



Tropentag, September 14-16, 2022, hybrid conference

“Can agroecological farming feed the world?  
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

## Understanding complementary feeding practices of child caregivers in northern Benin: a meal culture perspective

KOUÉTÉ PAUL JIMMY<sup>1</sup>, ANGE HONORAT EDJA<sup>2</sup>, BRIGITTE KAUFMANN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Agronomy, University of Parakou, Rural Economics and Sociology, Benin*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Parakou, Dept. of Rural Economics and Sociology, Benin*

<sup>3</sup>*German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), Germany*

### Abstract

The Benin Demographic and Health Survey recently reported that child malnutrition is an important problem, as stunting is observed in 41 % among children under the age of 5 years in rural poor households. Social and cultural contexts of child feeding gained interest as influencing factors for improving feeding practices and children’s health and nutrition. However, little attention has been paid to this aspect in most interventions and there is limited in-depth information on traditional feeding practices. This study aims to understand complementary feeding practices from a food culture perspective. Data were collected from mothers of children under 5 years of age from Fulani and Gando agropastoralist communities with a common Fulfulde language in Yagbo and Simpérou-Peul villages in Banikoara District, North Benin. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 mothers using a checklist related to food provision, including cooking, serving and eating meals, and the reasons for these practices. The results showed that the mothers mainly used home-prepared meals for their children’s complementary feeding. In the study villages inhabited by Fulani and Gando, we observed that the daily preparation and consumption of food is not only geared towards meeting the needs of their own household, but also the needs of the children of some neighbouring households, including the friends of their child/children’s generation. In everyday life, the mother of a child in one household sends her meal to another household on behalf of a child/children, or the children join together in a particular household to eat in groups when the meal is due. Furthermore, social occasions such as baptisms or weddings mobilise child mothers at the extended household or village level to engage in communal cooking activities where they share meals for household, including child feeding. Child feeding practices are thus part of social considerations of solidarity and sense of belonging that affect household food availability, including frequency of child feeding, and food diversity. This exploratory study highlights multiple aspects related to meal sharing scenarios that need to be taken into account and can play a key role in supporting child feeding and nutrition in rural contexts.

**Keywords:** Benin, caregivers, complementary feeding and nutrition practices, infant and young child, meal cultures