



Photo credit: One Acre Fund

One Acre Fund

A Human-Centered Approach to Improved Nutrition in Kenya

Background

One Acre Fund (OAF) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to lifting smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa out of hunger and poverty by providing them with tools and opportunities to build wealth and improve their quality of life.

Through its unique farmer-centered model, OAF delivers a variety of services to its member farmers including: financial services, high quality inputs like seeds and fertilizers, and on-farm trainings and peer-based coaching.

Traditionally an organization focused on farming and agriculture, OAF identified an opportunity to improve child health and development through nutrition behavior change targeting young children and pregnant and lactating women. In 2017, OAF introduced nutritional counseling to its farmer families to improve consumption of diverse, high-quality foods, to prevent anemia and stunting among children under two.

Social and Behavior Change to Tackle a Critical Need

In 2019, OAF hired Changeable to integrate principles of social and behavior change communication to achieve a more specific behavioral objective: Increase consumption of beans and eggs among children aged 6-23 months and among pregnant and lactating women (PLW).

Over the course of our four-month engagement, Changeable worked with OAF to produce a new integrated behavioral framework and a human-centered, social behavior change communication strategy designed to catalyze healthy, nutritional behavior change among rural Kenyan families.

Collecting Insights First: Myths and Norms Around Eggs and Beans

Broaching sensitive topics around human health and wellness can be challenging in rural settings. However, when discussing household food and dietary practices we discovered many Kenyan families were open, curious, and willing to talk. Using a community dialogue approach, we collected a number of insights that formed the basis for the behavior-change strategy.

Through collaborative discussions, we found that many myths still guided household decision-making and norms. Such as:

Myth: “When kids eat eggs, they will develop more slowly.”
Norm: “Men need more energy foods because they work harder.”

We also found that food staples like eggs and beans were actually viewed and valued in more complex economic terms by families. As one farmer put it: “Eggs and beans are the family piggy bank.” Additionally:

- **Insight:** For low-income farmers constantly battling volatile market prices, seasonal droughts, and severe economic instability, eggs and beans are not merely food but valued commodities often saved and used as currency during hard-times. Additionally, the decision to consume, trade, or save these particular foods involved complex, decision-making dynamics between the men and women in the household.
- **Insight:** Beans are a filling and non-perishable food for many farming households. However, because they can sometimes cause bloating, gas and indigestion, women would need to soak them in water for extended periods of time to make them more digestible – an impractical nuisance for women and mothers with busy schedules. And if the beans were consumed without prior soaking? Gassy, uncomfortable children meant more problems for the female caretakers of the household.

Building Up Local Expertise

From the outset, we wanted to assure OAF that strategic behavior change was not only intuitive but something they were already doing. Much of OAF's work delivering essential on-farm tools, knowledge and services, and building community were key features of a social behavior change strategy.

At Changeable, we work to build long-term capacity while working to meet short-term project deadlines. Balancing these two goals can be a challenge, but we are firmly committed to working in a nimble way to achieve both goals.



Photo credit: One Acre Fund

OAF assigned staff members to help with insight gathering, but not all of them were formally trained or had experience conducting such research.

To address this, we traveled to western Kenya to understand the context, meet with the team, and assess their capacity and business model. We then developed a simplified qualitative assessment methodology, based on human-centered design and anthropology. Our assessment methods included the use of pile sorts, diagnostic role plays, and creative concept testing. Both the farmer participants and the OAF assessment team found these methods interactive and fun to use.

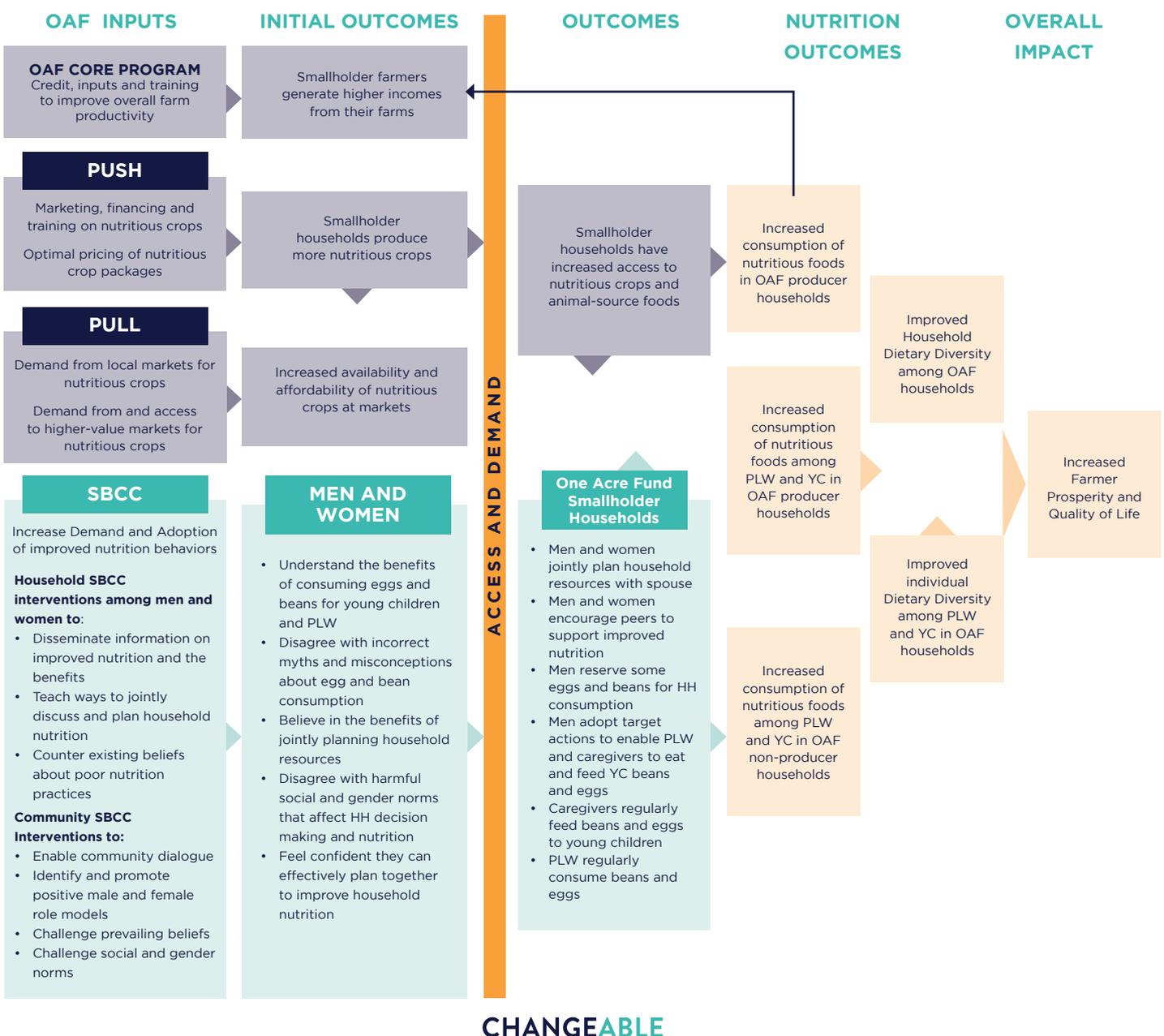
The project timeline and budget did not allow for multiple trips. As a result, our capacity building approach combined both in-person learning and remote support. After an initial in-country visit, where we introduced our process and the principals of behavior change, we developed an interactive webinar on qualitative methods to prepare the OAF Research team for data collection. Using a combination of animated slides with embedded videos, a pre-recorded audio lecture, and voice prompts, the day-long training webinar was packaged for facilitation by the Global Nutrition and Health Lead, and Kenya Nutrition Lead. They used digital prompts to guide instructional role plays, field questions, and facilitate group discussion while we provided real-time support from Washington, DC.

Defining A Theoretical Approach

We understood from the outset that any strategy to improve household nutrition needed to complement OAF’s existing theoretical framework for increasing farmer prosperity and also consider OAF’s business model. In addition to gathering consumer insights, we consulted members of the senior management team to understand their sales and farmer enrollment goals. We also spoke with OAF Field Officers to gather insight into how they were incentivized and spoke with a few farmers to understand their concerns and needs.

The resulting new SBC theory of change articulates exactly how increased demand and consumption of beans and eggs would enable OAF to deliver on its primary goal. Specifically, increasing demand for eggs and beans would bring added nutritional benefits to OAF’s farmer families, thus aligning OAF’s overall goal of poverty reduction and ensuring impact. A market that enables the production of quality eggs and beans is strengthened by households that demand both foods. Increased consumption of these foods in turn leads to healthier families who are more productive on their farms and ultimately better able to improve their household wealth and overall quality of life.

The resulting Theory of Change looked like this:



The Result: A Well-defined Strategy and Guidance

Our final deliverable to One Acre Fund was an audience-centered communication strategy informed by the audience assessment and theoretical framework. We identified two main audience segments: male heads of household and female heads of household who are caregivers of children under two. Paternal grandmothers who live with their son's family and grandchildren were identified as secondary targets due to their ability to influence food choice and the supportive role they play in child nutrition.

The resulting multi-channel, behavior change communication strategy will guide OAF to implement a phased approach to raising awareness of the unique benefits of beans and eggs to child health, catalyze social support, and increase self-efficacy for improved joint decision-making. The strategy will also challenge negative gender norms that often prevent men and women from improved nutrition behaviors. The strategy leverages a tailored channel mix that builds on OAF's existing infrastructure and responds to audience preferences, including mass media, interpersonal communication, and digital technology. Additionally, we made specific recommendations on how the strategy should take advantage of OAF's ongoing work, brand equity, and overarching business model and plans, specifically:

1. Consider the role of OAF's brand - A brand is defined by some as a 'strategic asset with a reputation' (<https://mannglobalhealth.com/microsite/index.php>). Many farmers choose OAF because they view their products and support as superior to the competition. Our strategy leveraged the established OAF brand to increase message reach and promote adoption of the new recommended nutritional actions. These actions were: shared decision-making around beans and eggs, joint decision-

making about food resources, and consistently feeding young children under two with recommended amounts of beans and eggs.

- 2. One Acre Fund's marketing and communication infrastructure** - OAF hired a talented marketing director with private sector experience. One of her top goals was to develop a client enrollment strategy that would increase farmers' engagement with OAF's programs. After consulting with her, we determined that the existing field teams would not be able to both drive nutrition communication and enroll farmers. They were already overburdened and motivating them to do both would be difficult because of the way they were incentivized. We prioritized these insights as we made recommendations for communication channels. Understanding OAF's larger communication needs also helped us make the case for OAF to combine communication budgets across the organization. This would enable OAF to negotiate for more competitive ad agency pricing and to combine media buys for greater cost efficiency.
- 3. Creative brief** - In addition to the communication strategy, we created an agency brief that distilled the detailed communication strategy into actionable language a creative agency would understand. Our creative brief included descriptive audience archetypes for each of the priority audiences, and recommendations for positioning, tone and voice. Since OAF's team was new to implementing marketing communication interventions, we applied best practices and outlined a detailed template timeline to help them align resources, staff and internal work plans.

One Acre Fund will take these insights, strategy documents and briefs for execution and plan a launch in late 2020. Visit oneacrefund.org for more information about One Acre Fund's work.

CONTACT US

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