

## What is the impact of combining food security and nutrition education interventions?

Few studies have documented the impact of promoting locally available foods on children's dietary intake, micronutrient status and growth. Even fewer have looked at the impact of combining targeted food security actions, aimed at increasing the production and availability of nutrient dense foods, with intensive nutrition education and behaviour change interventions. Research is under way to assess the impact of this approach in Malawi and Cambodia.

"Improving the dietary intakes and nutritional status of infants and young children through improved food security and complementary feeding counselling (IMCF)" is a five-year research project which began in 2011, funded by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) of Germany.

Research partners are:

- the Institute of Nutritional Sciences, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany
- the Agricultural Extension Department, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi
- the Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol University, Thailand

## The IMCF project is linked to FAO food and nutrition security programmes in Cambodia and Malawi

### Cambodia

"Improving Food Security and Market Linkages for Smallholders in Otdar Meanchey and Preah Vihear Provinces"

- The project is funded by the Food Security Thematic Programme of the European Union (January 2012 – June 2015).
- The project aims to improve food security and nutrition for vulnerable smallholder farmers through a "food-based approach" which involves food production, market led commercialization of agriculture, dietary diversification and consumption of adequate quantities and appropriate varieties of safe, good quality food.

### Malawi

"Improving Food Security and Nutrition Policies and Programme Outreach in Kasungu and Mzimba districts"

- The project is funded by the Flemish International Cooperation Agency (FICA) (April 2011-March 2015).
- The project outreach work focuses on strengthening the government extension activities in agriculture and nutrition through the establishment of farmer field schools, distribution of seeds and livestock, introduction of improved agriculture and irrigation systems, community based nutrition education and cooking demonstrations.

### Further information

[www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/nutritioneducation](http://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/nutritioneducation)  
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# Food security Improved diets Healthy children



## Food security

Scaling up the nutritional impact of agricultural interventions and policies is a major aim of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). To address and prevent chronic undernutrition on a sustainable basis, FAO supports national efforts to improve food security and nutrition. Our aim is to:

- raise awareness among policy makers and the public of the benefits of food and dietary diversification;
- empower communities to grow, purchase and prepare nutrient-rich foods, including legumes, vegetables, fruits, oil crops and animal-source foods;
- promote healthy eating and increased use of nutrient-rich local foods through community-based dietary counselling, group cooking sessions and social mobilisation;
- invest in nutrition training of agricultural and health extension staff and farmers;
- support community actions by developing a cadre of volunteer community nutrition promoters to scale up coverage of locally appropriate nutrition solutions.

## Improved diets

Optimizing the quality and diversity of foods consumed by all family members is key to achieving positive nutrition outcomes. Children between six months and two years of age should receive adequate quantities of nutritious complementary foods in addition to continued breastfeeding.

FAO uses practical hands-on learning approaches that aim to improve food and nutrition practices, with a focus on behaviour change in complementary feeding. Using community-based approaches and demonstrations, families learn how to feed young children, meeting their nutritional needs with limited resources. They learn to:

- grow a variety of nutrient-dense crops;
- raise small livestock to supplement the family diet;
- select and prepare nutritious complementary foods based on taste, seasonal availability and price;
- incorporate fruits and other healthy snacks into children's diets;
- take advantage of nutrient-rich indigenous and wild foods;
- maximize nutritional benefits by applying new skills on cooking, basic hygiene and sanitation.

## Healthy children

Research shows that optimal nutrition during the first two years of life can have a significant positive impact not only on children's health and development but on the health throughout a person's life, as well as the social and economic development of a nation.

Recognising that healthy eating is learnt during the early years, good complementary feeding can form a basis for lifelong healthy eating habits and may help prevent the onset of diet-related diseases in the future.

FAO is currently exploring how these improvements in complementary feeding are most readily adopted on a larger scale and how health and agricultural extension workers and community nutrition promoters can be trained to assist in scaling up the process.

