

ADVOCATING FOR NUTRITION AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL IN TANZANIA:

LESSONS LEARNT AND TIPS FOR TANZANIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOS)

Author: PANITA

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE CSOS TO ADVOCATE FOR NUTRITION AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL?

In Tanzania, district-level governance happens through Local Government Authorities (LGAs). These entities were created by the government to decentralise government power to the district level. When implemented properly, decentralisation involves more people at the local level in the planning and implementation of development programmes. Tanzania's National Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan (NMNAP; 2016-21) tasks districts to do the following:

- Strengthen district coordination of nutrition work across sectors through Multi-Sectoral Coordination Committees for Nutrition;
- Establish district-level Nutrition Units to provide technical support in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of multi-sectoral nutrition programmes;
- Identify nutrition challenges and solutions within each district;
- Integrate nutrition activities into Comprehensive Council Development Plans;
- Strengthen community-based activities to fight malnutrition;
- Support wards and villages (mtaa) to integrate nutrition into their own development plans and to implement, monitor, and evaluate nutrition activities in the context of the NMNAP.

Given the large role that districts play, it is important that CSOs engage district authorities and other key stakeholders to improve the nutritional status of women and children. The NMNAP also calls for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), and faith-based organisations (FBOs) to play a significant role in advocating for nutrition activities at the district level. Led by PANITA, the DFID ASTUTE project worked to strengthen CSOs' ability to conduct multi-sectoral nutrition advocacy at the district level, in line with NMNAP and government guidelines.

KEY APPROACHES USED

- ASTUTE was the first time that a large nutrition project engaged PANITA as a Civil Society platform to reach large numbers of individuals with nutrition interventions. PANITA built CSO capacity through training, mentoring, and monitoring of CSO staff in 1) project management and governance 2) how to engage government counterparts, and 3) how to deliver high impact Social and Behaviour Change nutrition activities (support groups);
- With respect to engaging government counterparts, PANITA helped CSOs work more effectively with DnuOs and other district officers responsible for nutrition. PANITA also helped CSOs integrate their own work with district plans that included interventions for nutrition;
- PANITA facilitated joint annual review meetings with CSOs and council officials such as Nutrition Officers, community development officers, and others to share updates on implementation of the ASTUTE project and to harmonise the NMNAP reporting requirement for CSOs at the district level.
- CSOs built strategic relationships with decision makers and other influential people in order to move the nutrition agenda forward;
- CSOs identified local champions for nutrition in their respective districts, which resulted in increased resources for nutrition activities;
- CSOs strengthened existing support groups through social behaviour change strategies;
- CSOs were proactive members in district and regional committees, including district steering committees, consultative districts, and other platforms that advance nutrition, per the NMNAP. Even when CSOs were not formal members of Multisectoral Nutrition Steering Committees, their participation added value.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO CSO ENGAGEMENT

- Historically there has been a culture of mistrust between CSOs and government officials which has caused friction and has negatively affected the working relationship at the council level between CSOs and their counterparts. PANITA built working relationships between CSOs and districts by bringing them together at annual meetings to improve understanding of their respective roles in nutrition and increase communication between groups. At these meetings, DNUOs and community development officers were invited to participate and present their work. This process was instrumental in strengthening relationships.
- There are too many reporting requirements. LGAs sometimes issue multiple reporting requirements that CSOs must complete regularly. Creating a harmonised framework across sectors would reduce labour. PANITA helped CSOs and district officials develop one report for the district nutrition officer. This report replaced the two reports that were required previously.
- Some CSOs have a limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the revised Terms of Reference (TOR) for District Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Steering Committees, thus reducing their ability to be effective advocates for nutrition. To address this issue, PANITA helped CSOs understand how they can contribute to TORs through training and mentoring.

Despite progress made in improving CSO and district collaboration, these challenges remain and require ongoing support.

CSO NUTRITION TOOLS

There are several tools that Tanzanian CSOs can use to improve their nutrition advocacy work, both within and outside of the ASTUTE Toolkit:

- The NMNAP can be used to help CSOs review and align their efforts within the NMNAP. The NMNAP can be found here: http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NMNAP_Tanzania.pdf
- The revised Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Steering Committee TOR provides guidance on how committees should operate. The TOR can be found here: https://www.panita.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/panita_national_4.pdf
- A series of checklists to monitor nutrition activities and supervision for regions, districts, health facilities, and CBOs. These can be found here: https://www.panita.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/panita_national_2.pdf
- Multi-sectoral nutrition scorecards and reports from districts, available via DMSNCs; bottleneck nutrition analysis, and Joint Multi-sectoral Nutrition Reviews.