

STRENGTHENING NUTRITION COUNSELING IN NIGERIA FOR THE HARDEST TO REACH: NEW TOOLS TO FOSTER AN EMPATHETIC EXPERIENCE OF CARE

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USAID
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Breakthrough
ACTION
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Speakers



Shittu Abdu-Aguye
BA Nigeria



Angela Samba
BA Nigeria

Background

Why focus on complementary feeding counseling by CHW?

Complementary feeding from 6-24 months is critical to young child nutrition and therefore lifelong growth and development, yet it remains a global challenge.

Community Health Workers (CHW) counseling of caregivers is a universal approach to improving complementary feeding practices.



Why create a counseling tool for CHWs?

Current situation:

CHWs usually teach or tell caregivers what they should do based on generic recommendations yet do not always foster an experience where caregivers can voice their needs, ask questions, or solve their challenges.

There is often a lack of trust between CHWs and caregivers. Current tools do not sufficiently address this barrier to quality counseling.



Goal

To provide CHWs with tools that **they design themselves** and find easy to use, meaningful and impactful.

Focus Question

How can Nigerian CHWs better **educate, empower, and activate** caregivers to initiate complementary feeding from 6 months and improve diet diversity for young children from 6-24 months?



Human Centered Design Process



Uncover Challenges



Qualitative Research Overview: Nigeria

Kebbi State

Community
Health
Workers

Mothers
and
caregivers

Community
and peer group
leaders

Household
influencers

Total

63

60

29

31

183

Research Methods

Remote/Digital

In-Person

EnGauge



Desktop research



One-on-one interviews



Highlights: Gaps in CHW Job Aids

- **Absence of support to build trust and empathy between CHWs and caregivers**
Current tools do not help CHWs make a personal connection or give space for and encourage CHWs to show empathy during counseling.
- **Absence of tools to tailor counseling to situation**
CHWs deliver information in one-way, without understand the situation of the mother and the child to tailor to specific challenges or needs.
- **Unmet needs of fathers and mothers-in-law**
CHWs don't have tools that speak to mothers-in-law and fathers' interests, such as, the value of local, nutrient-rich foods appropriate for young children, nor do CHWs often trigger them to bring or support feeding more diverse foods.

Develop Solutions



From Insights to Prototypes

Insights

Trust and empathy

Current tools don't give space / encourage CHWs to show empathy during counseling sessions nor give caregivers room to voice their needs without fear of being judged.

Uncertainty & fear

Motivated by results of proper nutrition, caregivers, family members and community members can learn new recommendations to overcome fear of harming the child while patiently encouraging healthy food introductions.

Food based norms

Norms about what is acceptable to feed children are powerful determinants and held/ conveyed by mothers-in-law, peers, and communities.

Challenge and solution:

Relationship building

Lead CHWs to show empathy to caregivers and build a connection to provide effective counselling and care to improve complementary feeding behaviors

Knowledge and Norms

Enable caregivers to learn about diet diversity for their children and recognize the expertise of CHWs in providing tailored counseling.

Tools to address the challenges.

Prototype 1
**YOUR OWN
ADVENTURE**

Prototype 2
EMPATHWAYS

Prototype 3
CARD GAME

Prototype 4
TRIVIA (with T&F Qs)

From Insights to Prototypes

Insights

Norms

Norms and traditions about what is usual and acceptable to feed children mean most children get only smooth pap

Perceived value of local foods

Mothers believe that expensive foods are 'better' and needed for children.

Confidence to introduce diverse foods

CHW counseling sessions could better equip mothers to feel confident to try adding diverse foods to pap/ bowl.

Challenge and solution:

Attitudes

Increase perceived value of locally available, affordable, nutrient-rich foods

Confidence and Agency

Increase confidence to feed children diverse foods

Tools to address the challenges.

Prototype 5 & 6; 8

PRICE COMPARISON ACTIVITY; COUNSELLING FLOW

Prototype 7

TRIVIA GAME

Prototype 8

COUNSELLING FLOW & ACTION PLAN

Test and Improve Final Solutions



User-testing Overview

Testing Sprint

8
PROTOTYPES

Focus Group
Discussions

One-on-one
interviews

Shadowing

Co-design
sessions



Community
Health
Workers

Mothers
and
Caregivers

Community
Leaders

Household
influencers

Total

22

22

16

6

66

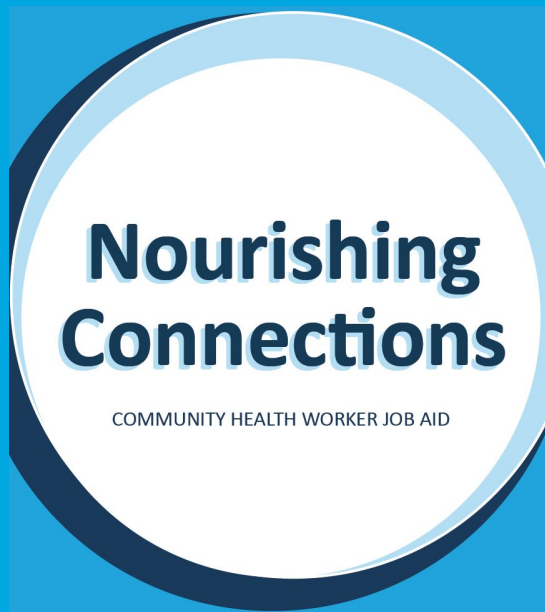
Starting with Empathy

Building block of a trusted relationship.

Empathy is good for health. Evidence shows that health workers with empathy have patients who enjoy better health.

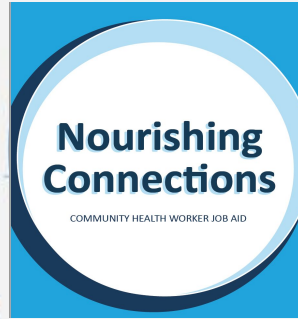
Goal of these tools are in part to transform the interaction between a CHW and a caregiver/family and move from one-way communication and information sharing to building a true connection and depth of understanding.

Practicing compassion can improve the experience for both CHWs and caregivers.



Counseling Job Aid & Supporting Tools

Home Visits



1

EMPATHWAYS

2

ASSESS CAREGIVERS' KNOWLEDGE

3

COUNSELING FLOW

4

ACTION PLAN



Total
duration:
30- 35 min



TRIVIA



CARD GAME



PRICE COMPARISON



Up to
20 min
per tool

Activity 1. Empathways to Nutrition

Questions for CHWs and caregivers to answer.

For example, “Can you share your experience about feeding your child?
What do you find challenging?”

- Puts caregivers at ease
- Creates a two-way connected relationship and builds trust
- Shifts experience to a safe and non-judgemental place to speak openly

“It has never been so easy to talk to them. In fact, they talked a lot.”

CHW

“That was the first time I was asked something during the session. and that is the first session that I think I will remember what was said.”

Caregiver

Step 01.
The Pledge
Introduce yourselves to each other. Then, you must read this about to the caregiver, as a commitment to an honest and open session.

“During this counseling session, I commit to an open and honest dialogue.
I pledge to study you and hear you.
I will keep what you tell me confidential.
I will keep an open mind to be understood and shared you in a whole.
I commit to providing you the best nutritional recommendations possible for your child's health.”

Step 02.
Get to know each other
Choose 1 question and connect with the caregiver.

A. How has your experience been as a caregiver?
What do you find the most about being a caregiver?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

B. Can you share your experience about feeding your child? When did you first started eating complementary foods? What do you like the most and what you find challenging about feeding your child?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

Step 03.
Information seeking
Choose 1 question to understand more about the caregiver's situation.

A. What do your family members and friends think about how you feed your child?
Do you agree with them?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

B. What does your spouse think about how you feed your child?
Do you agree with him?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

Step 04.
Addressing needs
Choose 1 question to understand the caregiver's needs. If you select the B you must read the scenario.

A. Were you ever afraid of harming your child by giving them a certain type of food?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

B. Read the following scenario before the questions:
Amelia, 28, gave in a community talk to learn from the CHW tips about feeding her 7-month-old baby. While in the session, she heard a CHW sharing a parenting practice: always do not use a "new food marker" for not giving solid foods to her 7-month-old baby. Then, Amelia decided to leave the meeting.
What do you think Amelia felt during and after this experience?
What do you think might happen next behavior?
What could have gone differently?
You and the caregiver should share your experiences.

Activity 2. Assess the Caregiver's Knowledge of Nutrition

Step 1: Ask the following questions

and then choose one of the 3 responses based on the answer provided by the caregiver.

1 What is the importance of feeding and the community to encouraging caregivers of 6 to 24 months-old children to provide a variety of food for healthy growth up to 24 months?

Good or better than before

Know but doesn't make understanding to explain the behavior

Know and understands the behavior but doesn't make practice

2 What are the benefits of adding different foods, such as dried fish or yogurt, when a child turns 6 months?

Good or better than before

Know but doesn't make understanding to explain the behavior

Know and understands the behavior but doesn't make practice

3 What animal-source foods can be added to a child's meal each day (6 to 24 months old)?

Good or better than before

Know but doesn't make understanding to explain the behavior

Know and understands the behavior but doesn't make practice

4 Why is it good for children over 12 months to eat to their own bowl?

Good or better than before

Know but doesn't make understanding to explain the behavior

Know and understands the behavior but doesn't make practice

5 What are the consequences to a family and community when a 9-month-old child only eats plain porridge?

Good or better than before

Know but doesn't make understanding to explain the behavior

Know and understands the behavior but doesn't make practice

Step 2: Register the score

For each question, mark the caregiver's response. Count the number of correct responses and the caregiver gives that response to each category.

Knowledge 3 answers

Practice 3 answers

Attitude 3 answers

Step 3: Pick a tool

This step is optional. Pick the tool that is most appropriate for the caregiver's response that you recorded at the end of the session.

If the caregiver had the desired response:

Knowledge

Attitude

Card game

Tools

Practice

Practice

Practice

Practice

Questions to assess current knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to feeding children aged 6 to 24 months.

For example: What are the benefits of adding different foods, such as dried fish or yogurt, when a child turns 6 months?

"This tool made my session faster, because I know what I have to talk to them about. This is by far my favorite tool".

CHW

"The questions are simple and everything went well so fast, I liked it".

CHW

Activity 3. Counseling Flow



Set of questions to identify current situation/ reflect on change since last session, **focus** on 1-2 issues, and **solve problems** together.

Counseling Flow: Ask, Follow-up, Explain, Solve together

"It was easy to discover the problem, because they talk a lot about this part. But, I have to get used to asking more questions."

CHW

"It was very good because we only talked about two subjects, so it's much better than when they come in and talk about all those stuff".

CHW

Activity 4. Action Plan

Action Plan

What do you have in your food stock?

What will you try to do this week?

Identify barriers

Session's Recommendations

Left with caregivers to provide actionable recommendations and documents agreements made during the session.

For example: What will you try this week?

"The action plan is very easy to use, and helps both of us to define the next steps".

CHW

"Can I keep this paper? I want to put it on my wall..."

Caregiver

Orientation Videos for CHWs

Set of three videos to set CHWs up for success:

1

Understand importance and benefits of compassionate care

2

Receive tips on how to lead a counseling session with caregivers that is compassionate

Learning from Testing



CHWs resisted sharing personal stories

- **CHWs resisted sharing their own experiences** as a way to engage with mothers and caregivers, which became a barrier to building trust.
- **CHWs feared gossip, looking weak,** and of losing control of the process.

"I know that working this way will reduce the session time and improve the result, but I can't compromise my family. I don't know how to do JUST ENOUGH"

CHW



Compassionate counselling requires a different skill set

- Listening actively for more than 1 minute, being vulnerable, asking probing questions, writing down key points, developing and sharing recommendations *all at the same time* is a **drastic change in the skill set, mindset, and expectations for CHWs.**

"It was hard to listen to so much and think. However, these tools are so useful".

CHW



Gamification favorite format

- **Gamification lightened seriousness** and helped participants to relax and be open to new experiences and learning.
- **Gamification allowed for frank conversations,** routine breaks for both caregivers and CHWs, experimentation with new roles, experience of desired reality, knowledge gain without obligation, and curiosity to go beyond information provided.

"The game is my favourite by far. I don't need to ask for attention because everyone is paying attention, without me making much effort".

CHW

Global Application



Global Application for the Job Aid

1. Empathways creates an empathic counseling session

Two-way **relationship building** sets up an experience that is supportive and empathetic. As a result, caregivers felt more confident communicating their needs and trusted CHW advice. *Mothers talked!*

Note: CHWs need new training, mentoring and other community/facility support to change expectations about CHW roles.



Addresses global need to better equip CHWs to build trusted relationships and be curious to understand a caregivers' needs.

Global Application for the Job Aid

2. Focus on 1-2 topics to solve timely issues

Counseling flow actively helped CHWs ask questions and focus in on 1-2 topics most relevant for a given mother or caregiver.

Enabled CHWs to efficiently assess caregivers' current behaviors / situation and tailor counseling sessions to their needs/priorities.



Addresses global need to tailor counseling to the child's and family's situation and needs to avoid information overload.