



USAID NAWIRI INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, DIVERSE, AND NUTRITIOUS FOODS IN TURKANA COUNTY

It is noon, and the USAID Nawiri team are engaging the Riokomor community in a meeting under the tree of talking in the middle of a seasonal river. Riokomor is a village located 196 kilometers away from Lodwar, Turkana County's headquarters. Gentle cool wind is blowing, reducing the fangs of the midday sun. The seasonal river, known as a lager, is barren with sand. Goats are shifting from one acacia to the next, enjoying acacia pods and tiny leaves that fall due to the gentle wind.

We are seated two stone throws away from a modern Early Childhood (ECD) Center that the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar recently constructed.

"That is where our small children learn," a middle-aged man tells me when I ask him how the ECD center is helping the Riokomor community. "We hope it will be a full school to take all our children in so they do not travel to far schools as they do now," he tells me as he walks towards an enclosed borehole that serves the center.

Back to the meeting, community members keep approaching two women, seated at the center of the crowd. On a closer look, the women are selling fruits and cabbages as the meeting proceeds.

After the meeting, we catch up with them to find out more about their businesses.

Apua Ewoi Loperito, 30, is a member of Akicha Business Group, a three-member group composed of three ultra-poor women identified by USAID Nawiri Rural Entrepreneur Access Project (REAP) for Nutrition (R4N) component in June 2022. Each of them had a malnourished child, and apart from enabling them to

access healthcare services in their local clinic, the program provided the women's families with monthly KES 6000 (USD 50) for a period of three months.

"We did not have a business then (when she came in contact with the USAID Nawiri team). We used to fetch firewood at Moru Eris hills and later sell them at schools and other places just to get something to feed our families with," Apua says, as she points at the hill, approximately 20 kilometers walking distance from her village.

"I could leave my home at 6am and arrive at the hills at 9am. On coming back I could sell some firewood and get at least 100 shillings which I used to buy maize because it was the only food that the money could buy. I would then crush the maize to make flour then cook it for my family," Apua adds as she arranges mangoes, oranges, cabbage, lemons, tomatoes, and onions in the group's 2m by 4m roadside stall made of sticks bound together with reeds. There are also clothes for sale, strategically hung inside the stall.

The other group member, Lochuch Loperito, is outside the stall, winnowing beans for sale. Their other member, she tells me, has gone to check her children. The group operates their business together.

When the women were identified, they were issued with a KES 30,000 (USD 245) business grant to start a business as a group. According to Apua, they used 15k to start their business, and saved the rest in their group savings plan, where they also save the profits they make from their business. Overall, their business, as indicated in their record books, is worth KES 41,000 (USD 334).



"Our business is doing well. This is because we received money that we use to buy good food for our families (the monthly consumption stipend). This helped us to feed our families even as our business grows. We do not take money from our business, even a shilling. We use it to buy stock and save the rest," Apua says.

USAID Nawiri's Market Systems team has linked the group with nutritious food and non-food item suppliers, who provide regular supplies to R4N business groups at affordable prices.

"Initially we used to buy our goods from middlemen and they sold the goods to us at higher prices. We made little or no profits. Now we get supplies directly from Lodwar, at cheaper prices. The suppliers also come on specific days and this enables us to have enough stock all the time," Apua says as she holds her three-year-old daughter whom she says was malnourished when USAID Nawiri identified her.

"She has added almost three kilos since last time. I feed her well. I also took her to the hospital (local clinic) for a check up. I am happy to see her happy and playing with other children," she says.

Collins Losinyono, one of the mentors that USAID Nawiri has engaged to guide the groups, says he taught them about record keeping to enable them to keep track of the performance of their business. He conducts monthly sessions with the groups, and does regular monitoring to check on their performance.

"When I started this role as a mentor, the challenge was that these women groups are in far villages and communicating with them was difficult because sometimes they move with their livestock or sometimes

there is no power to charge their phones. I have received a motorbike from USAID Nawiri that helps me to access them when they cannot be found on the phone. The motorbike helps me to monitor their progress without difficulty. I use it to mobilize them, transport them to meeting places, and take them to the clinic when they are sick even at night,” Collins, one of three mentors in the area who have received the motorbikes, says.

He adds, “We link them with suppliers and also guide them to diversify the products they sell. When suppliers come, we compare their rates and quality of goods and help them to choose the most appropriate for them. I remember how most of the groups were recording losses when they began their businesses because they used to just buy goods from exploitative middlemen,” the 30-year-old says as he wipes his motorbike’s side mirror.

.....



Four stone throws away from Akicha Business Group’s business premise is Echami Business Group’s stall. The group sells cooked food, and food stuff such as maize, wheat flour, cooking oil, sugar, salt and vegetables in their stall.

We meet a cheerful Diana Lokoyan Topos, who is on shift in running the group’s business on this day.

“We do weekly shifts here. Each member has her week, and it is working well for us,” she says as she serves a customer a plate of ugali (cornmeal mush) and boiled matumbo (tripe).

After a few months into the business, the group has learned that buying and selling wooden wares such as utensils, carvings of animals, among others outside the county fetches better profits.

“Our business is currently doing better than when we started. We are able to make profit. We have found a market for wood products in Kitale and we will soon transport these wares there for sale,” Diana says as she points at two sacks full of wares.

Kitale is an administrative town of Trans Nzoia County, located over 500 kilometers from Riokomor village.

Diana says, “My child was very malnourished when USAID Nawiri identified me. For me, it was a normal thing until when CHVs talked to me about it. They told me my child was not developing well and could die. I used to feed my children with whatever I could afford. There was no option for them whether it was tea or crushed maize,”

The only option I had was to fetch firewood for sale because there was no money to start a business. We used to have one meal in the evening when we were lucky. When we lacked maize to crush, I would boil the fruits from Edapal for them to eat,” she says with a reflective face.

Edapal is an indigenous tree whose fruits are edible after intensive boiling for more than 8 hours.

“The business grant was a blessing to us. Getting 30,000 shillings was a dream for us. We put all the money in the business and when you see in our records, our business is now at 50,000 shillings. The money I receive on our phones (consumption stipend) is helping me to buy good food for my children. I buy them oranges, and cook them matoke (cooked bananas), beef from sheep and vegetables,” she adds.

The group meets every Friday to check the progress of their business and receive guidance from their mentor.

“The mentor comes and records our progress every week, and also helps us to get linked to suppliers. We are saving some money and we hope we will soon access loans from elsewhere to enable us to expand this business,” Diana concludes.



Naisherua VSLA group posing with their savings box in Simale village, Samburu North sub-county

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN VSLA GROUPS TO REDUCE MALNUTRITION IN SAMBURU COUNTY

Samburu County, Kenya - The dusty road stretches onward in between dry shrubs, taking each turn in easy stride as we approach Simale village in Samburu North sub-county in Samburu County. The village homes commonly referred to as the 'manyattas' are stamped in the wide valley, as if placed by some meticulous collector, with each family home fenced to perfection with dry thorn bushes. The village is quiet except for melodious sounds emanating from a distance. We follow the melody to a manyatta where a group of women, adorned in beads, and red shukas dance and sing in praise. These are the members of USAID Nawiri's Naisherua Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) group.

USAID Nawiri targets women from very poor and vulnerable households in Samburu, to practice VSLA in order to improve household access to capital from their own savings. Naisherua VSLA group is one of the many VSLA groups that have been formed and trained through the program in Samburu County. The group which started in July 2022, consists of 15 group members and a secretary who commits to basic record keeping, financial numeracy and capturing group agenda, discussions, and conclusions.

Kuita Lenengwesi, a 26-year-old mother of 3 has been part of the Naisherua VSLA group since it started. "This savings and loaning group never existed and nobody in this group had ever heard of VSLA until Nawiri introduced the concept to us," she narrates. "After that introduction, we were trained on how to save and loan, given saving boxes and even educated on how these savings would help to reduce malnutrition in this community," she continues excitedly.



Since July, the group has saved Kes. 57,560 and loaned a total amount of Kes.20,300 to 8 members of the group and 1 student, an outsider, who borrowed to pay school fees. “We were told during sessions to save Kes.500 for the benefit of the group. We however, discussed amongst ourselves and decided to contribute Kes.100 each per week. When we get money from Nawiri, we also put some into our savings for our own use as a group,” says Kuita.

Apart from training women from poor and vulnerable households on VSLA, USAID Nawiri also supports them in the identification and startup of profitable income generating activities. This is in order to diversify their livelihoods hence leading to improved economic access to quality, diverse and nutritionally valuable foods.

Mpatanae Limiede, a 36-year-old mother of 8 children, received a loan of Kes. 7,700 from her group members in order to start her own business. “I have a small business where I sell flour, rice, cabbage, sugar, potatoes, tomatoes, maize and beans,” she says as she points towards the direction of a small shop. “The profit that I get from my business, I use it to purchase nutritious food for my eight children,” she says. “Initially, I relied so much on my husband to sustain all of us, and having 8 children, food was never enough, and my children were malnourished. However, now I can afford nutritious food through the profit that I make from selling in my shop,” she finishes proudly.

Nesharua VSLA group has a written constitution with rules and regulations governing its operation. For example, for every Kes.1000 loaned to a member, there should be a return of Kes. 100 interest and once a member borrows, she cannot be given another loan unless she has returned the previous loan and with the interest.

Improved income enables women and children to access healthcare, water and sanitation services which are critical for better nutrition and thus contribute to Nawiri’s achievement of sustainably reducing persistent acute malnutrition. Through Nesharua VSLA group, the women have acquired confidence in making decisions regarding management of household income resources including the purchase of nutritious foods for their families. “Before VSLA, we were living in the dark because we were pastoralists but now that we have been trained on how to use these savings, we are more knowledgeable on managing nutritional cases through purchasing nutritious food and even starting our own kitchen gardens. Also, because we are illiterate, we are now emphasizing on most of our children to be educated,” says Kuita in a slight giggle.



Despite the great impact of the VSLA group on women, they still face great challenges because of the long drought. Mpatane finishes by saying, “Before Nawiri, there had been a lot of projects. However, Nawiri has brought the greatest impact and has helped us solve malnutrition cases in our community. However, we urge the program to increase grants for our group for development purposes because the economy and drought are making our operations difficult.



Teresa displaying one of the Information Education and Communications (IEC) materials that she uses during her GIRL-H sessions in Simiti, Samburu North Sub- County.

USAID NAWIRI CHANGING PASTORALISTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Samburu County, Kenya- Teresa Letipila, 27, hums softly to the mellow sound of her broom touching the dusty earth, as she sweeps her compound in Simiti Community Unit (CU), Elbarta Ward in Samburu North sub-county. Her compound is vast, fenced with dry thorn bushes with a small iron gate at the entry. Her semi-permanent house sits in the middle of the compound and her shop, closer to the fence for her customers to buy. She smiles blooming in emotional warmth as we enter her home. “Welcome,” she says.

USAID Nawiri recognizes the importance of adolescent girls’ education to a range of well-being outcomes. Adolescents from poor households in rural and conflict-affected areas of Samburu, have limited access to education which has created significant societal-level vulnerabilities for risky sexual behavior and early pregnancy. Child marriages, rooted in harmful gender norms is also a known risk factor for girls dropping out of school or experiencing severely disrupted attendance.

USAID Nawiri therefore applies a set of integrated approaches dubbed Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods and Health (GIRL-H) model, that engages adolescent girls in cohort groups, under the leadership of a mentor and working with parents, guardians and caregivers, to support adolescents in setting goals to equip them with critical life-skills related to their unique context and social norms.

Teresa is one of the mentors that USAID Nawiri trained to lead the GIRL -H sessions in Samburu North sub-county. Born and raised in Samburu County, Teresa was among the few girls in the area that completed her primary education. Unfortunately, she could not continue with her studies due to the limited access to

education in her community. “I completed school up to class 8 then got married in Simiti area and I have been living here since,” she narrates.

Teresia currently mentors 20 girls aged 11-19 years on basic literacy and life skills while also integrating nutrition lessons in the sessions. “When the girls get into class, we first start with a brief introduction for the new members joining the class. Then we start our learning sessions, it could be on HIV/AIDS, basic literacy in terms of naming the alphabets or counting from one to one hundred, she says. “I also teach them on Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) like menstrual hygiene such as pads use, Family Planning as a way of preventing unplanned pregnancies and Gender Based Violence,” she continues.

Formal education for girls among the pastoralist Samburu not only imparts new knowledge and skills but also inculcates ideas and attitudes that clash with conventional understandings of female capabilities, sexuality, and gender roles.

According to Teresia, since she started her mentor sessions, there has been a great change amongst the girls that she mentors. Most girls in the area were not hygienic but since starting her classes and encouraging hygiene practices for the girls, they now bathe and practice basic grooming before attending class. She also

emphasizes that there is a change amongst girls who are sexually active. “The sexually active girls now use protection such as condoms when engaging in sexual activities,” explains Teresia. She additionally mentions that girls in the area now have a strong need to go back to school and hopes that this year, 4 of her girls will enroll once school resumes.

Teresia has not only noticed change in her girls but also in her personal life. Through the stipend that she receives from USAID Nawiri, she has been able to start a business, her shop, where she sells foodstuffs such as flour

and rice to her community. “I am also more educated, and this has changed the community’s perception of me as an individual and as a woman. I am more respected and have moved from the lower class to middle class people in the area,” she says as she smiles. Nutrition in her household has also changed, since she transfers the lessons learnt during the mentor capacity building to running her household. “I am now aware of how to diversify food in my household, the danger signs of malnutrition diseases and can easily identify a child who is severely malnourished and those that are moderately malnourished,” she says.

Despite these achievements, Teresia and her girl group still face insecurity challenges in the area. She explains that most girls have migrated with livestock due to the insecurity issues and therefore most are not able to attend the sessions. The ongoing drought has also affected her sessions since the girls move to long distances in search of water for their families and livestock.



CONTACT

HUSSEIN NOOR ABDILLE

Chief of Party (CoP), USAID Nawiri

MERCY CORPS

tel +254 721 497 543 | Email habdille@mercycorps.org

The Almont Park

Church Rd. | Westlands – Nairobi, Kenya



Disclaimer: The Humanitarian stories of change documentation was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this report are the responsibility of Mercy Corps recipient of cooperative agreement no. 72DFFP19CA00003 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.