

## SAMAKI SALAMA: HELPING A GRANDMOTHER IN KENYA PROVIDE BETTER NUTRITION TO HER GRANDDAUGHTER

By Francis Mbogholi, Catherine Sarange, and Elizabeth Kamau

Medza is a 74-year-old woman who lives in a village called Keresha, approximately one kilometer away from the shores of the Indian Ocean near Mayungu, a fish landing site in Kenya. The ground in the village is rocky, and the residents typically earn income by crushing stones into small pebbles with stone hammers and selling them to builders or masons. Medza also crushes stones to earn a livelihood and is one of the participants in the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish activity called *Samaki Salama* (which means “fish security” in Kiswahili). Together, with her son who is also one of the fishermen involved with the activity, she takes care of her 4-year-old granddaughter named Mariam and cooks most of the family’s meals.



*The nutrition educator assistant visited with Medza and Mariam at their home. (Photo by Catherine Sarange, nutrition educator for Samaki Salama activity)*

The Samaki Salama activity worked with fishermen to issue modified basket traps for more sustainable fishing and with caregivers to educate them on the importance of increased fish consumption, child nutrition and hygiene, and dietary diversity. Medza actively participated in cooking demonstrations organized by the Samaki Salama team, and she received three home visits for further nutrition education.

Medza showed a deep curiosity to learn about nutrition. She was older than most of the other caregivers participating in the activity and noted that much of the information about increasing fish consumption and having a balanced diet was new to her.

During the first home visit by a Samaki Salama nutrition educator, it was evident that Medza needed additional education on child feeding, hygiene, and sanitation. Mariam had been having only three meals a day with mostly starchy foods and few vegetables and fruits, and Medza would not cook food using oil because, to her knowledge, oil was not good for people’s health, especially children. Instead, she preferred boiling the food, but she complained that the child did not like to eat much.

The nutrition educator, assisted by a community health volunteer to translate the messages to Medza, provided her with information including the importance of having a diverse diet for Mariam, how to shallow fry fish, and the nutrients in fish. They also added that it was good for her to use some oil while cooking food for the child instead of boiling because it makes food more appealing and, most importantly, the oil enhances the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins, which are vital for the child’s growth and development and also helps prevent infections. Medza was glad to hear that if her granddaughter ate fish, fruits, and had a diverse diet, she would stop falling sick so often.

## PROJECT TEAM

### Lead PI and U.S. PI

Lora Iannotti, PhD  
Washington University in St. Louis

### Kenya PI

Andrew Wamukota, PhD  
Pwani University

### Kenya Co-PI

Elizabeth Kamau-Mbuthia, PhD  
Egerton University

### U.S. Co-PI

Austin Humphries, PhD  
University of Rhode Island

Later, Medza attended the cooking demonstrations by the nutrition educators when they came to her village. Even though she needed some translation of the Swahili words to Giriama (the local dialect), she was enthusiastic about participating in the cooking demonstration activities. These activities included nutrition education on the nutrients in fish, food menu games which introduced the concept of different food varieties by using stars to indicate nutrients in food (the more the stars on the foods the more nutrients it contained), and cooking fish and indigenous vegetables (i.e., amaranth). The children were also given fruits such as bananas and oranges during the demonstrations. The nutrition educators observed Medza happily participating in the activities like washing children's hands, grating coconut, as well as partaking in the star food menu game.

"I am happy to have learned something new thanks to the hands-on experience during the cooking demonstration," Medza said. "I learned how to wash vegetables before shredding them and how to cook them for a few minutes to preserve the nutrients. Before, I would cook leafy vegetables like amaranth by boiling the leaves for a long time

until they turned brown, but now, I have changed my cooking technique after the cooking demonstration to cook the vegetables for only a few minutes to preserve nutrients and keep the green color."

Medza additionally increased the number of feeding times for Mariam from three to five and the food varieties as well.

"After Mariam has had a meal in the morning, at around 10 A.M., I give her some milk, so she can add more weight," she said. "Mariam is also eating more vegetables and beans. Sometimes, she even asks for more food, and I also make sure food is ready when Mariam comes home from school in the afternoon."

From the cooking demonstration, Medza said that she learned that oil is important in cooking meals for children, and she has started shallow frying fish and adds onions and tomatoes while frying to enhance the flavor. When she does not have fish, she boils beans and then stews them with onions and tomatoes. Medza mentioned that she reminds her son, a fisherman, to come home with not only fish but also fruits for Mariam since he is the one able to access the market.

"Whatever I was taught in the home visits and cooking demonstration, I try my best to do as I was instructed," Medza said. "I look forward to learning more."

*Note: Medza and Mariam are both pseudonyms out of respect for the participants' privacy.*

---

## ABOUT THE FISH INNOVATION LAB

The Fish Innovation Lab supports the United States Agency for International Development's agricultural research and capacity building work under Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative. Mississippi State University is the program's management entity. The University of Rhode Island, Texas State University, Washington University in St. Louis, and RTI International serve as management partners.

[www.feedthefuture.gov](http://www.feedthefuture.gov)  
[www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu](http://www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu)

*This story was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future initiative. The contents are the responsibility of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*