunities to strengthen their own economic and social positions and address their vulnerabilities through these programming initiatives. USAID Nawiri will be sensitive to these dynamics as it engages in efforts to empower women and address harmful gender norms, working closely with men as traditional ‘heads of household’ in ways that recognize the critical role they play in household economies, decision-making and community participation. Key to this engagement will be promoting positive constructions of masculinity that are compatible with women’s rights and gender equality principles in order to interrupt the vicious cycle of violence and to enable sustainable and equitable socio-economic development.

As USAID Nawiri engages in livelihood interventions, it is critical that men are supported to strengthen and diversify their livelihood strategies alongside efforts to promote women's economic empowerment, reinforcing the critical role of men and women as complementary household providers. Livelihood interventions will be complemented by efforts to strengthen household dialogue utilizing the BRIGE approach to promote shared decision-making within households, reinforcing the idea that partnership between men and women, across different household types, is essential for poverty alleviation. Strong connections will be made across resilient livelihoods (agriculture, pastoral and off-farm) and youth and male engagement interventions to provide these economic empowerment opportunities. Integrated Gender and Structural and Social Behavior Change strategies will be rolled out, which will include a male engagement strategy.

TOC Implications: Outcome 3.1.3.1 Male change agents have skills and capacity to lead gender and generational SBC discussions at HH and community level. Outcome 3.1.3.2 Male change agents are motivated to change gender and generational norms

INSIGHT N°4: Interventions to strengthen intra-household dialogue and promote more equitable household decision-making and labor burden must understand and account for the social dynamics of household structures in Turkana and Samburu, including polygamy and child marriage.

Gender and social norms are defined and reinforced at the household and community level, and intra-household and inter-personal dynamics have a significant influence on nutrition outcomes across different household types such as male-headed, female-headed, polygamous households, and inter-generational households. Evidence suggests that a woman's current age and her age at marriage; the number, age, and gender of her children; and her age and rank relative to other co-wives may be among the significant predictors of her health and nutrition, as well as that of her children relative to their half-siblings. The household is a space where gender and generational inequalities and power relations manifest and are contested, with direct implications on household roles and divisions of labor, including time use, responsibility for childcare, access to and use of household resources, control of productive resources, household decision-making, and community participation. Power dynamics at the household level position men as the primary decision-makers over the use of household resources and livelihood decisions, which has a determinant impact on dietary diversity. Older women also exercise significant influence over younger women including in enforcing compliance with food practices and taboos, as well as upholding cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) in Samburu. USAID Nawiri's longitudinal study findings are inconclusive at this stage, but there is need to further explore the role that household structure has on nutrition outcomes for women and children. This will help identify if children under three living in polygamous households are more or less likely to be malnourished compared to those in monogamous households. County consultations exposed the importance of understanding the dynamic relations between spouses (monogamous and polygamous households) and co-wives (including issues of power, agency, and control over resources) to enable USAID Nawiri's success in Samburu and Turkana.

Implication: Efforts aimed at improving nutrition at scale in contexts where polygamy is prevalent must be informed by an understanding of the dynamic relations between spouses and co-wives (including issues of power, agency, and control over resources) and aim to support transformation of inequitable power relations. Using the BRIGE toolkit, USAID Nawiri will use household and community dialogue to explore the ways in which women and girls in monogamous and polygamous unions navigate and experience patriarchy and how this generates vulnerabilities and influences differential vulnerabilities

among women and children in the household. USAID Nawiri proposes to test, learn from, adapt and implement the BRIGE toolkit to account for local social and household dynamics that contribute to nutrition resilience, working to better understanding power dynamics within the household and adapt BRIGE to support relationships within polygamous household structures. The program will introduce the BRIGE household and community dialogue approach and Household Decision-Making (HDM) tool to address inequality in household decision-making, accounting for enhanced nutrition resilience at the individual, household, and community levels and to monitor whether and how households change their decision-making patterns after participation. Community Health Volunteers and Social Change Actors will be engaged to take a lead role in working with family structures to transform these household dynamics, through sustained dialogue that promotes more equitable decision-making, reduces intra-household conflict, and builds shared ownership of household nutrition outcomes through models that are adapted to the different family structures found in the two counties. Working to transform gender norms in the private sphere (peer and household) also creates an opportunity to leverage positive intent to enhance women's decision-making capabilities beyond the household into communal and political leadership. This intervention aligns and supports achievements for food security (Purpose 1) reduction in disease (Purpose 2), Enabling environment for nutrition Resilience (Purpose 3) and also impacted by Purpose 4 - Institutions Strengthening.

IO 3.1.1 Influencers re-frame existing gender and generational norms to advocate for women, male youth and adolescent girls agency Output 3.1.1.a.1 Traditional leaders trained in GBV and child marriage prevention and women's empowerment.

INSIGHT N°5: A systems approach to policy, planning, leadership, accountability and quality implementation and reporting is essential to building an enabling gender environment for nutrition services and strategies.

Community dynamics, leadership and governance mechanisms are influenced largely by the cultural psyche including social, gender norms and practices. The attachment to these traditional values is driven by patriarchal community structures, entrenched by custodians such as clan elders (mostly men) and the elderly women who largely influence the decisions of adolescent girls, especially young mothers which range from food choices, health seeking behaviors, and childcare practices. These norms have considerable implications on disparities in access to resources and opportunities, recognition of the abilities and capacities of women and young people and their participation in decision-making. As highlighted by the USAID Nawiri Gender and the Political Economy Analyses, leadership, governance, planning and budgeting including priorities often lack a gender responsive lens. Significant weaknesses have been identified in institutions' gender sensitivity and related planning, but opportunities exist to transform strategic system actors at policy, planning and communal levels so as to positively influence quality of planned interventions. Informal and customary systems are important to be included in creating an enabling environment for reducing vulnerabilities of women, girls and youth to harmful traditional practices. Central to Mercy Corps' governance approach are empowered and engaged citizens, skilled and connected civil society, responsive and accountable decision-makers and built relationships, constructive deliberation and increased trust which will be the foundations for building an enabling gender environment for nutrition services and outcomes. The continued analysis of policy enablers or limitations as well as review of progress in policy implementation would allow USAID Nawiri and collaborating actors to inform evolving program prioritization and investment priorities.

Implications: Continuous monitoring of gendered community and cultural trends and nuances will inform strategic entry points for nutrition, priorities and become central to the overall adaptive management of the program (see also Governance and Systems Strengthening for Nutrition Learning Brief). As part of Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach, a greater role for women in household and community decision-making will be encouraged to help shift community narratives around food and participation in livelihoods such as pastoralism that is very male-centric. USAID Nawiri will work across civil society organizations' (CSOs), government and private stakeholders to strengthen capacities to access, create, and implement solutions to notably engage girls and women in all levels of decision making. Elevating voices of strategic social change actors, including women and adolescents, and utilizing new spaces that have provided opportunities for women's leadership and agency, in addition to collaborating with the key cultural custodians as champions to encourage social behavior change will be critical. Cultivating relationships and buy-in with entities like Councils of Elders can help shift norms that contribute to poor nutrition through ensuring they are effective advocates for social change without undermining the agency and voices of women and girls who are significantly underrepresented in the cultural decision-making systems. For example, elders are currently active in advocating against FGM in Samburu, and could be activated to include nutrition messages in their work. They are however less motivated to champion reproductive health and contraception. The program can strengthen capacities to access, create, and implement solutions at the grassroots level to notably engage girls and women in all levels of decision making. The insight relates to Intermediate Outcome 3.1.3 of the ToC with the modification being made was to reframe gender and social norms and broadly look at transforming and redefining masculinity, while strengthening gender responsive planning, budgeting and programming (4.1.1). (ToC Reference: IO 4.1.1. CSOs, Private Sectors, and informal structures, especially those representing women, adolescents, youth and children influence policy development, development agenda and implementation. Outcome 4.1.3.1 CSOs support women and youth CBOs and interests. This strengthens the pathway and forms part of the design considerations.)

There is a need for strengthening the functionality and engagement of the Counties' Gender Sector Working Group (GSWG) to carry out their mandate as stated in the intergovernmental framework. As highlighted in the Governance and Systems Strengthening for Nutrition Learning Brief (Insight n°6), the upcoming transition in government and the related five-year planning cycle that dictates public expenditure management, and therefore the priorities in the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), is an opportunity for the program to support gender specific interventions and policy resourcing and mainstreaming within a multi-sectoral nutrition framework, as well as to inform gender-responsive and transformative CIDPs. Effective community engagement can enable counties to produce responsive, citizen-driven policies that meet citizen's nutrition needs, and translate into increased political legitimacy, and community increased trust for government. USAID Nawiri will also support strengthening a culture of learning across diverse sector mandates as part of a systems approach to sustainably reduce persistent acute malnutrition.

CONCLUSION & PRIORITY AREAS FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

To address the structural impediments in discriminatory social norms, attitudes and behaviors that contribute to poor nutrition, USAID Nawiri must engage in gender transformation approaches that challenge underlying gender and social norms that have sustained inequalities and their consequences including P-GAM. Program strategies and approaches must be designed based on a careful analysis and nuanced understanding of gender dynamics that underlie them and evolved based on continued learning

to remain relevant to the diverse contexts in Turkana and Samburu to ensure they meet the unique needs of adolescent girls and boys, female and male youth, men and women in their journeys to empowerment and resilience. These approaches move beyond reaching and benefiting women and girls to taking gender transformative approaches that recognize and challenge underlying gender and social norms that perpetuate inequality. USAID Nawiri's multiple pathways to nutrition resilience call for a human centered design to inform the development of a social behavior change strategy and delivery approaches, engaging key champions and influencers to drive changes that are embedded within local social and cultural realities.

Guided by the USAID Nawiri Gender Strategy, the program will work on all the above stated implications through four key pillars: 1) Addressing vulnerabilities of adolescents, youth, men and women; 2) Addressing social-cultural systems, gender norms and household dynamics; 3) Systems, policy, leadership and accountability; and 4). Maintaining a gender lens in strengthening the capacity of government and local actors to lead, coordinate, implement and evolve interventions to sustainably reduce P-GAM. This includes rolling out a male engagement strategy whose foundation is a systems-approach delivered by local champions in facilitating sustained social change with the goal of gender equality for nutrition outcomes.

In coordination with the County GSWG, USAID Nawiri will use a process of continuous learning to inform iterations and adaptations to the gender approach and interventions to allow for adaptive learning and decision-making. Ongoing areas for learning include:

- Understanding social relations and dynamics within polygamous families, understanding of the dynamic relations between spouses and co-wives (including issues of power, agency, and control over resources, and how household dialogues can be structured to drive more equitable decision-making).
- How do we best support County stakeholders to build a culture of data-driven decision-making and understand the practical implications of gender mainstreaming to influence budgeting, planning and service delivery.
- What best practices can we identify in working with adolescent boys, male youth and male 'custodians of culture' to adopt a gender transformative growth-mindset and to partner in transforming traditional practices that underlie social and gender norms.

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