

How a Community in Nakuru County is Boosting Nutrition through Kitchen Gardens

County:	Nakuru		
Sector/s:	Health	Sub-sector/Theme:	Nutrition/ Security/ Health Food Preventive
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Target Audience:	Counties, development partners, health policy makers		
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Introduction:

Poverty, food insecurity, and limited awareness of proper nutrition leave many families struggling, particularly children, who face severe malnutrition challenges. Malnutrition manifests in various forms, including undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight), micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight or obesity. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in its 2024 fact sheet "Malnutrition", globally in 2022: 149 million children under 5 were stunted, 45 million were wasted, 37 million were overweight or obese and nearly half of under-5 deaths in low and middle-income countries are linked to undernutrition.

Women, infants, children, and adolescents are especially vulnerable. Proper nutrition during the first 1,000 days (from conception to a child's second birthday) is essential for long-term health and development. This critical window lays the foundation for a child's cognitive, physical, and emotional growth. Proper nutrition includes:



- For pregnant women: Adequate intake of calories, protein, iron, folic acid, iodine, calcium, and other essential micronutrients to support fetal development and maternal health.
- For infants (0–6 months): Exclusive breastfeeding, which provides all the necessary nutrients, antibodies, and enzymes for optimal growth and immunity.
- For young children (6–24 months): Continued breastfeeding along with the introduction of safe, age-appropriate, and complementary foods rich in nutrients, including fruits, vegetables, grains, and foods sourced from animals.

Poverty aggravates malnutrition, while malnutrition, in turn, perpetuates poverty by increasing healthcare costs, reducing productivity, and slowing economic growth.

In Ogilgei community in Nakuru County, challenges such as food insecurity, poor child-feeding practices, parental alcoholism, and inconsistent exclusive breastfeeding have worsened malnutrition. In 2023, the local health facility recorded two malnutrition cases (one severe, one moderate) and one malnutrition-related death. Most affected families were transient renters, highlighting the need for community-based interventions to improve nutrition awareness and household food production.

Implementation of the practice (**Solution Path**):

To address this challenge, the Community Health Committee (CHC), supported by the DANIDA PHC Support Program, introduced kitchen gardening as a sustainable solution. A kitchen garden, also known as a home garden or a vegetable garden, is a small garden grown at home to produce fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruits for household use.



Figure 1: A photo of Community Health Committee members together with Community Health Promoters who train and educate the community on kitchen gardening and nutrition

Key steps included:

1. Capacity building and leadership

- CHC members received training in leadership and resource mobilization to better support Community Health Promoters (CHPs).
- Regular feedback and monthly CHP meetings facilitated knowledge-sharing and adaptive planning.

- 2. CHCs and CHPs conducted sessions in five villages (Kamungei, Kapchorua, Kaptembwa, Kerma, Kapkoros), demonstrating how to grow vegetables in reused sacks and containers, ideal for households with limited space.

Setting up a Sack Garden

The sack garden is an affordable and accessible option for cultivating leafy greens. It utilizes vertical space by hanging or stacking sacks filled with a well-balanced soil mix.



Figure 2: A proud beneficiary showcases her thriving managu crop, grown in recycled cement bags with support from CHPs

The process begins by:

- Gathering your materials: a sack, healthy soil (preferably loamy soil), compost, and plants.
- Cutting holes with a diameter measuring about 3cm in the bag.
- Filling the bag with healthy soil.
- Planting your seedlings into the holes on the sack and watering them from the midrib.

This method maximizes vertical space, conserves water, and is easily movable. It's suitable for leafy greens like spinach, kale, and radishes.

3. Community demonstration garden

- A 0.25-acre unused plot at the health facility was repurposed into a communal garden.
- CHCs and CHPs contributed seeds, tools (jembes, pangas, slashers), and KES 150 each from funds received after implementing activities facilitated by the DANIDA PHC Level 1 support, totaling to KES 2,250 to plant fruit trees along the garden borders.
- Members managed assigned plots in a bid to foster ownership and teamwork.

4. Direct impact on nutrition and health services

- Harvests supplemented diets of malnourished children identified during household visits.
- Over 40 households adopted kitchen gardening.



Results of the practice (*outputs and outcomes*)-

1. Families consumed fresh produce and sold surplus, boosting food security and earnings.
2. Increased Health Service Utilization:
 - ANC visits rose from 357 in 2023 to 464 in 2024.
 - Immunizations increased from 1,113 to 1,669.
 - Deliveries grew from 39 to 45 by February 2025.
3. Community benefits:
 - Access to affordable, chemical-free food.
 - Reduced malnutrition risks.
 - Enhanced social cohesion and knowledge-sharing.
4. Collaboration among CHCs, health facility staff, and County officials drove success.

Lessons learnt:

- The use of vegetables as a reward increased the number of mothers attending ANC.
- Simple innovations like planting vegetables in empty sacks or containers helped overcome the challenge of limited space.
- Community ownership, local resource mobilization, and teamwork were the driving forces behind the success of the kitchen garden initiative.

Recommendations:

- Continued support from DANIDA and other partners is needed to sustainably fund community health services.
- Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials should be provided for use during community dialogue and action days.
- CHCs and CHPs need support to transport chalkboards (MOH 516), materials and tools during action days.
- Provision of water tanks for irrigation will help maintain the CHP demonstration gardens throughout the year.

Further Reading:

World Health Organization. (n.d.). Malnutrition. World Health Organization.
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition>

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Photo Gallery – Kitchen gardens with variety of nutritious foods





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