How to Engage Men to Support Nutrition

Engaging the Men – How to secure their buy-in
Engaging the Men – How to secure their buy-in

1. Preamble

Patriarchy characterizes most of Sub-Saharan Africa. The men are in charge of most decision-making at household and community level, often relying on deeply entrenched cultural practices. As a result, development interventions focused on women usually fail to take root if not approved or accepted by the men. It is important for a developmental intervention to secure the buy-in of men within a community and at household level to support project implementation.

This approach was adopted by FANRPAN in the implementation of the Agriculture to Nutrition (ATONU) project in Ethiopia and Tanzania. The approach documented here provides a guide to projects on how to ensure and secure successful buy-in of the men in rural communities. Before implementation of project activities targeted at women, the ATONU field staff had to organize engagement workshops for men to secure their buy-in. Formative research had identified the involvement of men as imperative to achieving dietary diversity at household level. The research had also indicated that women had limited power to make decisions on resources in the home, ultimately affecting diets.

Below is a step-by-step approach to ensuring successful engagement of men in a rural community for participation and support of project interventions targeted at women and children.

2. Summary of Engagement

The engagement of men with a view to securing their buy-in and support involves the following steps, explained further below:

i) Mobilization of key stakeholders and targeted men

ii) Initial engagement workshop

iii) Implementation of planned activities to build commitment
   - Group Work
   - Individual Assignment

iv) Review of performance – Recognition and selection of Champions

v) Capacitation of Champions

vi) Peer influencing as a sustainability strategy

3. Objectives of the Engagement

i. To engage men so that they understand the nutrition challenges that affect their families and take action

ii. To increase women’s decision-making power on household resource use by alerting men of the impacts of patriarchy, and how it affects women’s access to resources

iii. To enhance men’s understanding of the effects of the load of household work on women, and its impact on family nutrition
4. Target Group and Selection Criteria

The following were considered in the selection of the target group:

i) Target Group

The target group are men who are from households that have children below 5 years of age, and women of reproductive age. Local leaders were also coopted to secure their buy-in and endorsement, and to ensure that they continued to motivate the men to remain committed to their new roles in the project.

ii) Selection Criteria

The targeted men were selected from households that were participating in the African Chicken Genetic Gains (ACGG) project. The ATONU project was overlaid on the ACGG project.

5. Preparation for Engagement – Workshop

v) About the workshop

- Duration – one day, to minimize disruption to the men’s established routines.

- Venue - In consultation with the local leadership, ATONU field assistants identified and secured appropriate places for holding the men’s workshop. ATONU field staff also negotiated and agreed on dates for the meeting.

- Attendees – ATONU field staff and the zonal coordinator, target group, and local leaders.

- Focus of workshops - to dialogue with men on their role in the project and how their involvement would benefit their households to improve their nutrition.

vi) Training of ATONU field staff

- ATONU field staff had to have an understanding of the agriculture and other activities of the participating communities, to include awareness of other events that would have a possibility of clashing with project activities.

- All ATONU field staff had to undergo training on community mobilization. The knowledge acquired from the training enabled field personnel to standardize their operations across different villages.

vii) Use of pre-determined agenda

- All ATONU field staff relied on a pre-determined agenda for engagement, which included the following:

- The nutrition situation in the country and in the village

- The challenges/consequences of malnutrition

- That the solution to addressing hunger and malnutrition lies with our people and our local resources.

- That men can make a difference.
iv) Integration of local leaders

Local leaders were officially invited to attend the workshop by way of a formal visit and project briefing by the project zonal/regional coordinators, accompanied by field officers. This was important because the local leaders would have to officiate at the workshop. To ensure that the local leaders had a full understanding of the topic under discussion, they were briefed beforehand about the men’s workshop, and its objectives. This pre-workshop briefing allowed the local leaders to internalize the issue of men’s participation, enabling them to craft appropriate advocacy messaging to encourage men to participate.

v) Materials

The requisite materials for the engagement meetings for men included the following:

- Presentation of the formative research results, featuring community specific facts.
- Pictures of malnourished children, poor diet food plate to demonstrate the concept of malnutrition and dietary diversity.
- Flip charts, pencils, pens, and notebooks, templates (including Workload Dialogue Tools).

6. Conducting the Workshop

The ATONU field staff, with the support of the local leadership and other project partners already operating in the community, convened the workshop. Attendance by men was poor if it was established that the proposed engagement is not endorsed by local leadership.

The following steps were observed at the workshop:

i) The chief welcomed the participants and introduced the workshop. This served as endorsement of the proceedings.

ii) The field staff introduced themselves and explained the project and their roles in the community.

iii) The target group (men) introduced themselves and were allowed to briefly describe their families, giving details of their spouses, their children and their ages. The objective was to ensure that the men met the selection criteria – to have spouses of a reproductive age and/or children below the age of 5 years.
iv) After introducing the aim of the meeting, the ATONU zonal coordinator presented on common nutrition issues and problems observed within the community, including the consequences of poor nutrition such as stunting. Issues highlighted included the following:

- There was no adherence to exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months from birth. There was lack of awareness on the need for frequent feeding of nutritious complementary meals to babies from the age of six months.

- There was lack of diversification and no dedicated preparation of children’s food, with most being fed plain porridge. It was observed that children were not given animal source foods.

- Women were not empowered to make decisions on diets, and also did not have enough time and adequate knowledge to prepare nutritious meals. There was no awareness that balanced diets could be attained from locally available foodstuffs.

- The need to maintain good hygiene to avoid diseases.

v) In groups, the targeted men discussed various issues, including the following:

- Did the targeted men agree that there were nutrition problems in the area?

- If there was a problem, were there solutions?

- What could the men do to make a difference? What would they need to do differently to solve the problems?

vi) The following tools were provided to ensure structure to the men’s discussion:

- A template to record the solutions that emerged from the discussion. Some of the ways discussed to ensure that men became part of the solutions included the following:

  - Improving the feeding practices for infants and young children to prevent stunting before the child reaches the age of 2 years.

  - Ensuring improved food and feeding practices for children so that they are healthier, not often sick, and intelligent.

  - Ensuring a balanced diet for pregnant women and lactating mothers so that the babies will be healthier.

  - Promoting exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months from birth.

  - Assisting the women with the workload of domestic chores.

- A Workload Dialogue tool to help the targeted men to describe their involvement in the processes at their homes.

### WORKLOAD DIALOGUE TOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>4-5 am</th>
<th>6-10 am</th>
<th>11-12 noon</th>
<th>1-3pm</th>
<th>4-6pm</th>
<th>7-8pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Sleeping</td>
<td>✔ At the farm or business</td>
<td>✔ Meeting with friends, eating lunch</td>
<td>✔ Resting, chatting with friends, making more money</td>
<td>✔ Attend to other chores like sharpening tools, leisure</td>
<td>✔ Resting, Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>✔ Cleaning compound, fetching water, making fire, warming water</td>
<td>✔ Preparing breakfast, bathing children, feeding children, attend to the farm/business, plan for lunch (what to eat for lunch, gather the relish), attending to livestock like chickens</td>
<td>✔ Cooking lunch, drawing water, feeding children</td>
<td>✔ Gather firewood, gather grass, fetching water, planning for dinner (looking for what to cook for dinner)</td>
<td>✔ Cooking dinner, bathing children, make sure chickens are in their shots, preparing children for bed</td>
<td>✔ Eating dinner, washing plates, putting things back in the house, planning for the next day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The men identified some of the tasks on the women’s list of chores that they could support with.
vii) After discussions, the targeted men were encouraged to make and pronounce their commitments to improving the situation. In summary, some of the commitments included the following:

- To support their wives/women with the domestic workload, including child care, and feeding, sourcing of food, attending to backyard vegetable gardens, and providing income for supplementary foodstuffs.
- Men to allow their wives to participate in nutrition projects and related development work so that they can learn more about nutrition.

7. Implementation - Package of Support Activities

To support the men to meet their commitments, the ATONU project implemented a package of activities. These included the following:

i) Group sessions
   - Training conducted on domestic chores, including cooking, child care and feeding.

ii) Home follow ups
   - ATONU field staff made home calls to check on the targeted men to assess progress.
   - Home visits also served to support and encourage the men to stick to the commitments made during the male engagement workshop.

“After discussions, the targeted men were encouraged to make and pronounce their commitments to improving the situation.”
iii) Review of performance

- Performance review at each man’s homestead helped reinforce the lessons learnt at the male engagement workshop and the home visits.

- The reviews galvanized the men, encouraging them to want to demonstrate their commitment and higher understanding of the ATONU project and its aims. As a result, the men supported their women, with their households demonstrating tangible outputs.

iv) Selection of champions

- Based on the results of the performance reviews, a participatory process of selecting champions, including all the targeted men, was conducted.

- The targeted men selected those outstanding among their peers to form part of the group of champions that would go forth and demonstrate the ATONU promoted lifestyle.

8. Training of Champions

The establishment of champions was in line with the project’s objective of promoting communities of practice (CoP) and ensuring sustainability of interventions after project termination.

- After being selected, champions were exposed to a day of further training, conducted by ATONU field assistants, with the support of ATONU National Coordinators.

- The one-day training helped champions to ground their understanding of ATONU, considering that they would be at the forefront of promoting the ATONU project and its objectives.

- Champions would become ATONU role models from whom the rest of the community could emulate.

- Through peer influence, champions would sustain the practices promoted by the project by:
  - Supporting and motivating other ATONU project participants during home visits to live the ‘ATONU lifestyle’, as well as encouraging attendance of the group sessions.
  - Supporting and convincing fellow men on the importance of empowering women to improve family nutrition status.
  - Providing feedback to the village leaders by giving testimonies and sharing stories of success during village meetings.