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“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Context-adapted Dietary Assessment and Nutrition Education Tools for Turkana County, Kenya

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Abstract

Turkana County has the highest levels of wasting among children (23 %) in Kenya; 34 % of children are underweight and 24 % are stunted. A critical determinant of malnutrition in developing countries is diet. Yet countries such as Kenya do not have a regular dietary assessment system nor contextually adapted nutrition education tools to raise awareness on healthy diets. From 2016 to 2018, Bioversity International and its partners (NGOs, Ministries, extension workers and universities) collaborated in a BMZ/A4NH-funded project to develop and test context-adapted novel and existing tools for dietary assessment and nutrition education purposes aiming to improve dietary quality for women of reproductive age and small children aged 6 to 23 months in Turkana County. The tools were co-developed and adopted by local stakeholders, and introduced to several other organisations at national level.

The project documented a rich diversity of edible plant and animal species with different functional classifications (95 different food plants of which 66 were wild). Despite this apparent diversity, diets are limited in diversity (only 20 % of women and 28 % of small children achieved the minimum recommended dietary diversity) with very low consumption of fruits and vegetables. Wild plant foods provide a huge potential of reducing diet cost, as well as fulfilling nutrient requirements, but their potential must be assessed on individual and location-specific basis. Indigenous knowledge systems, due to their high acceptance in local communities, offer new potential for nutrition communication and promotion of local agrobiodiversity use.

Our next step consists of introducing the integrated community-based approach for farm, market and diet diversity. The successful approach, developed in Vihiga County, western Kenya, involves communities, guided by extension workers, NGOs, policy makers and researchers, to design, implement and evaluate their own agriculture for nutrition interventions to improve use and benefits of seasonally available biodiverse nutritious foods.

Keywords: Nutrition focused projects