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Kitchen gardens reduce time needed to access vegetables: A qualitative study in Turkana, Kenya

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Abstract

The food environment is the context in which people select, acquire, prepare, and consume food and is thus a determinant of diet quality and nutritional outcomes as people mainly consume what is within their physical and economic reach. Findings from a food environment assessment showed limited options to select and acquire vegetables and fruits and low dietary diversity at household level. Ten randomly selected Community Units in Turkana (semi-arid/arid) were invited to co-create community action plans to enhance access to vegetables. Most communities established kitchen gardens. Ten Focus-Group-Discussions (FGD) were held to evaluate the impact of the KG including 43 men, 46 women from the study group. Discussion focused on: i) what participants liked about the project? ii) what is the impact on individuals, households, the community? iii) which challenges occurred, how were they solved? iv) how children and women were affected by the project? Coding was done in cycles and categories of analysis were developed. Baseline showed that the perceived distance to the preferred marketplace to purchase food ranged from 16 up to 210 minutes. The FGD showed that the implementation of the kitchen gardens reduced the time needed to access vegetables but also the budget needed to spend on vegetables as no transport fees were needed. Participants reported that access of vegetables, sold or shared with neighbours, generally improved dietary diversity in the communities and especially of the children. Parents perceived their children to be healthier. Water scarcity hindered KG activities and households reported to have used income from vegetable sales for paying others for water fetching. Without access to vegetables and fruits a diverse diet is not possible which is associated with a high risk for malnutrition. In the study area vegetable and fruit production is limited due to water scarcity. At the same time the poverty level in Turkana is high and associated with high levels of food insecurity. The limited opportunities to purchase vegetables and fruits in the surveyed region calls for public health measures which enhance the market availability of fruits and vegetables at affordable prices.

Keywords: Co-creation, community action plans, dietary diversity, food access, kitchen gardens, time allocation