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“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Linkages between food narratives and eating habits of low-income households in informal urban settlements in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract

Everybody needs food daily, but around 1.9 billion people worldwide are malnourished. Influencing people's food choices is complex and has limited effects when only considering physical and quantifiable factors. Eating habits are influenced by culture and beliefs which are social and emotional factors. Therefore, this qualitative research examining food choices in the low-income community of Mathare in Kenya. Investigations were conducted within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and are part of a research project of the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics. In the course of that project a Hip-Hop music video has been locally produced about food-related health issues and avoiding strategies. In this work, eleven participants who saw that music video have been individually interviewed twice within a period of one-and-a-half months. They were asked about their narratives they perceived around food before and after being exposed to the food related awareness creation. The findings show a significant effect on Food Attitudes, like participants stating that they started seeing interlinkages between food practices and human health. One finding of the Subjective Food Norms was, eating fried food with friends was not considered a treat anymore but bad for the health, and cooking together at home has been applied. A key finding from the Perceived Behavioural Control perspective was the courage of participants to point out mistakes to community members, to improve the food situation. These outcomes give first insights into the linkages between food narratives and eating habits, and how to induce a positive shift. To further tackle food behaviour change, more research is needed to understand the sustainable long-term effect of the educational music video on food narratives and eating habits.

Keywords: Food narratives, music for education and communication, behaviour change communication, eating habits, urban informal settlements