

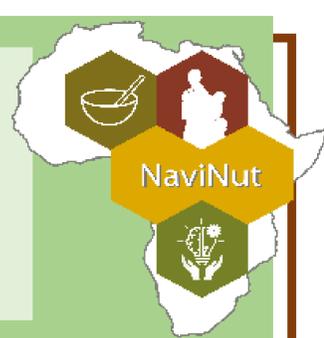


Cultural knowledge in complementary feeding of young children in agropastoral households in northern Benin

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Background

- In Benin, stunting remains a public health problem.
- Local nutrition practices and knowledge are increasingly seen as contributions to appropriate solutions to problems of malnutrition.
- However, little is known about the extent to which child nutrition is related to the interaction of local & external nutrition environments, as well as related beliefs and associated cultural knowledge.



Objectives

- The present study aims to investigate concepts and knowledge related to children's complementary feeding:
 - Describing complementary foods for young children
 - Analysing the cultural logic related to child feeding

Methods and Data

- **Study area:** The study was conducted in 6 villages: 3 each Banikoara and Nikki Districts in Northern Benin
- **Ethnic communities:** Bariba, Fulani and Gando, all from agropastoralist background
- **Data collection**
 - Long stay in each community over 6 months in 2021 and 2022
 - Selection of 34 interested mothers of young children in the target villages during Introductory meetings



- Participant observation of mothers in 34 households and during marriage ceremonies



- Individual interviews: 34 mothers



- 6 focus group discussions, each with about ten mothers, on stories and proverbs related to child nutrition



Results

Main complementary foods for young children

- Porridge and dough accompanied by with different types of sauces usually made from dried local vegetables



External special foods consumption

- In the Bariba communities, special meals for children made from externally sourced foods such as rice, pasta and couscous are common.
- Special externally sourced foods for children are less common in Fulani and Gando communities.



Protein source consumption and special local foods



- The preparation and consumption of meat or fish is almost non-existent in Fulani households, but is common in Gando and Bariba households.
- The cooking of meat is occasional and related to baptism feasts or after hunting.
- In Fulani communities, making sauce based on okra leaves mixed with crushed beans as vegetal protein source is quite common.
- Fulani women also give more milk to the children than the other communities
- Most mothers cooked a mixture of boiled sorghum flour and moringa leaves called *dambou* as special meals.

Cultural logic related to complementary feeding

Cultural logic	Evidence in mothers' discourse, songs, stories or proverbs
Idea of "taking care of the belly" of family members	Songs, colloquial expressions and stories collected from the mothers highlighted women's responsibility with regard to feeding the household in general and children in particular. Ex. " (I hurry to the well. I will go quickly and come back as soon as possible. When I return, I will prepare the pounded yam. The vegetable sauce " <i>kunowwa</i> " (black plum or <i>Vitex doniana</i>) will accompany the meal. I will prepare it to take care of the stomachs of my people.)
Optimal use of food or the attitude of "not wasting food" (e.g. re-preparing leftovers)	<i>Petepeteeri nyennaari</i> in Fulfulde; (The residue/remainder of the dried pounded yam re-prepared); <i>Sey yoo nyennaari am ca'ammi niido woo ee sa'an niidon lallaw ee mi watta albacce e kippu...</i> (I will prepare the rest of the dried pounded yam...then I will serve the people).
Local notion of "valued foods "	A traditional vegetable is referred in terms of its well-recognised nutritional value: "It is sauce made of <i>kunowwa</i> , whose value you know well that we will prepare to eat with the pounded yam."

Conclusion and policy implications

- The results showed that a variety of locally sourced complementary foods are given to young children and provide food diversity.
- Child mothers are driven by knowledge/behaviour showing the way to better nutrition of young children using local food resources.
- These findings highlighted that knowledge and practices among targeted mothers are likely to be suitable for improving the complementary feeding of young children in neighbouring malnourished households or communities with access to similar resources.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the NaviNut Project and its partners who made this study possible. The project is supported by funds of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) based on a decision of the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany via the Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (BLE). We would like also thank the mothers of young children in Banikoara and Nikki who were involved in this study.

With support from



by decision of the German Bundestag

