

# The power of show after tell-Leveraging Experiential Learning as a pathway to reduction of acute malnutrition in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya

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## INTRO AND OBJECTIVE

In Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), acute malnutrition remains a severe public health issue endangering maternal and child health. Isiolo and Marsabit counties, with low literacy rates of 36% and 26% respectively, harbor numerous vulnerable households. Existing informational materials lack specificity and effectiveness in addressing feeding and care practices for different age groups. The Nawiri SBC strategy aimed to enhance self-efficacy through experiential learning methodologies, to facilitate uptake of prioritized behaviors targeting expectant and nursing mothers and caregivers of children under five.

## METHODS

The use of this practical skills building approach, surpassing traditional didactic methods, fosters comprehensive behavior change by actively involving participants in learning processes. In ASALs, where cultural norms often impede priority behaviors, experiential learning plays a crucial role in reshaping attitudes.

The USAID Funded Nawiri project implemented practical skills building activities to support food preservation, feeding, growth monitoring and WASH related activities. These included cooking demonstrations for dietary diversity, food card games for making nutritious choices, and practical sessions on making tippy taps, handwashing and water treatment. Role plays including community participants exhibiting how to practically improve couple decision making were key skills aimed to challenge social norms.

## RESULTS

Over 400 anchor groups were reached with these experiential learning activities encompassing over 14000 households in the ASAL communities in Kenya. The female caregivers indicate improved nutritional understanding and meal planning among participants, reflected in increased demand for nutritious foods, purchase choices and better hygiene practices.

Their male partners and other household members also express a clearer understanding and practical skills learned through their spouses from community level sessions reflected at the household level. Skills transfer and self-efficacy building also aids in shifting social norms around gender roles and cultural taboos.



Experiential learning builds confidence and self-efficacy, it goes beyond primary participants to their supporting actors.

## CONCLUSION

- Active learning and peer sharing enhance behavior uptake beyond passive messaging and illustrations.
- Key supporting actors benefit from practical skills building as the sharing of knowledge also builds the self efficacy and confidence of primary actors and recipients of the sessions.
- Contextual and relational actions are pivotal in promoting sustainable behavior change, particularly in low literacy communities living in challenging environments like ASALs.

