



Designing the Future of Nutrition Social and Behavior Change Communication: How to Achieve Impact at Scale

Jointly organized by GAIN and USAID/SPRING

CONCEPT NOTE
September 11, 2014

Background

Evidence on the multi-causal nature of maternal and child malnutrition and their impact on human development has focused global attention on the need for rapid, impactful action ([Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, 2013](#)). Recent evidence has highlighted the crucial role of social and behavior change communication (SBCC) as a fundamental component of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions ([Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series, 2013](#); [Alive & Thrive special issue of the Food and Nutrition Bulletin, 2013](#)). However, there is no consensus on the essential elements that determine the success of SBCC strategies, and evidence around the scalability, sustainability or cost-effectiveness of existing SBCC models is limited.

Recognizing the need for concerted action to increase nutrition impacts through at-scale SBCC programs, GAIN and USAID, with its global nutrition project, SPRING, have joined forces to place SBCC at the top of the global nutrition agenda. The aim is to reach national and global targets on stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiency reductions and slow the rapid increases in obesity and non-communicable diseases world-wide.

For the purposes of this process, SBCC interventions are characterized as those aiming to increase the individual and group practice of optimal nutrition actions within a defined population, working at all levels of the socio-ecological model. A partial list of relevant actors who influence nutrition includes: mothers, caregivers, husbands, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, health care workers, community and religious leaders, district and regional officials, private sector and civil society organizations, the mass media, and policy makers. Communication approaches include interpersonal communication, small, medium, and mass media, and social/community mobilization, as well as design approaches that incorporate behavioral economics and choice architecture principles. Interventions that directly increase access to resources, enabling technologies or services are not included as communication for the purposes of this process, although SBCC is often integrated with these interventions. While social change communication and behavior change communication require different analyses, approaches, and strategies, for ease of communication we refer to them together as SBCC.

Many efforts over the past decades have led to extensive SBCC research and design approaches or tools, yet there is no firm consensus on the key determinants for a successful SBCC strategy. Documentation of past experiences is often limited in its description of the insights from formative research, the black box of creative design, or the nitty-gritty of project implementation. Though there is evidence for impact on feeding practices or growth in research settings, we do not know enough about what makes these interventions work, for whom, when, why, at what cost, and for how long. To make serious strides in achieving nutrition targets, there is an urgent need to set a strategic research and implementation agenda and take concerted action to increase nutrition impacts through at-scale SBCC

programs, leveraging experience from both the public and private sector.

SBCC strategies targeting maternal and infant/young child feeding and care practices often attempt to increase the use of optimal behaviors (either new to a population, or only practiced by a limited number of families) by straightforward informational communication, occasionally including an emotional or values-based component. This communication may transfer knowledge about new ideas and practices, or may transfer knowledge already existing in parts of the community, aiming to support families to make alternative choices within their own existing knowledge, value systems and practices. While standard SBCC design processes attempt to identify facilitating or hindering factors related to optimal behaviors (i.e. social norms, gender roles, beliefs, price, taste, or convenience), the variability in resources, analytical and creative skills, experience and in-depth understanding of the target population ultimately limits the impact of these strategies. Many SBCC practitioners also realize the importance of underlying cognitive/psychological (conscious or unconscious) and emotional drivers for behavior; however, they are less adept at leveraging them for change than private sector, for profit actors, despite recent efforts to draw lessons from private sector experiences in promoting nutrition to low-income consumers.

Recognizing this, GAIN and SPRING identified strengths, gaps and opportunities in delivering high impact, cost-effective, sustainable SBCC for nutrition at scale through a systematic review (Evidence Summary) of recent evidence for established and promising SBCC approaches and practices – both from within and from beyond nutrition – to improve maternal and infant and young child nutrition. An Expert Working Group (EWG) of global SBCC thought leaders, including researchers and public and private sector practitioners, was convened to apply their expertise and experience toward developing a strategic research and implementation agenda for the next 5 years in nutrition SBCC, informed by the lessons learned from this Evidence Summary. In April 2014 the EWG met and identified:

- Strengths and weaknesses within existing research and programming;
- Opportunities to improve from within and beyond nutrition SBCC;
- External factors that could impact efforts to improve nutrition SBCC; and
- Building blocks for improving nutrition SBCC.

Objectives

Leveraging insights and lessons learned from the evidence review and EWG meeting, SPRING and GAIN are convening this conference to share the outputs from the Evidence Summary and the EWG meeting, and springboard a movement from them. The objectives of the proposed conference are to:

1. **Engage stakeholders** in developing a research and implementation agenda; and
2. **Get stakeholder commitment** toward an action plan for nutrition SBCC, to increase the scale, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of SBCC interventions for nutrition during the first 1,000 days.

The conference will be an interactive 2-day working meeting, organized around one of the key themes that emerged from the EWG: developing an at-scale mindset. An at-scale mindset influences decisions and activities at every stage of planning, design, and implementation. It recognizes potential mutual interests in increasing optimal nutrition behaviors and in reaching the target audiences for nutrition SBCC among government, civil society, public health NGOs, academic institutions, and for-profit actors. It draws on multiple sectors, academic disciplines, and stakeholder perspectives to create enabling environments for social and behavior change. It forges different types of partnerships, where

overlapping strategic intent exists, that go beyond corporate social responsibility, endorsement, and/or traditional funding mechanisms.

The building blocks to working at scale identified during the EWG meeting are:

- **Create integrated, multi-disciplinary SBCC approaches** that take into account collective social structures and people’s complex daily lives(e.g. “family practices”, not isolated individual behaviors);
- **Focus on fewer behaviors and messages** to achieve greater impact. Nutrition SBCC practitioners can improve programs by focusing on fewer priority behaviors; phasing interventions over time; identifying and leveraging “universal insights”; avoiding over-messaging; and designing for reality where people are often bombarded with messages and live life as a whole, not in isolated sectors (e.g. nutrition, sanitation, livelihoods, etc.);
- **Create better mechanisms for engaging systems at multiple levels** to leverage economic, social, and structural factors to increase our impact (effectively put the “S” into SBCC);
- **Engage in effective multi-sectoral partnerships**, including with the private sector, such as food manufacturers, leveraging overlapping interests and managing conflicts of interest, to tap into infrastructures to achieve scale, leverage resources to stretch our budgets, and reimagine competing interests as an opportunity to co-create positive change;
- **Capitalize on existing commercial expertise** in building teams who can turn research into insight into interventions, in creating aspirational campaigns, in using mass and social media in changing behavior, and in creativity. Leapfrog from existing platforms, processes, and capacities, rather than spending time and resources creating new tools, processes and capacity; and
- **Create and effectively promote the uptake of a more unified process for SBCC**, combining the best of private sector strategic creative process with existing strong elements of SBCC practice, while addressing gaps that exist.

Audience

The conference will comprise 100 thought leaders in social and behavior change, including innovative academics, experienced program developers and implementers, out-of-the-box marketing and media experts, and committed donor agencies and foundations. There will be strong representation from the Global South, especially from the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and Feed the Future countries for which SBCC is a nutrition agenda priority.

Outputs / Products

The output of the conference will be a **strategic research and implementation agenda and action plan** for getting to more and better nutrition SBCC globally. This will include:

- **Identify a “few (big) things”** (tools, approaches, etc.) that will make the biggest difference to the future of nutrition SBCC around the first 1,000 days, with clear objectives and simple metrics;
- **Articulate a “cause”** to get behind rather than simply an ambitious to-do list;
- **Identify stakeholders and “shining stars”** with inspiring stories to engage, bring in others and create energy and vision; and
- **Identify constituents needed to form a “backbone”** of strong leadership and organizational support (dedicated human and financial resources).

The conference is envisioned as part of a process to increase capacity and resources for effective nutrition SBCC within existing national nutrition strategies and international nutrition bodies, like the SUN Secretariat, with the endorsement of donors, the private sector and governments. This includes increasing commitments to conduct focused research and to implement SBCC aimed at improving nutrition outcomes for women and children at scale globally.

These outputs will be disseminated through multiple channels, including:

- Online dissemination of the Evidence Summary and EWG meeting report;
- Publication of the conference proceedings as a supplement to a nutrition, communication, or public health journal;
- Presentation of the strategic research and implementation agenda to high-level panels, including the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, the Business Platform for Nutrition Research, and SUN.

References

Alive & Thrive Special Announcement, September 2013: New Food & Nutrition Bulletin Journal Supplement: Designing Large-Scale IYCF Programs. 2013. Available: <http://www.aliveandthrive.org/newsletter/2013/september/25/special-announcement-september-2013-new-food-nutrition-bulletin-journal>.

The Lancet. Maternal and Child Nutrition Series. 2013. Available: <http://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition>.