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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Food environment of children under five in drylands areas of northern Benin

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Abstract

Food environments play a major role in children’s diets and nutrition, as they determine household access and supply of nutritious food. Research on food environments to date in low-income countries is limited; the outcome is a lack of data on the food environments of the African drylands. The objective of this study is to characterize the current food environment of children under five in the dry areas of northern Benin. To do this, twelve group discussions with local nutrition actors, eight individual interviews with key informants with visits and examinations of products in stores, local markets and domestic stalls were conducted in eleven villages and city districts in the municipalities of Banikoara and Nikki in northern Benin. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the dimensions of the food environment according to the conceptual framework of Turner *et al.* (2018) using SPSS software (v. 21). The results obtained show this: (i-availability and accessibility) the presence of a hundred foods (94) of which 38 % come from harvesting and/or picking (concerns the diet of the most large part of the population) and 89 % are sold in local markets and domestic stalls. 22 % of food is seasonal and 78 % is available all year round. (ii-price and affordability) for food sold, 79 % of them is sold on in affordable format with prices between XOF 25–200, less than XOF 244 (which is the capacity daily food expenditure of people in the study area). (iii-food property and convenience) foods sold in bulk (72 %) with only 23 % being packaged (90 % of which are labeled and contain nutritional information). Processed foods are few (19%) leaving room for traditional cuisine. (iv-Marketing, regulation and desirability) customary foods with eight out of ten foods originating from the region. The desirability of food comes from eating habits. This food environment can be considered as the natural type with the coexistence of the informal market type according to the typology of Shauna *et al.* (2020). The supply of nutritious, affordable convenience and desirable foods is subject to the variability and seasonality of local agricultural products and food resources.

Keywords: Benin, child malnutrition, dryland areas, food environment