The Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (C-IYCF) Counselling Program in Nigeria: The Role of Women’s Empowerment

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Presentation Outline
We know that evidence-based, cost-effective interventions can improve nutrition outcomes.
However, we don’t always have the evidence we need to say WHICH interventions are most effective - especially at scale.
UNICEF Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Counselling Package
Our goal was to assess the following:

- Contextual and environmental factors that enable or hamper success
- Program processes, implementation achievements, and costs
- Skills and knowledge of IYCF among community volunteers
- Caregivers’ knowledge, attitude, beliefs and practice related to IYCF
The Nigerian Ministry of Health, UNICEF, and SPRING set out to rigorously evaluate the impact of the C-IYCF Counselling Package in 2014.
We used a range of methods:

- Multi level key informant interviews
- Community volunteer assessments
- Health worker assessments
- Maternal surveys
- Anthropometry surveys
- Cost study
Location of Evaluation: Kajuru LGA
Preliminary results show improvements in maternal and child nutrition practices.
Women are eating more during pregnancy, and infant feeding practices have improved.

- Women who ate more during their last pregnancy:
  - Baseline: 36%
  - Endline: 50%

- Children under 6 months who are exclusively breastfed:
  - Baseline: 31%
  - Endline: 50%

- Children 6-8 months old who received solid foods in the previous day:
  - Baseline: 56%
  - Endline: 64%
While the **objective** of the C-IYCF **package** is to improve nutrition practices, we also looked at components of the **enabling environment** for nutrition.
Women’s empowerment is important for health and nutritional status – their own and that of their children.

- Empowering women improves nutrition outcomes for both mothers and their children (USAID 2012, Smith and Haddad 2000)
- Improvements in women’s status and education accounted for more than half of the global reductions in child underweight from 1970–1995 (Smith and Haddad 2000)
- Women with greater societal status tend to have better nutritional status and better prenatal and childbirth care, and they also provide higher quality care to their children (Smith et al. 2003)
“When women are empowered, educated, and can earn and control income...child health, nutrition, and development improve, agricultural productivity rises, population growth slows, economies expand, and cycles of poverty are broken.”

- USAID’s Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy
Men play an important role in women’s empowerment, so we also took that into consideration in this evaluation.
Education and employment can empower women by promoting access to resources and decision-making power.
For women to understand, try, and adopt optimal nutrition practices, they must be able to make, or contribute to, household decisions.
At endline, more leaders, health workers, and volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that **women should be able to express their opinions regarding child feeding**.
Pregnant women and mothers were also more likely to **strongly agree** that **women should be able to express their opinions regarding child feeding.**
These are attitudes – but has anything changed in practice?
However, women’s decision-making power around nutrition practices is low and control of financial resources is even lower.
Based on our preliminary findings, the C-IYCF program did have a positive impact on nutrition outcomes.
Clearly, for continued improvements and greater impact on infant and young child feeding practices, we must find ways to adjust the intervention or complement with additional interventions that...
Sensitize health facility staff and community leaders in women’s role in decision-making.
Promote women’s empowerment issues during the community-IYCF support group meetings.
Encourage income generation activities among support group members to build women’s own resources and self-esteem.
Engage men in discussions on the importance of women’s involvement in household decisions and resource allocation.
Emphasize the importance of joint decision-making during home visits, support group meetings, community events, and more.
Thank you for listening!
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