



Tropentag, September 15-17, 2021, hybrid conference

“Towards shifting paradigms in agriculture
for a healthy and sustainable future”

Home Gardening for Climate Change-resilience: Co-designing a Nutrition-sensitive Intervention in Rural Kenya

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Abstract

Climate change will slow down the reduction of child undernutrition in rural sub-Saharan Africa, where households largely rely on rainfed subsistence agriculture. An integrated programme of nutrition-sensitive (home gardening) and nutrition-specific (nutrition counselling) interventions offers a promising adaptation strategy. Co-design with the local community and stakeholders is key for the successful implementation of such a program. In this qualitative study, we aimed at identifying perceptions and experiences of farming families and local stakeholders with regard to home gardening in rural Kenya.

Between September and November 2020, we conducted semi-structured in-person interviews with 30 caregivers of young children living in Siaya County and online interviews with 28 local stakeholders working in the agriculture and nutrition sectors. The interviews focused on experiences with home gardens, including the preferred set-up, maintenance strategy and crop choice, as well as barriers. The audio records were transcribed and analysed by content analysis using the software Nvivo.

Among these rural communities in western Kenya, home gardening was a well-established practice, and perceived as a means of diversifying the households' nutrition and livelihood. However, the participants acknowledged that home gardening was rarely high yielding, only conducted seasonally, and partly depended on the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Barriers to a prospering home garden were severe shortage of seeds and saplings, access to water and land, particularly for women, as well as destruction by straying livestock. For an improved garden set-up, the interviewees mentioned the relevance of capacity building for resilient designs, self-sufficient resource management and a strong community collaboration. Stakeholders stressed the importance of co-designing the project, together with the community and local leadership, and enabling an independent replication of techniques and resources in the community.

Thus, home gardening remains a promising approach to combat the impacts of climate change on food self-sufficiency in rural Kenya. The exact set-up should be tailored closely to individual needs and resources to facilitate caregivers' empowerment to contributing to household food security.

Keywords: Adaptation, climate change, food security, home gardens, sub-Saharan Africa, undernutrition

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