



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



CASE STUDY

Improving household food security in Mwanganya area through community involvement in Karonga District, Malawi

With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a group of community members agreed to improve their household food security situation during the hunger months with support from a multi-sectoral team of stakeholders. The community members from Mwanganya village in Group Village Mwandambo in Karonga District were assisted by community-based government extension workers and community members to try some actions recommended in the national OVC standards to enhance their household food security and nutrition. Using the quality improvement methods, communities in Mwanganya village mobilised themselves to establish grain banks to improve food availability at the household level during the hunger months.

Background

In 2009, the Government of Malawi developed draft national orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) standards with assistance from the USAID Health Care Improvement Project (HCI), to guide delivery of services for vulnerable children in Malawi. In 2011 a team of three representatives from Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Lusubilo community-based organisation (CBO), and the District Social Welfare Office were trained in OVC standards and quality improvement approaches.

After the training, the Lusubilo CBO coaches agreed to start pilot testing the OVC standards in Mwanganya area through Mwanganya CBO which is geographically located 25km away from the town centre. Mwanganya CBO was established in 2001 to support vulnerable children in four villages in two Group Village Heads: Mwandwanga and Kalambo in Paramount Chief Kyungu area. The three trained coaches facilitated establishment of the multi-sectoral team of government extension workers, volunteers, and CBO executive committee members.

Identifying gaps in services

In 2011, the QI team conducted a random assessment on 30 vulnerable children in the area using the Child Status Index (CSI) tool. The random selection was done in the Mwanganya CBO OVC register. After the assessment, the quality improvement team, with support from Lusubilo CBO, analysed the results and decided to disseminate what they found in the communities. The quality improvement team brainstormed some of the possible solutions to resolve the identified problems using the OVC standards as a guide. The lowest CSI scores for the children revealed that most of the children interviewed had poor scores on the food security and nutrition domain, as shown in Figure 1.

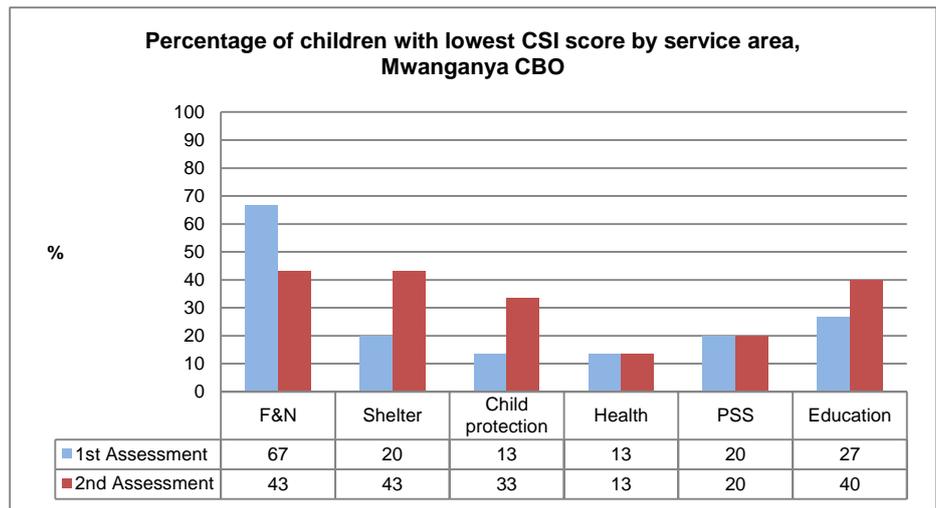
Members of Mwanganya quality improvement team

- Primary School Headmaster
- Child Protection Worker
- Agriculture extension worker
- Forestry Officer
- Health Surveillance Officer
- CBO executive committee members
- Volunteers from the community

DECEMBER 2013

This case study was authored by Tiwonge Moyo of University Research Co., LLC (URC) and produced by the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project, funded by the American people through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, Office of Health Systems. The project is managed by URC under the terms of Cooperative Agreement Number AID-OAA-A-12-00101. URC's global partners for USAID ASSIST include: EnCompass LLC; FHI 360; Harvard University School of Public Health; HEALTHQUAL International; Institute for Healthcare Improvement; Initiatives Inc.; Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs; and Women Influencing Health Education and Rule of Law, LLC. For more information on the work of the USAID ASSIST Project, please visit www.usaidassist.org or write assist-info@urc-chs.com.

The quality improvement team disseminated the results on CSI assessment findings to Mwanganya Village involving local leaders, government stakeholders, CBOs, and surrounding community members. The coaches used the OVC national standards to suggest options on possible food and nutrition interventions that could be tested to improve food security at the household level.



The quality improvement team wanted to identify the underlying causes of the food shortage during the hunger months so that they could help communities develop sustainable ideas to resolve these complex problems.

Challenges contributing to food insecurity in Mwanganya area

The quality improvement team brainstormed some of the underlying causes of food insecurity in the area. The team discovered that there were various community practices that led to food insecurity in the area which included the following:

1. Most families were harvesting once only in a year. This was a problem because they heavily relied on a single harvest throughout the year, making them prone to food insecurity.
2. Storage of harvested maize at the household level was also a challenge because of space and poor quality of chemicals used to preserve the maize throughout the year.
3. Limited access to agriculture inputs, such as fertiliser, influenced the quantities of maize harvested, especially by vulnerable households.
4. Barter exchanges of maize and plastic products with business people. The guardians observed that when people harvested their crops, business people would visit villages conducting barter exchange of maize with plastic products such as plates, cups and water buckets. Unfortunately, due to peer pressure most households were tempted to exchange some of their maize with these products. Usually the business people exploited the villagers. As a result of these issues, every year during the months of October – March, most households are food insecure, which leads to rampant malnutrition cases among children in the area. The food insecurity at the household level also affects school attendance of children in primary schools in the area.

Interventions tested and results achieved

After analysing the underlying challenges and possible solutions to the problem, the multi-sectoral quality improvement team agreed to conduct community meetings in Mwanganya area with various stakeholders to share some of the recommended actions in the OVC standards to improve food security at the household level.

After the meetings some of the guardians mobilised themselves in four groups to immediately start trying to improve their food security during the lean months. The guardians started storing the maize as



Figure 2 A grain bank member storing the group's maize in the interim while waiting for the completion of the grain bank

a group and developed some rules on how to access the maize during the hunger months. The group agreed to only get 20kg of maize every two weeks per family until the hunger period is over. In the 2013 harvesting season, a total of 45 bags of maize each weighing 90kg was preserved with chemicals and stored in one of the grain bank member's house while waiting for the finalisation of the grain bank seen in Figure 3. A total of 85 vulnerable households are currently participating in the grain banks to improve household food security in this area.

Lusubilo CBO noticed the motivation among the community members and identified funding within their budgets to support the groups to build brick-made grain silos to protect the maize from adverse weather conditions, as shown in Figure 3. The guardians identified the builders among themselves, and they contributed the sand and chemicals used to treat the maize for preservation.

The quality improvement team also identified and linked 98 vulnerable households to local leaders to get them listed as beneficiaries of the government's Fertiliser Inputs Subsidy Program (FISP) for the next growing season to improve their crop productivity.

The quality improvement team, through the CBO members and volunteers, conducted discussions with vulnerable guardians on the need to diversify their diets and harvest more than once during the year, making use of the available wetlands in the area. Guardians were encouraged to identify small gardens to grow vegetables during the year to diversify their diet at the household level. As a result,

the number of households that had identified and started growing garden vegetables increased from 12 to 34 households from February to September 2013. Guardians started growing irrigated maize to complement the food security at the household level and generate some household income through sales of the additional green crops.



Figure 3 Some of the guardians that established a grain bank in Mwanganya area

Conclusion

Using evidence to address real community challenges is key to resolving some of the problems in the community. The multi-sectoral team work helped the villagers to understand their problems better due to the inclusion of government extension workers who were available to explain some of the possible recommended actions to be tested in the communities.

It is possible for committed communities to brainstorm causes of some of the challenges they face and develop and implement sustainable solutions themselves.