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To cite this article: Nedra Kline Weinreich & Mustafa Basij Rasikh (11 Dec 2024): Integrating supply and demand in social marketing programs: the *Nosh-e-Jaan* campaign to promote nutrition in Afghanistan, Health Marketing Quarterly, DOI: [10.1080/07359683.2024.2419168](https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2024.2419168)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2024.2419168>



Published online: 11 Dec 2024.



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Integrating supply and demand in social marketing programs: the *Nosh-e-Jaan* campaign to promote nutrition in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

This case study describes a successful nutrition social marketing program in Afghanistan. By building up the domestic soy industry and supply chain, while creating consumer demand for high-protein soy products to combat malnutrition, the *Nosh-e-Jaan* campaign rebalanced the market dynamics for this relatively unknown locally grown crop. The campaign included technical assistance to the soy industry and retailers, a consumer media campaign, and community outreach via influencers, government agencies, and events. Outcomes included increases in awareness of soy, purchase of soy products, and knowledge about protein. This project provides critical lessons for those planning social marketing programs in similar settings.

KEYWORDS

Social marketing campaign; Afghanistan; nutrition; supply; demand; soy; public health

Introduction

Numerous factors have presented complex challenges to health promotion efforts in Afghanistan, including decades of conflict, economic factors, diverse remote populations, and lack of access to reliable and robust data (Hill and Sinclair, 2010). Social marketing is an effective behavior change-focused approach often used to address health and social disparities throughout the world (Firestone et al., 2017). However, in Afghanistan it has only been used in a limited way for issues such as bed nets for malaria (Rowland et al., 2004), use of family planning (Pollard & Davies, 2008; Shabanikiya et al., 2023), safe water systems and oral rehydration therapy (Karki, 2018).

In resource-poor contexts like Afghanistan, particularly when promoting a physical product, social marketing programs often must build demand while at the same time ensuring that sufficient supply will be available. A subset of social marketing is social franchising, in which private health care or health-related products are subsidized to make them affordable, then

marketed by governments or NGOs to generate consumer demand (Beyeler et al., 2013; Cumberland & Litalien, 2018). The Total Market Approach takes this a step further to ensure more sustainable and equitable access to and use of social marketing products and services in a commercially viable way (SHOPS Plus, 2024). This model of simultaneously addressing both supply and demand was applied in the social marketing program described in this case study.

Background

Despite significant gains made over decades, malnutrition and its associated negative health and societal effects continues to be a significant issue in Afghanistan. Almost half of the Afghan population faces acute levels of food insecurity and malnutrition (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Afghanistan, 2022). The Afghanistan Health Survey in 2018 found that the public health burden of malnutrition in Afghanistan was among the highest in the world (Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, 2018). The people of Afghanistan are vulnerable to multiple causes of malnutrition (Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda, 2018). These include: poverty, lack of education, childbearing during adolescence, gender inequality, inadequate infant and young child feeding and caring practices, low access to basic health services, lack of safe water, hygiene and sanitation, and food insecurity. In addition, economic consequences of malnutrition include health costs, lower aerobic capacity affecting physical work ability, and a reduction in economic productivity.

Recent nutrition surveys found that 22 out of 34 provinces in Afghanistan are above the emergency level threshold of acute malnutrition for children under the age of five, further aggravated by drought (UNICEF, 2020). In 2023, approximately 2.3 million Afghan children experienced moderate acute malnutrition, while an additional 875,000 children suffered from severe acute malnutrition (OCHA, 2023). An additional 840,000 pregnant or lactating Afghan women were acutely malnourished. Only 22 percent of children ages 6 to 23 months receive an adequate diversity of food each day.

Starting in the early 2000s, a number of organizations, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and an NGO called Nutrition & Education International (NEI) introduced soybean cultivation in Afghanistan as a method of encouraging alternative crops to eradicate opium poppy cultivation as well as providing support to smallholder farmers and the food system. The additional benefit of this initiative is that

soybeans are a complete protein, containing all nine essential amino acids and a good source of iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins, as well as a healthy and inexpensive alternative to animal protein.

Despite the fact that soy was not a native crop in Afghanistan nor one that people were familiar with, NEI played a crucial role in advocating for its promotion. Over the next ten years, NEI led the development of commercial soybean production, using imported seeds and training farmers in cultivation and harvesting. Soy processing facilities were established around the country to process soy milk and soy flour. This was supported by the Republic of Korea to improve well-being and address food insecurity through enhanced agricultural productivity, with funding for soybean promotion and asset creation toward increasing food security (World Food Programme, 2014). Over time, multiple donor agencies and the Afghan government supported soybean cultivation and utilization as a means of creating a new self-sustaining industry for farmers and food processors.

However, the sector did not generate sufficient consumer demand. Afghans were still eating very little local soy, and had not integrated it into their diets. The sector became reliant on artificial price setting, paying farmers high prices for their crops while subsidizing the use of soy for animal feed and institutional buyers. This created dynamics that threatened the soy industry's market viability.

The social marketing approach

With the ultimate goal of reducing malnutrition, this program turned to social marketing as the most appropriate method to reset the existing market ecosystem in a more long-term sustainable way. This required spurring consumer demand for soy products as part of a healthy diet, as well as bolstering the supply side to ensure that consumers would be able to obtain these products.

According to the Consensus Definition, social marketing is an approach that seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behavior that benefits individuals and communities for the greater social good (International Social Marketing Association, 2017). Built upon a foundation of audience research and theory that originally derives from the commercial marketing field, the approach is especially applicable to working across both the public health realm and the industry marketing sector.

A social marketing strategy adapts the commercial marketing mix approach of the “4 Ps,” which have been extended to “8 Ps” to take into

account the more complex needs of a behavior change-oriented project (Weinreich, 2011). These elements include:

- Product – what you are offering the audience, in the form of a behavior and its benefits
- Price – what the audience has to “pay” or give up in order to adopt the product, which may be monetary but more often intangibles like time, hassle, or psychological barriers
- Place – the times and places the audience is open to receiving messages about the product or making decisions about engaging in the behavior
- Promotion – the methods to be used to convey messages about the product or enable its use
- Publics – the key stakeholders, both internal and external, whose participation and buy-in are key to success
- Partnerships – other organizations and influencers who are able to reach the audience or have specific resources to assist with development and implementation of the program
- Policy – consideration of public or organizational policies that can help to create a supportive environment for behavior change
- Purse Strings – the source(s) of funding for the development and implementation of the program

Each element of the social marketing mix is developed based on the research conducted as part of the initial analysis, as well as direct research with the priority audience.

Formative research

Formative research started with a market analysis to understand the current environment in which the soy industry was operating, from the soy farmers to processors to distribution and sales. In addition, to gain insights into the potential consumer market, the project conducted a household survey in nine provinces that collected data on awareness and behaviors related to soy products, as well as nutrition and dietary habits.

Analysis of the soy market

In 2019, the project funder, a UN agency, with support from The Republic of Korea, commissioned a management consulting firm based in Kabul to determine why, despite all the investment in the soybean industry, Afghans still were consuming very little local soy. To this end, the firm conducted

research with the supply side of the soy market—the soy producers—as well as with the demand side—Afghan consumers.

The team visited all of the nine soybean processing facilities in the country that had been established over the years, each in a different province, to interview the owners, managers, local farmers and other stakeholders. The objective of the site visits was to form a composite understanding of the soybean value chain in Afghanistan. These visits consisted of a tour of the facility by the owner, as well as a detailed sit-down discussion with farmers, the heads of the soybean unions, and the technical person(s) running the facility.⁽¹⁾

They found that most of the processing facilities were either inactive or running at minimum production capacity. Only three of the nine continued to be active, in Parwan, Kapisa and Takhar. What had happened to the vision of a self-sustaining private soybean industry?

Almost all soy producers stated that they did not have prior knowledge about soy or experience working in this sector until they were approached by NEI. This unfamiliarity with the sector led international NGOs working to foster growth to provide incentive packages to farmers and processors to promote soy cultivation and to encourage investors. These incentives included artificial and arbitrary price setting, as well as a promise to purchase a certain amount of the produce of the processors, interfering with natural market dynamics.

The soybeans that were grown ended up going either to institutional purchasers or were used as animal feed, not sold to consumers. This led to a cycle of dependency on the NGOs, which made the industry unsustainable. When NEI stopped intervening in the market, soy product sales ceased almost entirely. The artificially high price that the processors had received, along with heavy subsidies to encourage commercial purchases, led to an artificially low price that buyers had gotten used to and market distortion. With a reliance on institutional buyers, no sustainable consumer pool was cultivated. All of the individuals interviewed also cited lack of consumer awareness of soy and lack of market demand as the main reasons for stagnation.

Another problem was that the processors did not see a reason to invest in upgrading their facilities to be able to improve their products, since there was little consumer demand. For example, one processor was producing tofu but did not have the necessary preservative to keep them from perishing after two days. Their products had to be delivered and consumed immediately. Another processor produced a large quantity of product without having a customer base, leading to an inability to sell in the local market due to a lack of market understanding and customer preferences. The owner, unwilling to resume operations or invest in infrastructure

improvements such as a food lab without additional grant funding, demonstrated an unhealthy reliance on grant assistance, which is not conducive to the success and sustainability of a private sector company.

One of the other key challenges identified was the lack of an established distribution network for most of the processors. This meant that the soy products they made were not available in the retail markets for consumers to buy. In addition, most did not have marketing strategies for their businesses.

Consumer analysis

The company conducted a household survey of adults across the nine provinces that had processing facilities, to better understand the consumer factors that impact demand for soy products. This involved a research team visiting randomly selected households to conduct the surveys and collect the results in person. Across the nine provinces, they spoke with more than 3,400 respondents.⁽²⁾

The key findings on the consumer side matched the industry perceptions. Soy was not a familiar food—only 19 percent of the survey respondents had ever heard of it. Of those who did know about soy, 69 percent had cooked it at home, so those who knew of it were also more likely to eat it.

The most common soy product purchased was “soy meat” (texturized vegetable protein or VGP) (31%). This is a product imported from Iran, and is most popular in the provinces of Herat, which is right on the border, and Kapisa, which has a large number of returnees from Iran. Soybeans (24%) and soy flour (22%) were the next most common soy products purchased.

Of those who knew about soy but did not cook it at home, the most common reason was lack of accessibility (37%). Some misconceptions came up as well, including one related to the fact that the Pashto word for “soy” sounds similar to the word for an animal that is not eaten as part of their diet. They also didn’t know that soy was a locally grown food. In addition, the survey found that only about a third (33%) of the respondents reported having any knowledge about protein, which is the main nutritional benefit of soy.

Based on the results of the market assessment, the contractor recommended a social marketing intervention that would both advance the development of all elements of the soy industry to assure retail availability of soy products and a campaign to stimulate consumer demand to buy those products. The funder agreed to move forward with a pilot campaign in three provinces.

Audience advisory group

Because of the timing of the campaign development at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, in-person formative research was limited. The project worked with an advisory group of women from the primary audience to help with campaign development and review. They participated in focus groups and provided input on the campaign.

Campaign development

The pilot campaign was to be carried out in the provinces with the most active soy processing facilities—Kapisa and Parwan—plus the capital province of Kabul. These provinces are geographically contiguous and have a mix of urban and rural districts.

Priority audiences

Persuading the owners of the soy processing facilities in Kapisa and Parwan to participate in the program was key to overall success. Luckily, they were excited about the opportunity to work with the project to explore commercial opportunities and improve their business operations. They also had the capacity and stock to provide product to the market with the campaign rollout.

In addition to the soy processors, the other priority audience on the industry side was the retailers. These owners and managers of retail stores throughout the provinces were the decisionmakers regarding whether to stock the soy products, so the campaign had to persuade them to participate to build the supply for consumers to purchase.

On the consumer side, the selection of the campaign's audience was guided by the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda data (2018). The people most affected by malnutrition, and therefore the target groups for the intervention, were: children under 5 years, women of child-bearing age, pregnant and lactating women, adolescents (12-18 years), and low-literacy audiences, especially women.

In order to best reach all of these groups, the campaign focused on the primary consumer audience of low- to middle-income married women, especially mothers of young children. These women are usually the decisionmakers about the foods to be purchased and served to their family, which influences not only their own nutrition, but that of their children, spouse, extended family and guests as well. By influencing the food preparation decisions of the woman of the household, the ripple effects can be wide-ranging.

A secondary audience was the male head of household. Though the man is not generally the one doing the food preparation, the social custom is that he is the primary purchaser for the family, going to the market to buy the food that the women request and will later prepare. While the

campaign may be successful in raising the interest of women to give soy a try, if the men were not convinced that it's worthwhile, they likely would not purchase the unfamiliar soy products.

The majority of married women are homemakers by occupation, especially in the rural areas. But in the urban cities like Kabul, many working women were also mothers. This was a segment of women who were literate and who used social media. The urban and rural populations differed in terms of how they could be reached with the campaign and needed different outreach strategies.

The secondary audiences for the campaign were those who could influence both the female and male audiences. They included Mullahs (the religious leaders in the mosques), doctors and health officials, community elders, teachers, social activists, and people working in the public sector. Because of the strong religious orientation of the priority audiences, involving the Mullahs in conveying key campaign messages that eating healthy food aligned with Islamic values, was an important part of the strategy (Hasan, 2019).

Goals

The campaign's consumer-side goals balanced the directive of the donors with the needs of the priority audiences. The donors were specifically interested in promoting soy products and increasing consumption of soy from a commercial point of view. The overall project goal was to increase the percentage of consumers reporting purchase of soy products by 35 percent. However, in order to achieve that goal in a healthy way, a key objective was increasing knowledge about protein and how it fits into a balanced diet.

The supply-side goal was to increase availability of soy products in retail stores in the three target provinces by 10 percent, with at least 100 stores participating.

Theoretical framework

The strategic approach taken by the project was theoretically guided by the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011), and informed by the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003).

Use of the COM-B model focused on the consumer side, and states that in order to increase the chances of a behavior occurring, such as purchasing soy products, someone must have:

- Capability – psychological or physical capability to take action, such as being aware that soy exists, knowing where to buy it, and how to prepare it

- Opportunity – external physical or social factors, such as having a store nearby that sells soy products, having one’s husband support the request to buy soy at the store, and believing that others like you use soy products
- Motivation – internal processes like the belief that eating healthy food is important, being excited to try a new food, and expecting that the family will like it

The Diffusion of Innovations theory helped to guide the outreach to local stakeholders and influencers, as well as the commercial distributors. This model describes how new innovations—or products—spread through a specific population over time. Certain characteristics of the product make it more likely to spread quickly:

- Compatibility with existing values and patterns of behavior – e.g., believing that eating healthy food is important and that soy fits within their diet
- Ability to try it out before buying it – e.g., offering free tastes of items prepared with soy products
- Advantage over the alternatives – e.g., learning about the importance of protein
- Noticeable usage and benefits – e.g., seeing others eating soy products and enjoying them
- Ease of use – e.g., getting recipe cards that show exactly how much soy flour to swap

The role of opinion leaders, whose advice your audience respects, is a key element in encouraging adoption of the innovation. The project’s secondary audience—Mullahs, doctors, and other community leaders—played this role. By helping them become early adopters of soy products in the context of a healthy diet, they then would be more influential.

Social marketing strategy

The project strategy was built based on the “8 Ps” social marketing mix framework described earlier that ensures that all elements necessary for campaign success are considered. Each of the “Ps” is described here:

Product

The physical product the campaign promoted was soy flour, the soy product most immediately available from the processors, which could be used to make traditional dishes to introduce soy to the consumers. The behavioral product was the act of deliberately choosing healthy foods to put on their family table, which the survey research had shown motivated this



Figure 1. The Nosh-e-Jaan campaign logo

audience's decision making. The brand was named *Nosh-e-Jaan*, which is a commonly used expression used across the majority of languages and communities in Afghanistan (see [Figure 1](#)). People say it before the start of a meal to wish each other a healthy appetite, and at the end of a meal to wish good health resulting from the food they have eaten. It has connotations of goodwill and hospitality, and the brand stood for good health coming from locally produced food. The brand was used for the umbrella campaign related to eating a healthy diet, as well as the specific soy products being distributed, and was intended to be used and expanded over the years to include other healthy foods and nutrition campaigns.

Price

The considerations for price involve identifying how to lower the monetary, psychological and social costs of adopting the product, to remove barriers and make it as easy as possible. This included enhancing the supply chain to make soy products accessible for purchase, and initial pricing was

lower—and sometimes even free—to encourage people to try the product. To help people get more familiar with soy, messaging emphasized that it's grown locally and provided tips for how they could incorporate it into their cooking. The project also offered opportunities to taste soy flour for themselves in favorite dishes.

Place

To reach the audience in the times and places where they were most able to take action, the project built a functioning distribution system to place the soy products in neighborhood retail stores where the audience could buy them (see [Figure 2](#)). The campaign also identified some of the media and physical locations where the audience could be reached—television and social media (urban areas), radio (rural areas), community locales, mosques, schools and health care providers.

Promotion

The promotional methods included a mix of media and in-person events, tailored to the needs and habits of the audiences. For example, two television ads were created in each of the two main languages of the pilot provinces, Dari and Pashto. These ads aired in the evening, when families often watch television together. To reach those in the more rural areas, who often do not have televisions, the campaign created four radio ads that aired broadly. Billboards were used in urban areas as a teaser campaign to get people thinking about what they eat. Public relations efforts included television morning shows, which were popular among women. Community mobilization events focused on rural areas that were not as easily reached



Figure 2. Retail product packaging for Nosh-e-Jaan soy flour

by media. The project also created a children's book distributed through schools for children and parents to read together so both would learn about nutrition.

Publics

The stakeholders who could make or break the success of the project included two major organizations. One was the funder, along with the country donor for this campaign, The Republic of Korea. They were most interested in focusing on soy as a commercial product, rather than creating a more general nutrition campaign. This orientation was intended to help reduce the soy industry's dependency on institutional buyers, and create a sustainable market of commercial customers for long-term food security. The other key stakeholder was the Ministry of Public Health, whose buy-in the project needed to get access to audiences across the country via the health system and the health care providers that the audience trusted. They were not interested in partnering on a commercial campaign promoting soy, and would only do so on a broader nutrition campaign. The other groups that had to be considered were those in the supply chain—the soy farmers, processors and retailers—to ensure they would participate and continue over time.

Partnerships

Based on those identified in the research as influencers of the consumer priority audiences, the project had a team of social mobilizers who traveled to localities throughout the three provinces to secure endorsements and participation from local community leaders. These included Mullahs at the grand mosques in each locality, who received content for Friday sermons on the topic of the importance of wellness and nutrition; doctors and local health officials, who helped distribute campaign materials; and teachers, who received resources on nutrition and distributed the children's book. By framing the campaign as a social cause, emphasizing the value to the community of supporting local smallholder farmers, linking healthy food to children's health, and promoting smart purchasing decisions, local leaders and influencers were more willing to participate.

Policy

With an eye to ultimately institutionalizing the campaign across the country, the project reached out to officials at all levels of government and across different ministries to get their buy-in and help support the campaign through their offices. The credibility from the involvement of the Ministry of Public Health persuaded provincial and local governments in

the pilot region to participate in the launch and regional events as well. According to the Ministry, this was the first national campaign to focus on healthy diets.

Purse strings

Ultimately, this pilot project needed to be successful in order to secure more funds from the donor to expand to additional provinces, and have a full national campaign. This meant that demonstrating growth in the consumer market for soy was the priority for evaluation.

Campaign implementation

Campaign implementation included several streams of outreach and activities.

Stakeholder buy-in

To achieve the goal of promoting a healthy diet, the project worked closely with the Ministry of Public Health to secure its endorsement for the umbrella nutrition campaign. Messaging and outreach promoted balanced eating habits, particularly among pregnant women, and focused on educating people about all types of nutritious food, including how to prepare them and the specific nutrients they contain. While soy was included in the messaging, the primary focus was on teaching people about the importance of a balanced diet and the various sources of protein and other nutrients.

Production support

The project worked closely with the owners and management of the two soy processing facilities in the pilot region to identify their needs to enable production and distribution in the three provinces. The processing facilities did not have commercial plans or distribution networks in place. The project worked with them to create them from scratch, from designing the branding and packaging all the way to creating the distribution network to bring the products to the retailers' shelves.

Distribution

The mobile marketing team traveled throughout the region visiting retailers in each district. They conducted a shelf audit of 2,100 stores to check the availability and variety of soy products currently offered, to interview store owners and managers on how best to market and distribute the products,

and to drive orders for soy flour. Almost half of the retailers (48.2%) already sold some kind of soy product in their stores, with 96 percent of those products being imported soy meat; less than one percent sold soy flour. About 40 percent were interested in receiving the *Nosh-e-Jaan* distributed soy flour to sell. Many received samples to try, along with point of purchase materials with recipes and guidance on how to make protein-fortified bread with soy flour. As part of this initial outreach, the mobile marketing team also worked with bakeries to encourage them to add a new line of healthier cookies and cakes made using soy flour. In the first round of product promotion and placement, the team distributed more than 1,500 kilograms of soy flour across 231 stores.

In addition to in-store sales, the project created an online sales system for the campaign's social media followers and others who were not able to find a local store that sold soy flour. The project also worked with organizations that provided winter food ration packages to vulnerable families to include soy flour and recipes. With all of these distribution activities, for the first time, soy flour was made available in retail stores across the provinces. Overall, the pilot project distributed 3.7 tons of soy flour.

Media outreach

Before campaign launch, the project seeded a series of billboards with questions like "What is healthy food?" and "What is energy?" as a teaser campaign in the most well-trafficked locations in the three provinces, as well as on social media, to get people to think about what they eat and to start talking about the topic prior to introducing campaign content. Other media included two television spots and four radio ads, highlighting the message of locally grown soy bringing health to those eating at your table. Public relations efforts resulted in the soy processing facility owners appearing on four different morning television shows, and coverage in news media.

The social media response was enthusiastic. In less than six months, the project built its social media followers on Facebook and Instagram to 21,000 people. Each post had a high engagement rate with many likes and comments. The posts asked questions, held contests, created cooking videos, provided tips on how to use soy and eat in a healthy way, shared video from events and TV appearances, and posted beautiful food imagery (see [Figure 3](#)). People could also order soy flour directly from the Facebook page.

Community mobilization

Community engagement events formed the cornerstone of project outreach activities throughout the three provinces and were a large part of the

نوش جان
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تا حالا کیک شیری سویا را نوش جان کرده اید؟
 ما برتان در این ویدیو طرز تهیه کیک شیری سویا را شرح دادیم. ویدیو را تماشا
 نموده و کیک شیری با مزه و مفید سویا را برای خانواده تان آماده کنید.

[#پروتین](#) [#رژیم](#) [#سبزیجات](#) [#مادر](#) [#غذای](#) [#پروتینی](#) [#صحت](#) [#سویا](#) [#سلامتی](#)
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Have you ever tried soy milk cake?

In this video we explained to you how to make soy milk cake.
 Watch the video and prepare tasty and useful soy milk cake for
 your family.

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Figure 3. Sample Facebook post

campaign's success in this phase. The project worked with the governors, provincial directorates of public health, agriculture, women's affairs and others to get buy-in from local officials that gave credibility to the events.

The Soy Festival was held on World Food Day prior to the official campaign launch. It promoted locally grown soy products in Kapisa and Parwan, and highlighted the important role of the farmers. Many

government officials attended, with guest speakers talking about the health benefits of soy. The program included sampling foods made from soy, along with a traditional celebratory dance called the Farmer's Dance. More than 400 people attended.

The *Nosh-e-Jaan* official campaign launch event was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health. This event welcomed many governmental dignitaries and stakeholders to participate in the campaign, and focused generally on helping Afghans eat healthier for a better life. Similar events sponsored by various governmental offices were held throughout the provinces.

Another campaign event focused on getting the Mullahs in each province excited about soy and nutrition so they would participate in the campaign. The project celebrated the holiday of Mawlid an-Nabi (the birth of Mohammad) by baking and distributing soy kulcha (cookies) and a popular confection called halwa, made with a modified recipe including fortified soy flour, at mosques around the provinces. This gave numerous Mullahs and imams, as well as 1,700 attending prayers at the mosque, the chance to taste soy products for themselves. This also offered an opportunity to demonstrate to the community that the nutritional value of traditional flour-based dishes can be boosted by adding soy flour while still tasting good.

Finally, to reach the adult audience through their children, the project worked with schools to provide educational content, including distributing the children's book created by the project. The story focused on a nightingale that helps a young girl learn about the importance of nutrition. When the child and parent read it together, they would both learn and talk about the food they eat.

Results

To follow up on the initial pre-campaign survey, a randomized household door-to-door survey was conducted in the three target provinces using the same methodology. The total number of completed responses collected were 1,236, which were then compared to the 1,152 responses that had been collected in the three provinces in the baseline survey.

The project assessed exposure to the *Nosh-e-Jaan* campaign by asking whether the respondents had seen any ads or heard anyone talking about soy in the past two months. This campaign was likely the only one talking about that topic. Overall, 40.7 percent reported exposure. Of those who said they had been exposed, 75.1 percent recalled correctly that the name of the campaign was *Nosh-e-Jaan* (from a list of four options).

Overall, the television ads were the most frequent source of exposure, with 66.8 percent of those exposed having seen them. The next most

common were the community mobilization events (30.0%) and word of mouth via family and friends (28.8%). Almost a quarter (23.7%) had heard about soy at the mosque.

Women were more likely to have been exposed to the campaign via television ads (15.6% of women vs 12.6% of men, $p=.03$) and word of mouth (11.5% of women vs 1.0% of men, $p<.001$). Men were more likely to have been exposed via community events (6.6% of men vs 3.9% of women, $p<.001$) and social media (2.9% of men vs 0.8% of women, $p<.001$).

Awareness of soy increased by 160 percent (from 24.6% pre-survey to 64.0% post-survey, $p<.001$) (see Figure 4). Self-reported purchases of soy products increased by more than 300 percent (from 12.8% pre-survey to 51.4% post-survey, $p<.001$) (see Figure 5). Knowledge about protein also increased by 43 percent (from 38.0% pre-survey to 54.5% post-survey, $p<.001$). And people who were exposed to the *Nosh-e-Jaan* campaign were three times more likely to have used soy flour than those who were not exposed (41.6% exposed versus 12.8% unexposed, $p<.001$). For almost all of the survey questions, those who were exposed to the campaign far exceeded those who were not in positive levels of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

The campaign concluded after achieving success during the pilot phase, which was designed to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of the intervention for ensuring the soy market's sustainability at a national level. Unfortunately, while the project was waiting for approval to move forward with the next phase of the campaign and expand to additional provinces, Afghanistan underwent a political and social upheaval. The Taliban forces moved through the country, capturing key cities until they reached Kabul, where the project staff was based. The key staff evacuated the country, and

Have you heard of soy? Pre-campaign vs Post-campaign

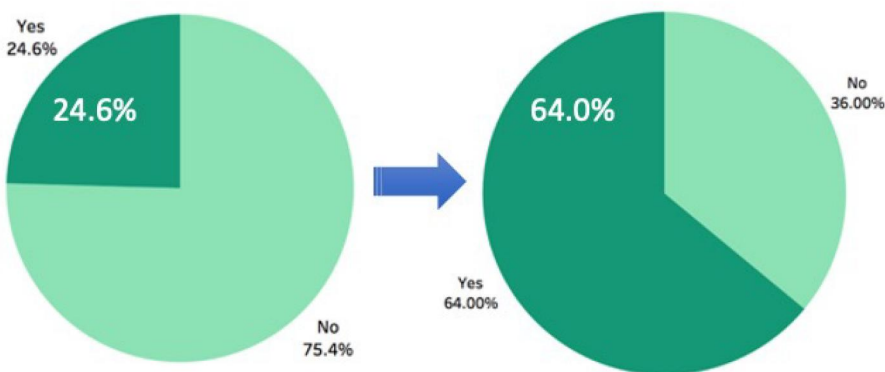


Figure 4. Awareness of Soy, Pre and Post Campaign

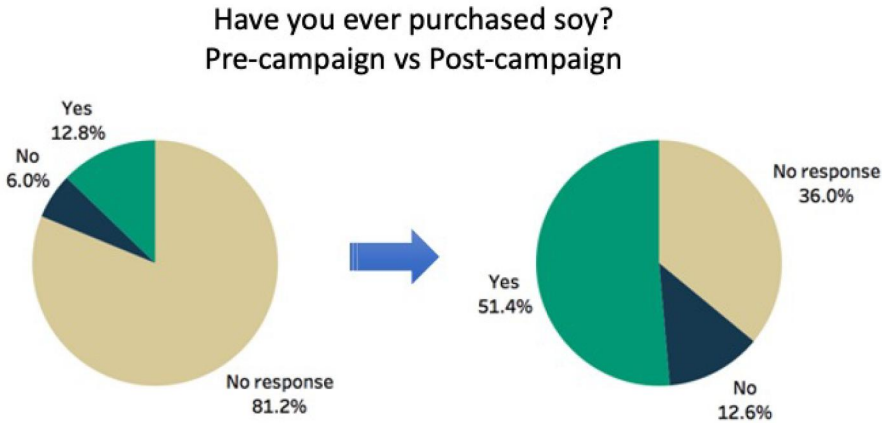


Figure 5. Purchase of Soy, Pre and Post Campaign

the progress that the project made was likely lost. The future of the soy industry in Afghanistan is uncertain.

Discussion

This case study contributes not only to the field of health marketing, but also to the broader discourse on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach to coordinating crisis response efforts in challenging settings (World Health Organization, 2021). The *Nosh-e-Jaan* program provides actionable lessons supported by evidence for practitioners and their implementing partners involved in health education and behavior change initiatives.

While the project ended before it could expand to additional provinces, the evaluation of the pilot implementation provides several lessons for similar future projects.

Key factors for success

Defining the campaign as a social cause rather than simply promoting the purchase of soy was a crucial decision that resulted in a more collaborative effort. This clarity not only helped recruit authoritative figures in the community, but also made the messages more effective. For instance, the project leveraged the influence of teachers in town halls and small community gatherings at the village level, further amplified by the support of the Mullahs. The Mullahs, during their Friday sermons, emphasized the importance of nutrition and supporting local farmers, a message that resonated deeply with the community.

Parallel to these efforts, the project organized community events in which health directors and other provincial officials discussed the critical

importance of nutrition during pregnancy, focusing on protein and the sources of this nutrient. The Mullahs and teachers are highly esteemed in Afghan society, and their endorsements are taken seriously by community members. This respect, combined with the targeted health messages from medical professionals, significantly enhanced the campaign's success.

Each event included educational content and also provided opportunities for the community to taste the product. A key strategy was the integration of soy into products already familiar and regularly included in people's diets. This approach ensured that introducing something unfamiliar, like soy, does not make it seem more alien to the community. For instance, the project provided guidance on how to use soy flour to fortify commonly eaten foods, such as bread or other flour-based products.

Departing from traditional methods of developing content in English before translation, the campaign prioritized initial creation of all video content in Dari and Pashto, ensuring culturally resonant and linguistically tailored messages from the outset to engage audiences and foster behavioral change. This approach integrated cultural insights, colloquial expressions, and context-specific references from the start, promoting understanding and emotional resonance while mitigating translation pitfalls. Direct content creation in Dari and Pashto enhanced communication effectiveness, enabling precise messaging critical in health education, where trust is paramount. Finalized content in Dari and Pashto was translated into English for client review, maintaining message integrity through skilled translators familiar with the subject matter.

Working in a setting like Afghanistan, where access to structured and robust data is limited, poses significant challenges for making informed decisions and crafting data-driven interventions. The baseline data collected for this campaign played a crucial role by furnishing vital insights, enabling the team to devise a targeted strategy with a higher likelihood of success. Originally designed to raise awareness about soy, the campaign shifted its focus to broader nutrition issues upon discovering a greater need for primary health education among the audience. Starting with messages that merely promoted soy consumption would not have sparked the necessary behavioral change, highlighting the importance of flexibility and responsiveness in campaign strategies.

This change in scope was largely possible because the client was committed to achieving results, providing the necessary support to the team. The pilot was successful primarily because the client prioritized outcomes over strict adherence to the initial scope and terms, demonstrating a solution-driven approach. Traditionally, there has been a strong emphasis on the top-down approach in humanitarian and development sectors, with donors dictating exactly how tasks should be carried out. However, this case

demonstrates with concrete evidence that a flexible, hybrid approach, in which the implementing partners are empowered to adjust the scope of assignments based on new insights and their familiarity with the context not only produces better and more measurable results but also ensures greater value for money.

Project challenges

The decision to promote soy as the primary product for the campaign underscores a broader challenge in development or humanitarian projects. Introducing a new food that is unfamiliar within the Afghan dietary context and not native to the local setting, adds complexity to the goal, even with substantial investment. This is why the processing facilities struggled to sell their soy products before the campaign started. Alternatively, the project could have adopted local solutions that require fewer resources and education, such as mung beans, which are already popular and a regular part of the Afghan diet.

The campaign's audience segmentation could have been further fine-tuned. Campaign exposure was more likely among middle to high income households. However, people in the lower socioeconomic levels are more likely to be the ones suffering from malnutrition and may be more in need of the benefits of soy than those who can afford a more varied diet. In addition, though the campaign's primary target audience was female caregivers, it also reached nearly the same proportion of men. Nevertheless, the campaign was very successful, confirming that men, who are often the actual purchasers, are a critical audience to engage.

On the distribution side, the project's mobile marketing team received many purchase orders from retailers for soy flour, but many of them later decided not to buy the product. While an online ordering system was put into place for consumers who could not find the flour in local stores in the meantime, more work needed to be done to onboard local retailers and get them excited about the new product in addition to the free samples. More than half of those who did place initial orders ended up reordering, so testimonials from the satisfied merchants in a marketing campaign to their peers could have been a useful approach.

Health marketing implications

The success of this pilot project has important implications for health and social marketers, and offers several lessons for others conducting social marketing projects in similar contexts (see [Figure 6](#) for summary).

1. Embed the program into the local context.
2. Develop the program with appropriate theory.
3. Create a memorable brand.
4. Build the program with the broader needs of the priority groups in mind.
5. Consider and plan for contingencies.

Figure 6. Tips for Creating a Sustainable Social Marketing Program

Embed the program into the local context

Social marketing is much more than just building demand for a product. Examine the full market ecosystem and how to get the product to the desired consumers. This may require that you create the supply as well. Work with intermediaries to more effectively reach your audience in a culturally appropriate way and build a durable infrastructure to sustain the change.

Develop the program with appropriate theory

For example, the COM-B model helped design the key behavior change levers to be used, and Diffusion of Innovation theory identified the need to include influencers and early adopters in the program. These influencers can be powerful in helping to increase uptake of the program. To do this, consider who plays an important role in your audience's lives and then work with these potential influencers to get them on board and on develop messages targeted at them. The Mullahs that the project worked with had a big impact on the people who heard them talking about nutrition and the value of soy.

Create a memorable brand

A good brand is gold. The *Nosh-e-Jaan* brand was designed with a broader purpose in mind than just to sell soy flour. The brand represented good health through food, and was intended to be used as an umbrella for many other nutrition-related campaigns and products in the long term. Its resonance with the audience came through in the large percentage of people who remembered it in the evaluation.

Build the program with the broader needs of the priority groups in mind

Do what you know is best for your audience, and advocate for their needs during campaign development. This project was an opportunity to initiate a broader conversation with the audience about nutrition and eating a balanced diet. Had the campaign been limited only to promoting soy, it would have been a lost opportunity for promoting public health.

Consider and plan for contingencies

Unexpected events that are outside of your control may happen at any time to turn everything upside down. Plan for sustainability of the program even after funding ends, through partnering with public institutions and community influencers.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ahmed Mengli, Founder and President of Chinar Media; Zelgai Hatif, Faisal Emran, Mujtaba Basij Rasikh, and the rest of the *Nosh-e-Jaan* team in the research and implementation of the project.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. A total of 65 key informant interviews included 9 soy processing facility owners, 9 farmers, 5 soy farmers association members and 42 community members, which includes local elders, bakers, shopkeepers and local residents.
2. For a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error, the survey included 384 respondents from each of the nine provinces, for a total of 3,456 respondents, 50 percent male and 50 percent female. The sampling strategy was stratified by province and district, using probability proportional to size. Within the clusters selected in each district, the starting households were randomly selected using code of the day random selection methodology. For example, on the n^{th} date, the data collection team at the particular village started with the n^{th} household and skipped every three or two households based on the size of the cluster. Local authorities and elders were contacted ahead of time to inform them and gain their consent and coordination for data collection.

Funding

This work was supported by the World Food Programme under Grant Number WFP/AFG/RFP/19/106. There are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

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