



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

Nutrition education needs and capacity analysis  
package

Nutrition education stories



# Nutrition education needs and capacity analysis package

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
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# Nutrition education stories

## Questions

- What is the setting? Who is involved?
- What is the nutrition issue?
- Who is the educator OR What is the education source?
- Who learns what and how?
- Who does not learn, and why not?
- What can we conclude about Nutrition Education?
- What can be done?



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### N1. A boy going to school (anywhere)



Emanuel (or Ahmed) is eight. He lives in the hills. When he gets up in the morning his parents have already gone to work in the fields. He washes but he doesn't have anything to eat. He walks three kilometres to school. Then he studies all the morning. Today one of the lessons is about vitamins and minerals. He writes down the message of the lesson in his exercise book: You need micronutrients to be healthy. At 11 there is a school meal of porridge made with cereal and soya. Afterwards he walks three kilometres home. For supper he has cereal (rice/maize/cassava) with some beans.

### N2. Mothers at the clinic (Burkina Faso)

Mariam and Aicha are two young mothers from the same village. Every month they go to the clinic with their babies, where the health assistant weighs the babies and records the results in her book. Today the health worker is doing individual counselling but there are a lot of women and not much time. When she finds how Mariam and Aicha have been feeding their babies she gets quite sharp. "Don't you know breastfeeding must be exclusive?" she says.

"What do you mean?" asks Mariam.

"I mean your baby must not have any other food or liquid, only breastmilk. No water, no porridge, no special herbs. Do you understand?"



Mariam and Aicha nod their heads.

Once outside, Aicha says “I never heard of such a thing.”

“Nor me,” says Mariam. “I don’t think I can do it.”

“What would my mother-in-law say!” says Aicha.

### N3. What you learn at home (Zambia)

Stuart is 8 and Sibeso is 13. They are eating their evening meal with their family and younger brother Mwansa. The dish contains a lot of stiff white nsima (like sadza) made from maize flour and pieces of chicken in a sauce with green leaves, tomato and onion. Father, who is very hungry, is eating the chicken.

Mwansa: Waaaaaah!

Mother: Sh, sh, Mwansa, be quiet. Your father is tired.

Stuart: Mother, can I have some chicken too?

Mother: No, that is for your father. He is a man.

Stuart: Why does dad always have good food?

Sibeso: Mother, I’m hungry too.

Mother: Sh, sh, you are a girl. You will be a mother some day. Do not get used to eating a lot. You will be finishing the food from the granary. You have to learn to be hungry.

Stuart (reaching for more chicken): I need more.

Mother: Stuart, you eat too much.

Stuart: I play football. I need food. I am a man too.

### N4. Red meat (Kenya)

Mr Mwathi/Adoyo is 68 and has diabetes. His kidneys are not working well. His eyesight is failing and his joints and feet are so swollen that he has to shuffle along with a walking stick. His doctor has given him a lot of advice, and now he is eating more vegetables and less sugar. But he refuses to stick to fish, beans, eggs and chicken.

Every few days he goes to his club in a village not far from Nairobi. He brings his friends to dine with him on “the meat of men”, washed down with a few beers. Mr Mwathi can afford to eat meat, roast red meat, nyama choma, every day and he will continue to do so.

“If there is no nyama choma, there is no food,” he says.

His friends agree. They all drink to nyama choma.

### N5. Breastfeeding week (from a nameless country)

Today is the launch of National Breastfeeding Week at the National Nutrition Institute. Several VIPs and all the staff of the Institute are seated under a canopy in the courtyard, wearing their best clothes. The Press is taking photos.

There is the sound of a band in the distance and down the road comes a group of mothers and children. They line up in front of the canopy and stand in the hot sun. For about an hour, male politicians and civil servants read out speeches to the seated dignitaries about the value of breastfeeding. Copies of the speeches are given to the Press and there are more photographs.

When the ceremony is over, the mothers and children are given sandwiches, sweet buns and Coke and some of the VIPs stay to lunch (chicken and chips).

### N6. Fat of the land (South Africa)

Dora is a Home Economics teacher who lives near Pretoria. She is very overweight and not at all worried about it. Her husband, who himself is lean and wiry, prefers her that way: "It's good to see a big woman who does credit to her own cooking," he says.

The whole family eat like elephants and the children are both weighty. "Eat up," Dora tells them. "We are blessed to have so much good food and we should enjoy it and be grateful for it. And I don't like to see my good cooking go to waste." The family's favourite foods are sausages, bacon and chocolate cake. When they go out to eat they like to have pizza, burgers and chips.



## N7. Farmer field schools (Malawi)



Muriel is a small farmer, and also the mother of two young children. She grows maize and beans and a little tobacco; some of the maize and beans go to feed her family and to make the porridge that she feeds the youngest child (aged 14 months). The family diet is monotonous but they usually have enough food and they sell enough to be able to afford a few consumer goods. Muriel's husband controls the spending in the household. Muriel is lucky to be able to attend a Farmer Field School near her home. The very practical instruction focuses on better methods for growing maize, which will help to increase the yield and will mean more income. She is now optimistic about the future.

## N8. Extension training (anywhere)

The extension team consists of a health worker (Beatrice), a community worker (Amat) and an agricultural extensionist (Calvin). Beatrice normally does growth monitoring and sometimes gives short talks on meal composition and food groups. Amat and Calvin activate village projects and advise on farming methods.

Now they are doing a course on community nutrition, learning about nutrients and food functions, diet through the life cycle, malnutrition etc. There is also a session on communication. The facilitator talks about the topics, then asks the groups to prepare a short community talk.

"What do we say?" asks Amat.

"Search me," says Calvin.

"Try this," says Beatrice, and gives her usual talk.



## N9. Disgruntled grandmothers (Malawi)



Dsiko and Mesi are grandmothers, respected in their village. Together they have brought up 10 children (four died). They advise younger women on how to feed and bring up their babies and deal with their illnesses, and they look after the infants when the mothers are working. Today a project team visits the village to talk about good complementary feeding for babies and give a cooking demonstration for mothers with children under two. The grandmothers are asked to keep the other children quiet. The demonstration goes on a long time. The children start to cry because they smell the cooking. That evening the grandmothers hear about the project team's advice. Dsiko tells her daughter-in-law: "It's good advice but we can't afford these foods." Mesi asks: "Who is going to do the extra cooking?" The young mothers appeal to their husbands, but the men listen to their own mothers. They know whose opinion counts.

### P1. Vegetable micro-gardening (Uganda)

Ephraim, a small farmer speaks. "I never knew I could use the small spaces I have at home to raise vegetables. With the training I got from CESVI/FAO, my chicken droppings, goat pellets and cow dung will not go to waste anymore because they are food for vegetables that I grow in the micro-gardens. I hardly go to the market now to buy onions, tomatoes, cabbages and eggplants, because I can keep a small garden here and keep it wet regardless of the rains."

### P2. Girl Guides anemia prevention badge (Swaziland)

Miremba is 13. She lives in Mbabane in Swaziland and belongs to a Girl Guide troop. The Girl Guides learn a lot of subjects in a very practical way and can pass on what they learn to their families and



friends. Miremba wants to be a nurse, so she and her troop are working for the badge in preventing anemia. They have to learn about how dangerous anemia is for girls and mothers, and how to eat well to prevent it. They keep dietary records, visit markets, plan meals and are creating an iron-rich cookbook. They also make posters, talk to other girls, design reminder cards for pregnant women and volunteer at the clinic.

### P3. Free supper for the champions (Uganda)

The City Football Club does not want food shortages at players' homes to stop them winning the title. This month the Club is providing free supper to make sure their players are well fed. Club officials said that the players lack stamina because they do not eat enough good food and take enough water.

"Most players drink less than two litres of water a day," says the club chairman. "We must also provide supper for everybody at the beginning of the second round of the league," he says.

The players have been getting fruits and eggs every week and the team's performance has improved. With free suppers as well, hopes for the title are high.





#### P4. Street food (South Africa)

Mariam sells cooked food in the market at lunchtime. It's a competitive environment but she is a good cook and her stall is popular. Her problem is that she has no running water. She puts the dirty plates and cutlery in a bucket of water and pulls them out when needed.

One day the market supervisor tells her a customer has complained that he was sick after eating her food and Mariam could lose her licence. Mariam is furious but she is determined to keep her business

going. She takes food safety training and fixes the water problem. She makes food safety a selling point. She puts on bright pink rubber gloves and a cap and makes sure that customers notice. Big copies of her food safety certificate are displayed on the stall. Her children spend hours writing OUR FOOD IS CLEAN AND SAFE! on paper bags with marker pens. She preaches food safety endlessly to her customers. Soon she has a glowing reputation. Sales go up and her rivals are jealous.



### P5. Kung Fu and water bottles (Trinidad)

George and Joseph are brothers. Their favourite occupation is playing video games and they keep themselves going on fried pies, chips and fizzy drinks. One day the local Kung Fu team visits their school on their racing bicycles and gives a show of martial arts. It's more exciting than video games!

In the break, the team munch carrots and drink large amounts of water from their trendy lightweight water bottles. The coach talks about their fighting diet, explains the importance of water and pours scorn on fizzy drinks and chips. George and Joseph are inspired.

Next week at school half the boys have new-style water bottles and are practising kick-boxing. But the fashion soon lapses and the brothers go back to their video games.

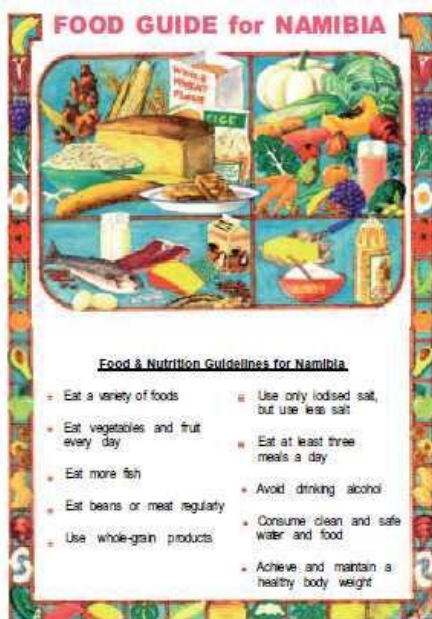
### P6. From housewives to nutrition educators (US)

EFNEP, the US Extended Food and Nutrition Education Program, which has been going for more than 40 years, has had conspicuous and verified success in improving dietary practices among low-income Americans (participants learn to plan nutritious meals, increase physical activity, practise safe food handling, prevent obesity and "stretch their food dollar"). EFNEP estimates that for every dollar invested it saves the country ten.

It is run by community nutrition educators and has an extensive training program. Tina Snyder and Mariellen Woodward both started as homemakers, attended EFNEP courses themselves, then were taken on as community educators and trained. “It’s a very rewarding job,” says Tina. “The beauty of it is that I was where some of these people are now, so I’m able to translate that into helping them to be successful.” Mariellen says “I see so many needs, so many issues – if you can help build them up so they’re a little bit stronger, then they can take care of those issues on their own.”

## P7. Food-based dietary guidelines

Veronica is a local public health officer, responsible for several clinics. Recently, national dietary



guidelines have been developed and posters have been circulated to health centres and frontline workers. As Veronica goes round her district she sees the poster on display, but no-one seems to be using it. She decides to take the guidelines to heart. First she tries explaining them to her own family. Then she calls a meeting of her health workers and asks them to explain the guidelines, to each other, with examples. They all apply the guidelines, one by one, to themselves and their families, think of one improvement to make in their diets and discuss the problems in making these changes (and there are plenty!). Then they make a list of everyone else who should be able to explain the guidelines (e.g. teachers, community leaders) and decide to carry on the process with them.

## P8. Junk food in schools: developing an opinion (UK)

“Junk food” is fatty, salty and sugary snacks and sweet fizzy drinks. In England, the government has banned its sale in schools. Schoolchildren give their opinions about this to a radio station.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Corrie, 13</b> | I think it is great that they are banning junk food. Sure, it tastes nice but it can kill you, what is the point in that?                                      |
| <b>Tom, 11</b>    | I think that it is a good idea to ban junk food from schools so children are more healthy and active and when they have exams their brains will work properly. |
| <b>Ruth, 15</b>   | We should be able to eat what we want if we are paying for it!   |
| <b>Mark, 14</b>   | It is not fair that they are choosing our food for us. It is up to us what we eat, not the government. If we want to be unhealthy then that is our fault!      |

- Sandra, 13** I think it is a really good idea bringing healthy food into school but are the children going to eat it?
- Angus, 12** It is okay to ban junk food at school but I think we should be allowed junk food at Christmas.
- Sally, 10** I think banning junk food is a good idea because you will become healthier. We now have a healthy tuck shop in school. STOP JUNK FOOD!!!
- Janet, 13** I do not think it is such a good idea to ban junk food, as we need to learn to decide what is right and wrong to eat. I think that there should just be more healthy snacks available.
- Heather, 13** I think that junk food should be banned in schools because it is not healthy and does us no good - it rots our teeth, makes us put on weight and gives us spots. BAN IT!!
- Sacha, 15** If people want junk food at home that is their choice, but at school, it is the school's and government's responsibility to keep us healthy.



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## Open questions

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### O1. When leaders take the lead (United States)

Do gestures by leaders make a real contribution? In 2009 Michelle Obama started an organic kitchen garden in the White House grounds, with the help of elementary schoolchildren. The plan was to grow more than 50 food plants and help to provide a healthy diet for the President, his family and his guests. Four years later, Steve Barnes wrote in The Washington Post : “Michelle Obama may have slowly created one of the most influential programs in the Obama administration: The White House Kitchen garden ... there’s some evidence that the gardening message has been heard loud and clear. Last year alone, notes ... the National Gardening Association, the organization received more than 10,000 applications for just 346 grants for school gardens....”

### O2. Stone craving (Kenya)

Do strange food cravings matter? Are they a case for nutrition education? Nancy Akoth is 4 months pregnant and has strange cravings. Some women eat coal, gherkins or soap but Mrs Akoth craves soft stones, known as odowa. "I have this urge to eat these stones. I even wake up at night and go looking for them," she says. Mrs Akoth is not alone. Many pregnant women in Nairobi say they ate soil or stones during pregnancy. The stones are easily found on sale in Nairobi's Gikomba market. They are too soft to break the teeth. “They have a bland taste,” says nutritionist Alice Ndong, “a bit like eating flour. They actually clean the teeth. But if somebody eats these stones and they don't take enough water, then they can get severe constipation. It can cause kidney or liver damage.”

Experts say that the craving is largely due to a deficiency of vital minerals like calcium. "Unfortunately, these stones don't offer a lot of calcium," says Mrs Ndong. "My doctor gave me medication for iron," says Mrs Akoth. “But I still have the urge to eat those stones.”



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## Sources

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Photo: FAO Photo Archive 24649\_2664

**What you learn at home** Adapted from a script by Zambian writers. Picture from FAO Family Nutrition Guide

**Red meat** Supporting source: Africa struggles to control a prolific killer, Katrina Manson, Financial Times 16.11.2011 Picture from Google Images

**Breastfeeding week** Personal experience

**Fat of the land** <http://www.health-e.org.za/news/article.php?uid=20031167> (South African health news website).

**Farmer field schools** Photo: FAO Farmer Field Schools 2336C

**Vegetable micro-gardening** Aldo, aged 60, Ugandan farmer. Evaluation of FAO's activities on capacity development in Africa Rome Oct 2010, Box 7.

**Girl Guides Anemia Prevention Badge** developed by the FANTA project for Uganda, Rwanda & Swaziland (Evaluation of the FANTA project July 2007 USAID).

**Free supper for the champions** Adapted from an article in New Vision, Kampala, 25.02.07 by Swalley Kenyi

**Kung Fu water bottles** Personal anecdote

**From housewives to nutrition educators** Forty years of EFNEP  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7bfM9eTrg4&feature=endscreen&NR=1> EFNEP Data collected from families that participated in EFNEP show that:

- Families increased their healthy food choices by 20 percent.
- Fruit and vegetable consumption improved by 25 percent
- Food Safety practices increased by 30 percent.
- Families increased physical activity by 20 percent.

**When leaders take the lead** "The influence of the White House vegetable garden", Steve Barnes, Washington Post 27 March 2012

**Stone craving** Adapted from "Why Kenyan women crave stones" by Anne Mawathe, BBC News, Nairobi, 18 Sept 2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7596067.stm>



