

Impact of a Nutrition Education and Cooking Demonstration Programme Utilising Local Food Biodiversity on Child Feeding Practices in Forest Communities of the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Intervention Study

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Abstract

Child malnutrition remains a significant public health challenge in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly in remote forest communities. These areas possess rich local food biodiversity, which is frequently underutilised in child feeding due to knowledge gaps. This study assessed the impact of a nutrition education and cooking demonstration programme, emphasising locally available biodiverse foods, on child feeding practices among caregivers in forest communities of the Congo Basin, DRC. An intervention study was conducted in selected villages. Caregivers of children aged 6-23 months were enrolled. The intervention comprised interactive group education sessions and practical cooking demonstrations using locally sourced foods. Knowledge, attitudes, and practices were assessed using a structured questionnaire administered before and after the intervention. Quantitative data were analysed to measure changes in key indicators. Post-intervention, there was a significant improvement in reported feeding practices. The proportion of caregivers who reported incorporating at least one additional locally available vitamin-A rich food into their child's diet in the preceding week increased from 32% to 78%. Qualitative feedback indicated increased caregiver confidence in preparing diverse meals using forest foods. A practical education programme focused on local food biodiversity can improve child feeding practices in forest communities. Leveraging existing food resources is a feasible and culturally appropriate strategy to enhance dietary diversity. Integrating biodiversity-focused nutrition education into existing community health programmes is recommended. Further research should investigate the long-term impact on child nutritional status and the scalability of the approach in similar contexts. nutrition education, dietary diversity, local foods, food biodiversity, child feeding, Democratic Republic of Congo, cooking demonstration This study provides evidence for a community-based intervention model that utilises indigenous food resources to improve child feeding practices.

Keywords: *Nutrition education, Child feeding practices, Food biodiversity, Democratic Republic of Congo, Community-based intervention, Cooking demonstration, Malnutrition*

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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