



How KES. 20,000 Grant Changed My Life in the Village in Isiolo, Kenya

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USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is funding a 5-year Development Food Security Activity (DFSA) project known as Nawiri, led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and being implemented in the arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) counties of Isiolo and Marsabit in Kenya. The project's goal is to sustainably reduce levels of persistent acute malnutrition among vulnerable populations in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties.

In September 2021, Isiolo County government and Nawiri (CRS) undertook a joint documentation initiative in collaboration with other USAID PREG implementing partners, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), local media outlets and communities. The aim was to identify and showcase compelling stories of community resilience in the county, by capturing inspiring efforts underway to help prevent and withstand the impact of climate- and human-made shocks.



Photo: CRS/Nawiri

Marynadeta Loriu and Veronica Lomatukae (R) at their Lowangila kiosk that she started from the business grant she received from Nawiri (Village Enterprise)

Veronica Lomatukae, from Lowangila village in Isiolo County, is a contented woman. She was once a charcoal maker in Ngaremara ward, but not anymore.

Ngaremara, inhabited by the Turkana community, is synonymous with charcoal making with a majority of women solely relying on it as their main livelihood now that pastoralism has been undermined by prolonged droughts.

To evade arrest, the mother of two and others would cut down trees late in the evening and transport charcoal at night, a venture she says was not only risky but also unreliable and less rewarding.

“I sold a sack from as low as Sh200 after the strenuous activity, but I had no alternative as my children needed food and other things,” she says.

Like a majority of residents in the region, her family struggled to access safe and nutritious diets due to

high poverty levels, leaving her two children malnourished.

Malnourishment, especially among children aged under five years, remains high in the county, with recent statistics from USAID Nawiri showing stunting and global acute malnutrition rates at 18.5 percent and 13 percent respectively.

The leading causes of malnutrition in Isiolo include low uptake of fortified foods, high child morbidity, some cultural beliefs and poor infant and young child feeding practices due to food insecurity. Ngaremara is among Isiolo North's malnutrition hotspots, alongside Burat and Oldonyiro wards.

Fortunately, Ms. Lomatukae in August this year benefited from the USAID-funded Nawiri's KES. 27 million cash transfer programme, and KES. 6 million business grant from USAID Nawiri's Adapted Nutrition-Friendly Graduation pilot (implemented by Village Enterprise), targeting 600



Photo: CRS/Naviri

Marynadeta Loru outside their Lowangila kiosk that she started from the business grant she received from Nawiri (Village Enterprise)

families in Cherab and Ngaremara with malnourished children so they can meet their basic needs.

The project targeted ultra-poor households across 14 villages that are far from health centres and whose children are at risk of repeat acute malnutrition.

Besides cushioning her family from the biting effects of drought, Ms. Lomatukae says her children can now access nutritious food and health products to improve their health.

The families receive Sh7,500 every two months to meet their immediate needs for the next one year under the programme that seeks to reverse acute malnutrition rates.

But it is the KES. 20,000 small business grant from Village Enterprise for 204 business groups of three households each that made the mother abandon charcoal making.

"I regret being involved in environmental degradation and I have taken it upon myself to educate women on the need to shun charcoal making, because it is the cause of the harsh climatic conditions we continue to experience," Ms. Lomatukae says.

Nation Africa caught up with her at the diversion to Lowangila village, about 10km past Isiolo town towards Samburu.

She was busy serving a group of men with camel meat soup, seated under an acacia tree outside her iron-sheet kiosk that also serves as a general shop.

"We sell camel meat, soup and cereals, among other items," an elated Ms. Lomatukae said while ushering us into the kiosk that she operates with Ms. Marynadeta Loru and another woman, who are members of the Nachami Business Group.

"Our business is barely two months old and we make a profit of at least KES. 1,500 daily," Ms. Loru reveals, saying they had started saving part of the profits for future business expansion.

Having a reliable source of income, the women say, enables their families to get enough food for healthier living.

"I can now help my husband pay fees for our children and they can carry food and even come home to eat, improving their health," Ms. Lomatukae says, adding that they had been trained

by Village Enterprise in partnership with the Ministry of Health on health and nutrition.

About one kilometer away is Tractor town, where Mary Eyanae, another beneficiary who previously engaged in charcoal making, operates a general shop and an eatery with Ann Eluman and Lucia Ekwam, an engagement they say has transformed their lives.

The 38-year-old says her children used to sleep on an empty stomach, but they now get enough food, thanks to the cash they get under the Nawiri programme and proceeds from their businesses.

"We are no longer worried about what the children will eat as we now have a source of income. The struggle we had walking under the scorching sun to fell trees for charcoal is gone," said Ms. Ekwam, a 26-year-old mother of two from Attan village.

The regular health and nutrition training by Nawiri is meant to ensure households improve their feeding practices, especially pregnant women, infants, young children and people with disabilities.

In Isiolo and Marsabit, Nawiri aims to increase awareness on malnutrition so as to sustainably reduce persistent acute malnutrition and strengthen institutions.

Stakeholders have called for resources to be prioritized for health and nutrition to reduce the two counties' overdependence on development partners in tackling malnutrition.

Malnutrition remains a global challenge, with 144 million children suffering from stunting, 47 million wasted and 14.3 million severely wasted.



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