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.

PROJECT DESIGN

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 audience will not feel overwhelmed by being asked to change too many things in their lives. Explore the tips provided in chapter 3 of GIZ’s SBC Guide.

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 but that you still don’t do, such as exercising or going to the dentist. In your programming, do your best to understand and tackle the real barriers to, and motivations for, change. The useful guidance and tools at www.behaviourchange.net and People in Need’s Behavior Change Toolkit can help you do so.

Involves the key influencers who shape mothers’ practices — for example, the fathers, grandparents 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.

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Innovative ways to promote nutrition behaviors

EVALUATION

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 might allow people and organizations to learn and to further improve the impact of their work.

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Data for impact: what does it take?

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

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.

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 matters. 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. The ‘simple and direct’ message “Feeding your child milk and eggs every day” provides great inspiration.

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.

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Use your tools to scale up

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Break complex behaviors into small doable actions.

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Define your key indicators

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Use your quantitative impact data to refine your activities

For example, ‘Feed a variety of foods’ suggests a more specific action such as ‘Teach your child milk and eggs every day.’ ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day’ is more likely to be a specific action such as ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day.’ ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day’ suggests a more specific action such as ‘Teach your child milk and eggs every day.’ ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day’ suggests a more specific action such as ‘Teach your child milk and eggs every day.’ ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day’ suggests a more specific action such as ‘Teach your child milk and eggs every day.’ ‘Feed your child milk and eggs every day’ suggests a more specific action such as ‘Teach your child milk and eggs every day.’

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Use your tools to decide

References and notes


