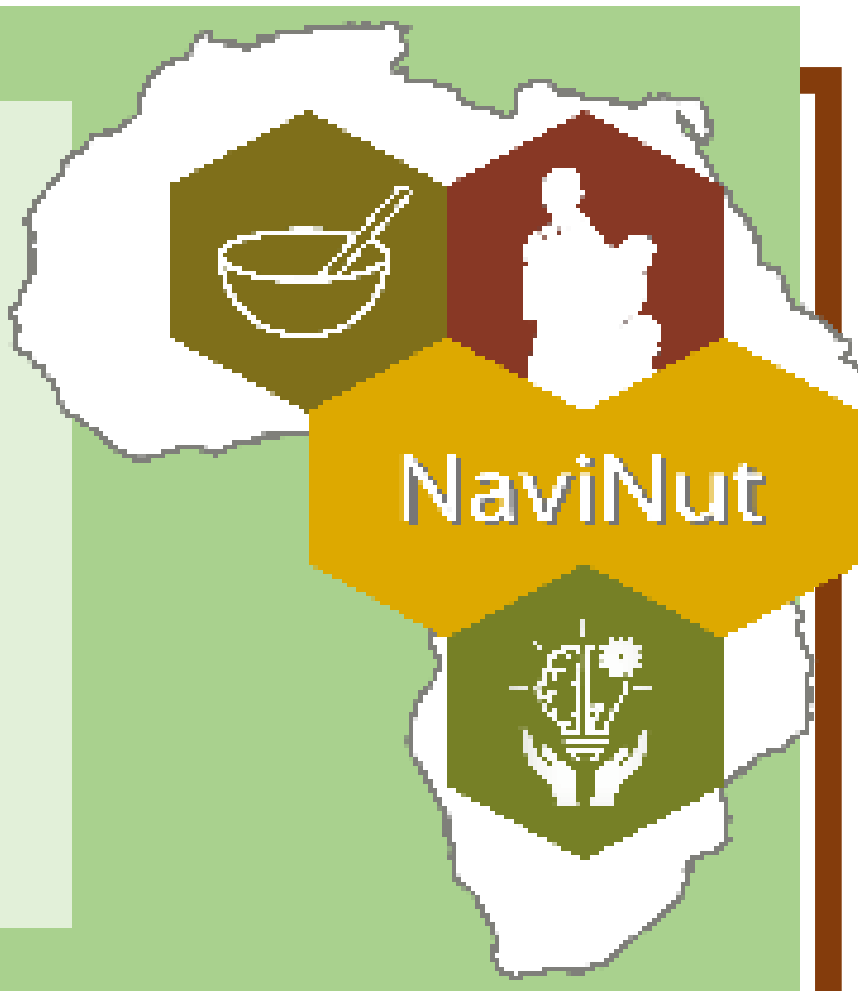




Understanding complementary feeding practices of child caregivers in agropastoral settings in northern Benin: A meal culture perspective



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Background

- In Benin, stunting remains a global public health problem
- Social and cultural contexts are important factors to consider in improving feeding practices and children's health and nutrition

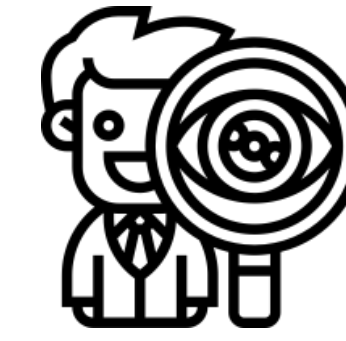
Objectives



- Understanding how social practices influence complementary feeding practices among 6-59 months aged children mothers
 - Describe sharing meals patterns
 - Provide the reasons behind meals sharing practices
 - Analyse the influence of meals sharing on child feeding

Methods and Data

- **Study area:** The study was conducted in 2 villages in the District of Banikoara, Northern Benin
- **Ethnic communities:** Fulani in Simpérou-Peul and Gando agropastoralists in Yagbo
- **Data collection**
 - Long stay of 6 months in the community
 - Selection of interested child mothers in each community (8 in Simpérou-peul and 12 in Yagbo) during Introductory meetings



- Participant observation in 20 households of child mothers and during marriage ceremonies



- Individual interviews: 12 child mothers



- Cooking and eating of meals: what, who prepare, and who serves and how children are fed; the reasons behind the practices



Results

▪ Main complementary foods

- Maize and sorghum based food stuffs are home-made, especially porridge and dough accompanying with different types of sauces.

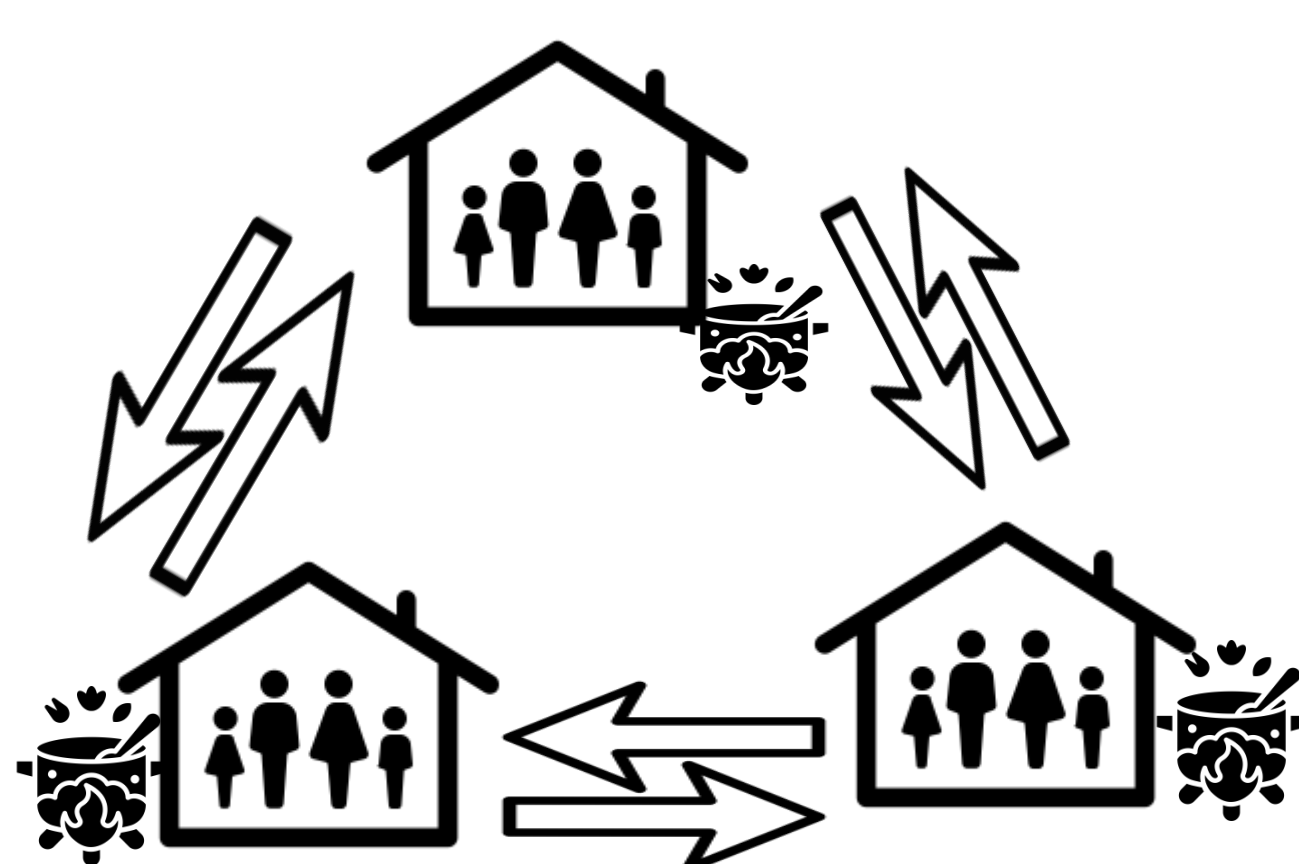


▪ Collective meals sharing



- Marriage ceremonies are always opportunity for collective preparation
- Participating child mothers used meals made at this occasion for household foods

▪ Interhousehold meals sharing

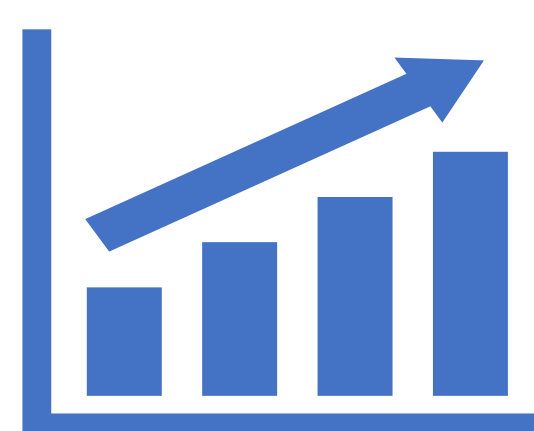


- Food preparation in a household cover the needs of the children of some neighbouring households
- Meals sharing between households occurred frequently in the 2 communities
- Children gather mostly during the main daily meal time in a particular household
- Child mothers sent a portion to the children in other households
- Children shares baobab fruits and power

▪ Reasons for meals sharing

Factors underlying meals sharing	Evidence in child mothers' discourse
Prevailing norms of solidarity	- <i>We are the same</i> (A mother from Yagbo) - <i>Here we are united</i> (A mother from Simpérou-peul)
Expected reciprocity	<i>If you don't do for someone child, who will do for yours when you are absent</i> (A mother from Simpérou-peul)
Belonging and obligation	<i>"This child belongs to me; I should offer a special meal I cooked."</i> (A grand-mother from Yagbo)

▪ Influence of meal sharing on feeding frequency and food diversity



- Mothers estimated feeding frequency between 4-7 times
- Mothers perceived increased feeding frequency because of meals sharing



- Children got fruits based on meals sharing improving food diversity
- Sharing meals improves food diversity as regard meat often added to meals with collective preparation occasion

Conclusion and policy implications

- Child nutrition with the Fulani and Gando in a village setting is not only influenced by their mothers/ household but also by neighbourhood.
- Child feeding practices are part of social considerations of solidarity and a sense of belonging influencing child feeding frequencies and food diversity
- This exploratory research reveals that sharing meals practices should be taken into account in child nutrition projects when giving recommendation on suitable child feeding and nutrition practices

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