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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Understanding the motivation of community health volunteers (CHVs) in promoting nutritious child-feeding practices in Benin drylands

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Abstract

Benin Republic is one of the West African countries with severe micronutrient deficiencies among children. To address this issue, nutrition education has been promoted by government and development actors, engaging local communities in promoting good nutrition, health and long-term well-being. The nutrition education system relies on Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) operating through community-based volunteer networks such as Nutrition Assistance Groups (GANs) and Food and Nutritional Surveillance Committees (CSANs) supporting and relaying nutrition experts to local targets. Our transdisciplinary research studied the motivations and actions of CHVs in the current community-based child nutrition and health education system, in order to contribute to inform sustainable and scalable child-nutrition interventions. To achieve this, participant observation was carried out during nutrition education activities conducted by two local NGOs in seven villages in the districts of Nikki and Banikoara in Northern Benin. The activities involving the CHVs focused on active health biometric screening, child-growth monitoring, cooking demonstration and communication for social behaviour change. Two expert consultation workshops were organised with 23 nutrition education experts, including 17 women, to understand what NGO field workers and supervisors think about the CHVs in the local nutrition education system. Five extended group discussions were organised engaging 99 community relays and volunteers (including 76 women) in exchanges about current nutrition education process. Preliminary results from the study revealed that CHVs have more extrinsic motivation (allowances, training per diems, divine blessings, social prestige, social networking, social influence, etc.) than intrinsic motivation (family welfare, learning and new skills). Cases of amotivation were not noted with the CHVs, but rather among the targets, who sometimes find no interest in nutrition education activities. Local communities conceptualise this as ignorance (*nyinru sariru*), which is seen as the root cause of failure in efforts to improve child-feeding practices. The observed low level of self-determination among CHVs added to the gender power relations influences the effectiveness of the nutrition education system in place. These findings are useful for further research and for improving nutrition education policies, with a view to building an appropriate and respectful community-dialogue model in African drylands.

Keywords: Child-feeding, community health volunteer, motivation, nutrition education, self-determination

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