



Understanding Factors Influencing Consumption of Nutrient-Rich Foods in Northern Nigeria: Implications for Food Systems and Nutrition Programming

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BACKGROUND

Malnutrition is a critical public health concern in Nigeria. Recent data shows that 12 percent of children suffer from wasting, and 88 percent of young children did not meet the minimum acceptable diet.¹ Contributing to malnutrition is the lack of consumption of a diverse, safe diet. In 2022, USAID Advancing Nutrition held consultative workshops in Bauchi, Kebbi, and Sokoto to understand local food system stakeholders' perspectives on priority nutritious foods that, if promoted, could increase incomes and diets in the state. The selected foods included: morning and spinach, eggs and fish, soya bean and groundnut, and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (OFSP). Following this consultative workshop the project designed a consumer demand study to better understand the factors affecting the consumption of these target nutrient-rich foods.

INTERVENTIONS/ RESEARCH METHODS

The research team used a qualitative, cross sectional research approach and implemented focus group discussions (FGD) with female and male caregivers of children vulnerable to wasting in January–February 2023 in Bauchi, Kebbi, and Sokoto. The questionnaire focused on specific foods in each major food group of interest determined from the 2022 consultations. In total, we surveyed 120 female FGD participants (primary audience) and 60 male FGD participants (secondary audience) across the three states. The FGD Guide consisted of five main sections around these target foods:

1. Getting to know your respondents beyond nutrition
2. Understanding eating habits and willingness to try new foods
3. Understanding decision making processes
4. Exploring factors from the stakeholder consultation
5. Community norms surrounding food purchase and consumption.



Photo credit: Helen Keller International

FINDINGS

Factors influencing consumers' purchasing and consumption of selected foods ranged across individual, social/community, and marketplace systems but included considerations around perceived availability and accessibility, perceived affordability, perceived importance for health and nutrition, convenience, taste, and personal/cultural preferences. The assessment found high demand for staple foods such as rice, maize, sorghum and growing demand for selected foods like legumes, dark green leafy vegetables, and animal-source foods.

CONCLUSION

- Use findings to design food systems intervention to design activities that address the aforementioned factors.
- Conduct stakeholder engagement workshops to disseminate findings to local influencers of nutrition and food systems to identify opportunities to address the aforementioned factors.
- Use data and findings as capacity strengthening opportunities for carrying out future consumer demand campaigns and nutrition interventions.

Table 1. Overview of Findings Relating to the Prioritized Foods in the Study Area

Description	Moringa/Spinach	Eggs and Fish	Soya Bean and Groundnut	OFSP
Self-reported consumption practices	Consumed by all respondents	Consumed by most of the respondents, frequency varies though	Consumed almost daily by most of the respondents	Consumed rarely
Perceived availability	Slightly less available in Bauchi, but overall fairly accessible to all respondents	Readily available across all locations in the study area	Readily available across all locations in the study area	Not readily available and respondents do not know where to find it
Perceived desirability	Varying responses around desirability. Some just use for tea, others add to mixed foods, overall seen as a desirable food	Highly desirable foods but are often unaffordable	Desirable and regularly consumed foods	Varying responses around desirability. Most are unfamiliar with it and therefore do not find it desirable
Perceived nutritional value	The nutritional value is known by many of the respondents	The nutritional value is known by many of the respondents	The nutritional value is well-known by many of the respondents	The nutritional value is not well-known by the respondents
Perceived affordability	Affordable	Not affordable for many of the respondents	Affordable	Affordable when available



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KEY TAKE-AWAY

Barriers affecting the purchasing and consumption of safe, nutritious foods in Northern Nigeria are complex. Food systems interventions must take a holistic approach to address the array of barriers in order to increase the consumption of diverse diets.

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¹ FGN (Federal Government of Nigeria) and IITA (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture). 2022. *National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey 2021: Preliminary Report*. Abuja and Ibadan, Nigeria: FGN and IITA.

