

## Participatory approach to improve dietary diversity in Vihiga County, Western Kenya

*Julia Boedecker<sup>1</sup>, Francis Oduor<sup>1</sup>, Céline Termote<sup>1</sup>, Gina Kennedy<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Bioversity International, Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Bioversity International, Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems, Italy

[J.boedecker@cgiar.org](mailto:J.boedecker@cgiar.org)

**Objectives:** This research project examines the suitability of a community-based participatory approach for diversifying diets in Vihiga County, Western Kenya. It is part of the Humidtropics and Agriculture for Nutrition and Health CGIAR Research Programs.

**Methods:** The project consists of a diagnostic phase documenting agricultural biodiversity and nutrition (phase I), participatory development of activities to improve nutrition (phase II) and participatory implementation of the activities (phase III). This paper describes phase I and II. Phase I applied cross-sectional and longitudinal study designs. Data on agrobiodiversity, nutrition practices, anthropometry and dietary intakes was collected in ten randomly selected sub-locations in Vihiga County. In each sub-location, 40 households with a child aged 12-23 months were sampled. After pair-matching, five of the ten sub-locations participated in phase II. Participatory workshops were carried out aiming to mediate basic nutrition knowledge, to discuss results of the diagnostic phase and to develop community activities to increase dietary diversity.

**Results:** Vihiga County is rich in local food biodiversity (67 cultivated and 38 wild edible plant species). However, only 74.8% of children and 45.1% of women meet Minimum Dietary Diversity. Stunting affects 28% of children. To diversify diets, the workshop participants in all five sub-locations decided to plant traditional vegetables and legumes and to raise poultry. Community action plans were developed specifying how these activities are going to be realized. The participants also identified local funding mechanisms to finance their activities and developed a budget. It was observed that over the two months workshop period, trust was built between participants and researchers and that the groups developed ownership of their activities. Harmony within the group was a supportive factor for good performance.

**Conclusion:** A community-based approach in form of participatory workshops led to the successful development of community activities to diversify diets in Vihiga County, Western Kenya. Other related projects in low-income countries stress the importance of community-based approaches in improving nutrition and livelihood outcomes.

Keywords: dietary diversity; agrobiodiversity; nutrition; community-based participatory approach