

Social & Behavior Change in Nutrition: What Works?

Nutrition programs are meaningful only to the degree that they help people *do something differently*. That is where social and behavior change (SBC) methods can help. In our experience, we have seen program planners miss opportunities to achieve much bigger and more lasting impact of their SBC work. The nine tips we offer here show you what you can do at each stage of a program cycle to avoid missing such great opportunities and to contribute to real, positive changes in people's lives.

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PROJECT DESIGN

1 Focus on promoting a limited number of the most impactful and feasible practices, ideally at a large scale. This approach will allow your team to gain a deeper understanding of the promoted behaviors, and the target audiences will not feel overwhelmed by being asked to change too many things in their lives. Explore the tips provided in chapter 3.3 of GIZ's SBC Guide.¹

2 Go beyond raising awareness. Lack of knowledge is often not the key barrier to change – just think of all the things that you know perfectly well that you should be doing, such as exercising or going to a dentist. In your programming, do your best to understand and tackle the real barriers to, and motivators for, change. The useful guidance and tools at www.behaviourchange.net and People in Need's Behavior Change Toolkit can help you do so.²

3 Involve the key influencers who shape mothers' practices – for example, the fathers, grandmothers or more progressive peers. Without their support, mothers may not have the time, resources, courage or decision-making power to follow the nutrition practices your program promotes. See examples in Alive & Thrive's 'Dads can do that!' innovation brief.³

EVALUATION

9 Understand why a program (has not) worked, not only whether it met its indicators. Designing your monitoring and evaluation system (including the final evaluation) in a way that allows you to understand why the results were (not) achieved is often even more valuable than the results themselves. Such insight allows people and organizations to learn and to further improve the impact of their work.

PROJECT INCEPTION

4 Use your baseline quantitative data to refine the focus of your activities. The data can help you choose which behaviors to promote (e.g., by knowing how many people practice them now) and the focus of your activities (e.g., by understanding people's level of knowledge and attitudes towards the promoted behaviors). Take advantage of the guidance available at www.indikit.net.

5 Break complex behaviors into small doable actions. Let's take an example. Complementary feeding is complicated: Which foods? How much? How frequently? At what age? Success will be more likely if you select just a couple of specific actions. Rather than asking mums to "Feed a variety of foods," suggest a more specific action such as "Feed your child milk and eggs every day." The video 'Choosing the Small Doable Action' provides great inspiration.⁴

6 Engage people's emotions. Decisions about what to do are more often based on the emotional self than the rational mind. In Peru, when nurses added the message "Teach your child to eat with love, patience and good humor," the mothers smiled, likely making them more open to the 'instructional' messages.⁵ To learn more, enjoy this video, 'The Elephant, the Rider and the Path – A Tale of Behavior Change.'⁶

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

7 Use real-time data to monitor the quality and progress of implemented activities. For example, People in Need's frontline staff used smartphone-based checklists to monitor the quality of SBC activities and the key gaps in the adoption of promoted practices. The data was automatically analyzed and used to adjust the project strategy.⁷

8 Employ multiple contact points, such as face-to-face interactions, community discussions, radio shows and cooking demonstrations. Alive & Thrive's research showed that the number of communication channels matter: in Ethiopia, only 16% of women who were exposed to one type of communication activity fed a child an egg, as opposed to 50% of women who were exposed to five or more activities.⁸

References and notes

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⁷Experience of People in Need (PIN) Cambodia from the EU-funded Community Livestock Market Development (CLIMAD) program.

⁸Alive & Thrive. Understanding factors driving nutrition behavior change: the experience of Alive & Thrive.

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