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Evaluating the effectiveness of nutrition awareness campaigns for pregnant, lactating women, and caregivers in Liberia

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Abstract

Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and lactating women and caregivers of young children, is crucial for combating malnutrition and improving overall health outcomes, especially in regions where food insecurity and limited nutritional knowledge persist.

The Health System Strengthening (HSS) Project, implemented by Welthungerhilfe Liberia, sought to address these issues through tailored nutrition education interventions aimed at improving dietary diversity (DD) among the target population.

This study, conducted in Southeast Liberia, evaluated the effectiveness of these nutrition education interventions on food diversification and nutritional knowledge among pregnant and lactating women and caregivers of children under five years. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A total of 224 women participated in the survey, with 110 women in the intervention group and 114 women in the control group. Additionally, six Focus Group Discussions and four Key Informant Interviews were conducted.

This study assessed the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) of reproductive age (15–49 years) after the intervention, the Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD) of children, and evaluated how well nutrition knowledge gained through the programme was maintained, as well as its influence on participants' attitudes toward DD.

Overall, the MDD-W increased from 14.8 % at baseline to 28.2 % in the intervention group, indicating a substantial enhancement in the diversity of foods consumed. More children in the intervention households reached the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Children (MDD-C), namely 16.1 % in the intervention group, compared to 6.1 % in the control group, highlighting the positive impact of nutrition education on the DD of children. Participants in the intervention group exhibited a greater understanding of balanced nutrition and reported incorporating a wider variety of foods into their own and their children's daily meals, reflecting a positive attitude toward DD.

While the nutrition education trainings have been helpful in improving DD, challenges such as financial constraints, seasonal food shortages, and cultural beliefs continue to limit the widespread adoption of diverse diets. The study underscores the need for sustainable interventions that address economic barriers and cultural practices to promote long-term DD and improved nutrition.

Keywords: Dietary diversity, food security, intervention effectiveness, nutrition education