

SUCCESS STORY

Program intervention fights malnutrition through locally available foods



Hilda and her boy, Bright.

“Look at him now, he is happy and charming in perfect health, I will always be grateful for what I learned in the Hearth session.”

Photo: IMA World Health

Bright is a 13-month-old boy from Buhigwe Village with an infectious smile. Yet underneath it lies a cleft palate that makes it difficult for him to nurse. His mother, Hilda Robert, breastfed Bright with difficulties for two months until her mother in law told her to stop.

The elder mother believed Hilda’s breast was dirty and could not produce enough milk to suffice for Bright’s need.

Hilda introduced porridge to Bright at 3 months of age, and that’s when his weight started to deteriorate slowly. By 6 months, he had become severely malnourished when community health worker Laurent Ngonga came across Bright and his mother.

Ngonga referred Bright to Heri Mission Hospital for immediate help, yet there were no therapeutic foods to treat him. Instead, the family turned to ASTUTE’s Positive Deviance/Hearth program, which uses only locally available food to treat malnourished children. Bright was enrolled in the program, where he joined 25 other children under 2 years of age who were severely malnourished.

During hearth sessions, each mother or other caregiver brings food and cooking utensils from their own homes. A health worker guides the group in cooking practices and recipes that can restore their children to health.

Hilda brought eggs, sweet potatoes and amaranths to the hearth. Ngonga showed mothers how to prepare a nutritious meal while relaying information on feeding practices, hygiene, child development and other healthy practices for the children. Hilda

Tanzania



and other mothers learned how to prepare an enriched meal in their own homes.

The sessions worked. Bright gained 300gm in just 12 days of hearth sessions. Ngonga continued to conduct follow-up visits to Hilda's home, where he reinforced what Hilda learned to her husband and mother in law.

"I have learned how to prepare and feed my child using different varieties of the locally available food," Hilda said.

By the end of 30 days, Bright had attained a normal weight for age and he was much more active. "Look at him now, he is happy and charming in perfect health," Hilda said. "I will always be grateful for what I learned in the hearth session."

In partnership with the Government of Tanzania, ASTUTE has implemented hearth sessions across five Lake Zone regions. The program has been shown to decrease levels of malnutrition in children under age 5 with up to 85 percent gaining sufficient weight after 12 to 30 days.

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