

# Leveraging Social and Behavior Change (SBC) Approaches for Stronger Health Systems: A Review of 12 Case Competition Entries

## Authors and Affiliations

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

In 2023, the USAID Health Systems Strengthening Accelerator held its second Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) case competition, showcasing initiatives and their impact on health systems and outcomes. Participants submitted posters focusing on themes central to the 2030 USAID Vision for HSS and the Learning Agenda; equity, locally led development (LLD), or social and behavior change (SBC). The competition received 102 entries including 43 entries in relation to equity, 47 in relation to LLD, and 12 in relation to SBC. A review on the 12 case entries relating to SBC revealed key themes and insights essential for incorporating SBC into HSS; 1) training and capacity building, 2) community engagement, 3) strategic communication, and 4) collaborations. The brief highlights the challenges of integrating SBC into HSS and provides recommendations its successful integration into HSS initiatives strengthening.

### SBC Questions

- What types of social and behavioral (SBC) changes or outcomes are commonly sought within health systems strengthening (HSS) projects or interventions?
- How are SBC methods useful in creating behavior or norm change among government, private sector, and community health system actors?
- What are lessons learned regarding explicitly incorporating SBC approaches within HSS programs?

## KEY INSIGHTS

Integrating SBC into HSS is a challenge that requires careful consideration to create cohesive strategies that address both behavioral and systemic issues simultaneously:

- An SBC outcome effects change in individuals' behavior and results in changes in how the system operates.
- An SBC approach targets people who play a role in the supply-side dynamics of how the health system operates.
- Effective SBC approaches, outcomes and target populations consider multiple health needs rather than only a disease-specific intervention.

POSSIBLE QR CODE

## THEMES ACROSS THE CASE ENTRIES

**Training and capacity building:** Training and capacity building are foundational to the success of SBC initiatives; they equip key stakeholders with the necessary skills to effectively implement SBC strategies, monitor outcomes, adapt strategies to changing circumstances, and integrate new health interventions.

**Community Engagement:** Building and trust and relationships with community members are strong pathways to improve community ownership of health issues. Engaging communities in the implementation of projects ensures that community members are actively involved in decision-making processes and interventions are better able to address their needs, beliefs, and preferences, leading to increased acceptability.

**Social and Behavior change communication:** Strategies utilized to combat discriminatory and prejudiced behavior include using different channels, developing platforms that target the intended population group and tailoring messaging to community needs. These approaches ensured that the information was accessible to individuals with diverse backgrounds, promoting the importance of digital health communication in SBC health outcomes.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration, especially with civil society organizations (CSOs), governmental agencies, implementing partners and the community, emerged as a critical to the success of SBC, illustrating the need to foster multi-sectoral partnerships and leverage diverse expertise that amplify the impact of initiatives aimed at improving health outcomes.

## LOCALIZATION SUCCESS STORY

USAID has increasingly prioritized empowering local actors to set their own agendas, develop solutions, and bring the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality. This priority and push for locally led development (LLD) is integral to SBC interventions and increasing opportunities for success.

**The Eat Better South Africa program** was created by a South African organization to help improve health outcomes in rural communities across South Africa. Using advocacy and awareness campaigns, a community coaches' program, and one-day intervention workshops, they empowered individuals in marginalized communities to make informed choices about their health and created an environment where community members can learn and change together. The organization bridged the gap between nutrition education and communities in underserved areas, thereby facilitating long term behavior change and improved health outcomes.

## IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

To combat this challenge and bring about change effectively and in sustainable ways, the integration of SBC approaches should consider the following:

- **Build trust with the community:** Building trust with the community helps engage honesty through inclusive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving approaches, creating a sense of ownership and accountability. LLD is effective at building trust with the community because it prioritizes engagement and empowerment of community members in the design and decision-making process of interventions, a vital component of behavior change.
- **Tailor messaging and diversify communication strategies:** Tailor SBC approaches to the specific situation and needs of the target population by focusing on understanding cultural norms, beliefs, and communication preferences. Diversify communication channels to include social media, online messaging platforms, and community-based events, to ensure greater reach and accessibility
- **Combat misconceptions with training of "local champions":** "Local champions," individuals or groups who hold influence and credibility within the community, can mobilize community members and encourage change. It is imperative that local champions be trained to effectively engage and counsel individuals as they often facilitate the acceptance, uptake, and sustainability of interventions.