

Enhancing Child Diets in Food-Insecure Rural Ethiopia

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Abstract : High rates of child undernutrition in Ethiopia place children at significant risk, highlighting the need for low-cost, nutritious diets starting at six months of age. These diets should be diverse and rich in essential nutrients like proteins, vitamins, and minerals. However, many rural households participating in the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) struggle to afford fortified foods and often rely on low-protein, cereal-based diets, leading to micronutrient deficiencies. In addition, fasting practices further restrict the consumption of animal-source foods for 190 to 250 days each year, limiting dietary diversity even more. Addressing these challenges requires solutions beyond nutrition counseling, focusing on factors such as seasonality, food perishability, and safety to promote better health outcomes for children. The program's main objective is to empower caregivers with practical recipes for complementary feeding for children aged 6 to 23 months by enhancing meals with affordable ingredients like cereal, legumes, dried vegetables, and meat. The ongoing implementation research within the SPIR-II program is centered on developing a cost-effective mixed flour and exploring drying techniques to extend shelf life, ultimately addressing the delayed introduction of complementary foods and increasing nutrient-rich options in households. Saleswomen participating in the SPIR-II program have been empowered to produce easy-to-use local complementary flour and conduct door-to-door sales in their neighborhoods. Caregivers who have purchased and fed this flour to their children have reported significant improvements in their nutritional status. Additionally, SPIR-II is testing low-tech drying methods suitable for rural Ethiopian contexts to reduce food loss and promote the inclusion of nutrient-dense foods in children's diets. The paper will highlight the primary outcomes of these initiatives as they are being implemented.

Keywords : food preservation, easy-to-use mixed flour, complementary feeding, drying techniques

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