

How to motivate and support improved practices in Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) in Northern Nigeria

This briefing outlines findings from operations research to support the refinement of the infant and young child feeding (IYCF) strategy implemented by the Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme.

Recommendations

- **The IYCF Messages:**

- Create a concept of food groups that is meaningful to mothers.
- Emphasise the unique benefits of each food group to help mothers understand why it is important to feed foods from different food groups each day.
- Emphasise that there is a choice of foods from within each food group, focusing on the available and affordable options within each food group.
- Consider including messages about appropriate substitutions, especially for animal source foods and soap.
- Investigate whether it would be appropriate to associate IYCF recommendations with Qur'an verses, including the importance, for spiritual and physical health, of a balanced diet.

- **The IYCF approach:**

- Strengthen counselling to reinforce the messages and help mothers find solutions to any barriers they face.
- Hold support group meetings with fathers to encourage their commitment and support.
- Recruit a trusted and well-respected member of the community to champion for improved IYCF practices.

- **Strengthen the training of community volunteers (CVs) to deliver the IYCF via counselling.**

- **In the long term, support development of income earning opportunities for mothers.**

ORIE Research Summary



Village Life
(Oil on canvas).
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Background

A high prevalence of malnutrition is present among 6-23 month old infants in Northern Nigeria, which was associated with poor infant feeding practices (Visram et al, 2014). To prevent malnutrition, culturally appropriate and practical recommendations on how to improve infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices need to be promoted.

Focal Questions for the study

- 1 How do mothers, in Northern Nigeria, understand the concept of feeding foods from different food groups? – An IYCF recommendation that is used to promote feeding infants and young children a diversified diet.
- 2 Can mothers put into practice the IYCF recommendations being promoted in the WINNN supported IYCF programme in Northern Nigeria?
- 3 What might motivate and support them to put these recommendations into practice? What might prevent them from practicing them?

The research, which included two studies, was undertaken in two local government authority areas (LGA) of Jigawa State. In each

LGA, it was done in its main urban centre and in five other randomly selected communities i.e., a total of 12 communities. In one study, 36 mothers who had an infant between 6 and 23 months of age were asked to:

- Name, in Hausa, each of four main food groups (i.e., animal source foods, staples, legumes and fruits & vegetables) and describe the attributes of each.
- Categorise 39 foods into their respective food groups and rank them on the dimensions of affordability, health, acceptance and convenience.

In the other study, 76 mothers who had an infant between 6 and 23 months of age were asked to practice three IYCF recommendations (see Box 1) for 14 days; and tell the research team what they found easy to do, difficult to do, what motivated them to follow the recommendations and what other people in their family or community thought about them doing it. In addition, the dietary practices of the infants were assessed before the mothers were introduced to the IYCF recommendations (baseline) and again 14 days later, using a semi-quantitative 24-hour dietary recall, to find whether the numbers or types of foods fed to the infants had changed during the IYCF intervention period.

« Culturally appropriate and practical recommendations need to be promoted, which mothers of infants and young children can understand and practice. »

Box 1: The IYCF recommendations evaluated in this study

1 Try to feed a variety of foods at each meal including:

- **Animal-source foods:** meat, chicken, fish, liver, crayfish, eggs, milk.
- **Staples:** maize, wheat, rice, millet, sorghum, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes.
- **Legumes:** beans, lentils, peas, groundnuts.
- **Fruits and vegetables, especially vitamin A rich ones:** mango, pawpaw, passion fruit, oranges, dark-green leaves, carrots, yellow sweet potato, pumpkin, banana, pineapple, watermelon, tomatoes, avocado, eggplant.

Food variety



2 Increase frequency of feeding according to age:

- **6 – 8 months:** three times a day plus a snack.
- **9 – 11 months:** three to five times a day, including meals and snacks, gradually increasing amount and frequency.
- **12 – 24 months:** five times a day including meals and snacks, gradually increasing amount and frequency.

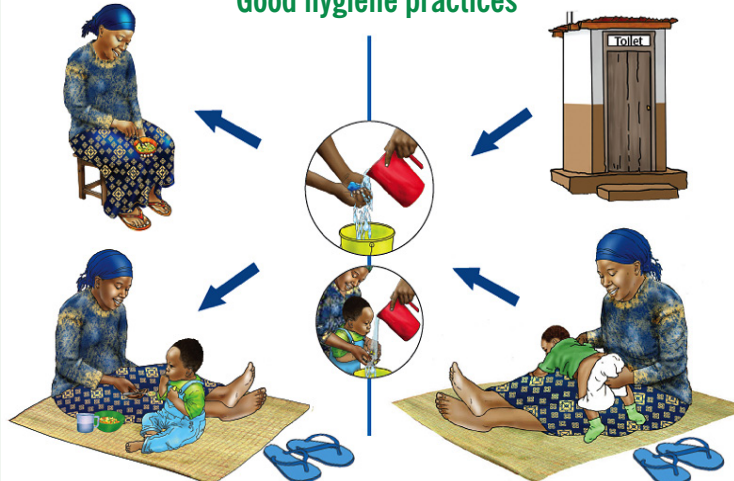
Complementary feeding from 6 up to 9 months



3 Wash your hands with soap and water (WASH):

- Before preparing foods and feeding your baby.
- After going to the toilet.
- After changing your baby's nappies.
- Wash your baby's hands and face before eating.

Good hygiene practices



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Key Research Findings

- **The concept of food groups, the unique benefits of feeding foods from each food group and the classification of foods into specific food groups is foreign.**
- **Both cost and health considerations have an important influence on the decisions made about what foods to feed 6-23 month old infants.**
- **The IYCF recommendations, in the short term, were feasible to put into practice; and led to improved complementary feeding practices.** Specifically, the number of times an infant was fed snacks and meals, and the number and types of foods fed to an infant in a day (especially legumes, eggs, fruits and vegetables) increased.
- **The mothers valued, trusted and appreciated the support given via three face-to-face discussions with a research assistant; to help them understand the IYCF recommendations and overcome barriers to practicing them.**
- **Mothers were motivated to try out the recommended IYCF practices by a desire to improve their infant's health,** future aspirations for their child, and a desire for their infant to be healthier than other infants in the community. The WASH recommendation was readily accepted because cleanliness was part of their religion and other community members valued a clean child.
- **Their motivation to continue practicing the IYCF recommendations was further enhanced when after practicing the IYCF recommendations they saw that their infant accepted and liked the new practices,** their infant's appetite, playfulness and satisfaction with their food increased and they breastfed/cried less often.
- **The initially perceived key barriers to practicing the IYCF recommendations was the availability and affordability of the foods/soap;** which were overcome by choosing available and affordable foods or making appropriate substitutions. This was an important revelation to overcoming their concerns and criticisms from other community or family members.
- **Other barriers were a misperception that young infants are unable to eat the amount or types of food recommended;** which was overcome via counsel on food preparation methods or food choices.
- **Social support was the most important enabler for successful practices,** especially support from husbands but also support from parents, co-wives or other community members to provide foods, child care or reminders to follow the recommendations.
- **Other enablers** included environmental changes (i.e., putting soap close to the toilet) and having their own business.

ORIE and WINNN

ORIE is an independent component of the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) funded Working to Improve Nutrition in Northern Nigeria (WINNN) programme. WINNN is working to improve the nutritional status of 6.2 million children under five years of age in five states of northern Nigeria. ORIE is carrying out research to determine the impact of WINNN and generate important research on key evidence gaps regarding solutions to undernutrition in northern Nigeria.

References

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WHO (2008). Indicators for Assessing Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices. Part I. Definitions. World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.

Credits

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