

# Community Mobilization for Improved Dietary Diversity in the Elgon Region of Uganda



## Nutrition Champions' sensitization Activities

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## Background

Behavior Change Communication (BCC) strategies play a critical role in promoting and adopting practices related to health (Rimal & Lapinski, 2009).

PNSP's third objective was to improve basic knowledge on family nutrition of the population in the Elgon region. The project targeted 13000 households within the Elgon region to improve knowledge in basic nutrition. 1 in 3 of the project beneficiaries being pregnant, lactating and/or women of reproductive age 15 to 45 years to be reached through all information formats of the project.

PNSP adopted a BCC campaign called "Grassroots Food Diversity" using radio messaging and community based approaches to improve dietary diversity and nutrition knowledge in the communities.

The Ministry of Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MoGLSD) clearly outlines roles of various stakeholders in community mobilization for improving food and nutrition security; including the roles of community leaders and religious leaders; which guided the adaption into PNSP's BCC strategy.

The Nutrition Champions were a component of PNSP's community based approaches of the "Grassroots Food Diversity" campaign. Identified from a pool of opinion leaders including religious and cultural leaders in 2019, these champions are key influencers of behavior change in their communities.

PNSP partnered with stakeholders from Mbale, Kapchorwa and Kween districts to recruit 33 leaders to support community mobilization for improved dietary diversity and nutrition education activities. Parish Priests, Imams and Clan Leaders at sub county level were recruited, oriented and trained.

## Roles of the Nutrition Champion

PNSP mentored the Nutrition Champions to integrate key nutrition messaging into their routine work in the community. For example, Religious Leaders integrate nutrition messages into sermons at the mosques and churches and Clan leaders at clan meetings.

### The Nutrition Champions' roles were to;

1. Sensitize communities about;
  - a. The nutrition problems that exist in the Elgon region.
  - b. The consequences of these nutrition problems in their communities.
  - c. What actions communities can be do to address the nutrition problems.
2. Encourage the community to take action against the nutrition problems.
3. Advocate for nutrition and allocation of resources to improve nutrition.

## Nutrition Champion Activities

PNSP also provided a platform for the champions to engage with the wider communities on adoption of recommended practices and promotion of interventions to the nutrition problems in region.

### The Nutrition Champions' activities included;

1. Radio Talk Shows
2. Outreaches in which they participated as mobilisers and sensitized at.
3. Community Sensitizations at;
  - a. Events ranging from parties to burials.
  - b. Cultural gatherings.
  - c. Religious gatherings at churches and mosques.
  - d. Home or Pastoral visits
4. Advocacy and lobby meetings for nutrition Bylaws at sub county level.



## Capacity Building

### IEC Materials

#### Guide of Key Nutrition Messages

Talking points to guide the sensitizations included;

- Why nutrition matters in agriculture
- What is nutrition, malnutrition, forms of malnutrition
- Relationship between under-nutrition and disease
- Dietary diversity
- 1st 1000 days of life
- Breastfeeding, Complementary feeding
- Kitchen gardening
- Gender in nutrition

## Mentorship and Follow ups

PNSP set up review meetings to address challenges arising from the field. The review meetings were an engagement amongst stakeholders to facilitate and document lessons learnt from the Champion activities. District Nutrition Focal Persons, District Health Educators participated in the review meetings twice a year.

A Data Collection Tool was developed in the review meetings to document and track sensitization activities from the field.

## Nutrition Champion Achievements

### Integrating advocacy to influence policy

Nutrition Champions as a component of BCC allows for a holistic approach to health communication.

Following previous review meetings on the sustainability of interventions and activities led by the Nutrition Champions, the enactment of bylaws at sub counties was proposed. PNSP technically reviewed the proposed bylaws and initiated consultative meetings with the Technical Planning Committees and

Council representatives from three sub-counties; Kaseko in Kween district, West Division in Kapchorwa district and Budwale in Mbale district.

### Progress on the Bylaws

Kaseko's by-law will be presented to Council before 31st of May, 2022.

Budwale's by-law will be presented to Council on 15th of June, 2022.

West Division's by-law will be presented to Council on the 18th of June, 2022.

### Communities Reached

The Nutrition Champions have improved the reach of nutrition education and supported mobilizations within the sub counties in which PNSP operates. A total of 9,978 people (5,703 females and 4,275 males) through events and gatherings. A total of 732 people (413 females and 319 males) were reached through home visits.



**Kaseko's Technical Planning Committee and Pastor Wafula - Nutrition Champion (far right)**

## Documenting the approach

PNSP conducted research to facilitate the validation of the Champion activities, identify best practices, document challenges and recommendations to adapt the approach in nutrition education for future interventions.

## Study Objectives

1. To identify challenges, barriers and motivations faced by nutrition champions while carrying out nutrition education activities in the community.
2. To identify best practices and provide recommendations for adaption in future nutrition education activities by nutrition champions in the community.



## Methods

Qualitative data was collected through FGDs and KIIs with key community stakeholders including nutrition champions and FFBS beneficiaries selected from each district and consequently each sub-county of study.



## Results

### Best Practices for adaption in nutrition education activities

The champions turned into agents of change; living by example to the communities.

*“Being a leader you must serve as an example to others for example in my home I didn't not have a kitchen garden but right now I have them much as the weather is not good for them. Secondly I didn't know how to eat nutritious foods because whenever they could serve Matoke and garden eggs, I would feel I had a complete meal and completely didn't know that I had to have several other foods to make it complete or diversified.” says a Nutrition champion (Reverend) in Mbale*



The champions easily reached out to the most vulnerable in the community.

The champions effectively integrated gender messaging into their sensitizations.



*“Yes, we talk about gender by promoting the positive relationship between the man and woman in the home. Households always have chicken and so we encouraged fathers not to eat the eggs alone and yet they have young children. Those things like women not eating chicken existed long ago during our mothers' time but right now they no longer exist.”*  
Mentioned by a Nutrition champion in Mbale

## Barriers and challenges faced by Nutrition Champions

**Limited follow up of project activities in the COVID-19 lock downs.**

*"We only had a challenge of follow up of families and also during the COVID-19 times because we were not so much in touch with the partner and whatever we had planned was hampered by this COVID pandemic. So we believe that what we had planned to do we shall revisit and see that we can achieve and what we had lost."*  
A Champion from Kween



**Limited review meetings a year; these meetings were refreshers and learning workshops**

**The Champions' activities were solely voluntary, continuity for some champions was derailed. Reporting was a challenge especially without digital tools to capture data.**



*"The shortage of allowances and also the shortage of meetings through which we get more refresher trainings. Making reports is also quite challenging to us."*  
Mentioned by a Nutrition champion in Mbale

## Motivations for the Nutrition Champions

Radio talk show engagements that were integrated in their activities.



*"The project gave us an opportunity to go for radio talk shows where we shared information about nutrition. We also interacted with many community members during community sensitizations."*

Review meetings that were organized to offer learning and refreshers as capacity building



## Recommendations for adaption in nutrition education activities

- Motivators can be adapted to leverage Nutrition Champion activities.
  - Raise review meetings from twice a year to quarterly meetings.
  - Radio talk show engagements continue to routinely be integrated in their activities.
- IEC and supportive materials are necessary for Champions' activities. For example; smart phones to capture data and also share electronic messaging.

## References

1. Rimal, Rajiv N & Lapinski, Maria K. (2009). Why health communication is important in public health. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 87 (4), 247. World Health Organization. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.08.056713>
2. Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. (2013). *Community Mobilization on Food and Nutrition Security. A Guide for Community Mobilisers.* (fantaproject.org)