

Nutritional Interventions in School Environments

Participatory Workshops on Challenges and Solutions

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Background

Adolescence is a crucial phase in developing behaviours, particularly dietary habits, that persist into adulthood, thereby offering a unique opportunity to promote healthy eating patterns. In Kenya, while rates of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain high, there is a continual rise in overweight and obesity problems as well as diet-related non-communicable diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.). Although schools provide an effective platform for nutrition interventions aimed at adolescents, such initiatives have historically been largely confined to providing meals to boost enrolment, without adopting a comprehensive strategy to address the many ways in which malnutrition can manifest, and remain inadequately documented.

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For more information

<https://www.nutrition-research-facility.eu/>; <https://www.generationh.org/>

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Description of the Research and System

In Kenya, several policy documents, such as the National Nutrition and School Meal Strategy (2017–2022), have been specifically developed to guide the design of health and nutrition programmes in schools. However, the scope of these programmes' implementation and the associated challenges remain poorly documented.

The research project 'SIAA' (School Interventions to Promote Nutritious Diets of Adolescents Living in Urban Africa), funded by the European Commission's Nutrition Research Facility and carried out by the African Population Health Research Centre (APHRC) and IRD, aimed to document which interventions could be implemented or bolstered to improve the diets of 14-18 year olds in city schools. Firstly, we conducted surveys in 30 schools in Nairobi and Kiambu to establish a profile of each school according to the type of interventions. We then launched a participatory research framework to address two questions: 1) What are the challenges associated with implementing nutritional interventions in schools? 2) How can these challenges be overcome?

The Participatory Research Tools Mobilised

At each school, four separate workshops were held with teachers, students, parents and canteen staff to identify the challenges they might face in implementing interventions (28 workshops in total, involving 184 participants). Three activities were organised.

- To verify the accuracy of the school profiles we had available, facilitators displayed photographs in the room depicting the interventions already present at each school (nutrition education, meals, gardens, vaccination, hygiene, etc.). The facilitator reviewed each photo and invited participants to give their opinion via green or red cards on the profile that had been established. Participants described any interventions that were overlooked, and they were added to the school's profile.

- Using large white sheets of paper, participants were asked to discuss challenges to implementing the existing interventions identified in activity 1. These discussions took place freely in small groups before being shared at a plenary session.

- Each participant individually and confidentially assigned a score of 1, 2 or 3 to the three challenges they considered most important among those raised in activity 2. The scores were then tallied to identify the three challenges with the highest overall scores.

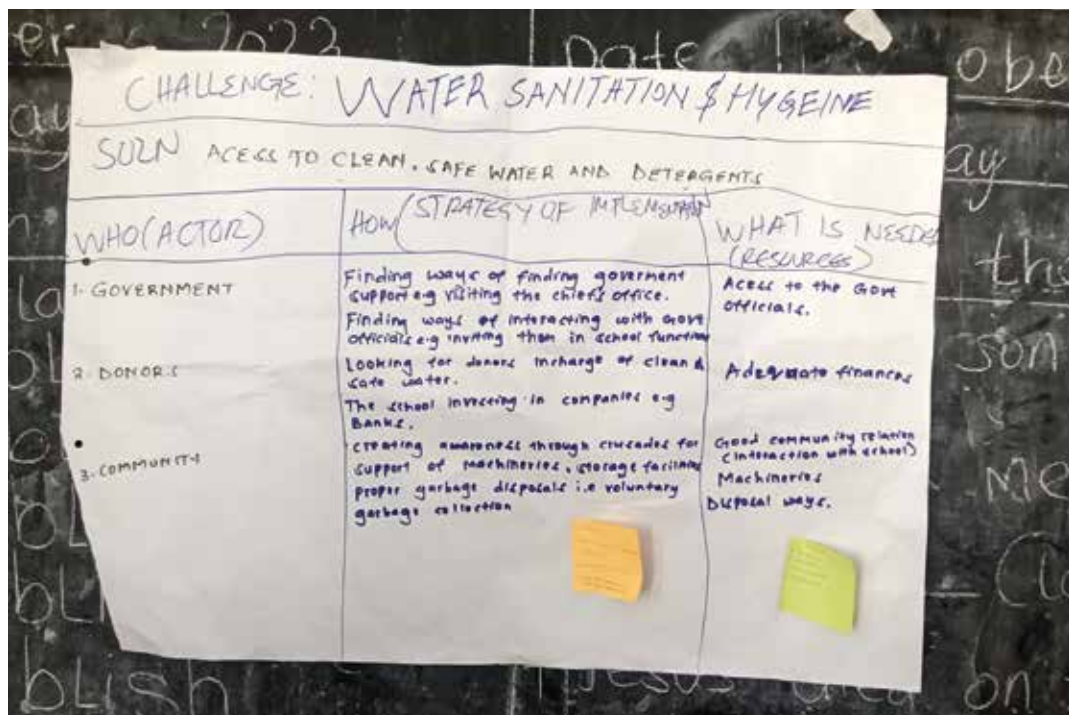
Teachers, students, parents and canteen staff subsequently took part in a second workshop to consider solutions for overcoming the most significant challenges (one workshop per school, seven workshops in total, involving 60 participants). Two sub-groups, one comprised of teachers and canteen staff and the other of parents and students, were formed to ensure active participation, particularly from the students. A four-point matrix guided the work, which involved specifying the 'idea' (the proposed solution), identifying 'who' would implement it (stakeholders), outlining 'how' the solution could be implemented (proposed steps or processes), and stating 'what' they would need



(resources). Participants used coloured sticky notes to add factors that could block or facilitate the implementation of these solutions. The deliberations' results were presented in a plenary session so that each participant could respond and contribute to the discussion. Each workshop lasted between one and two hours and was led by two facilitators.

The Results and Effects Achieved Through the Research

The school community identified many challenges in implementing nutrition-related



Workshops on the challenges and solutions in schools.

interventions. Those concerning the quality of school meals were predominant, notably: 1) insufficient portions served to adolescents, a consequence of parents' late payments, high market prices and a lack of knowledge among canteen staff regarding the standard portion sizes required for growing adolescents; 2) a great monotony in the meals served (primarily cereals and legumes throughout the year) due to high food costs and a lack of equipment for preserving perishables; 3) problems with the nutritional quality and sanitary safety of the foods served (overcooked dishes, diluted porridges, contamination by insects), attributable to staff inadequately trained in proper hygiene and preparation practices as well as the lack of modern kitchen facilities that make cooking difficult (wood/charcoal).

The school community proposed several solutions that could be implemented at either the government or school level, for example: 1) implementing taxes on unhealthy foods (such as sodas) to fund infrastructure and school interventions; 2) involving nutritionists and the school community (including parents and students) in developing menus; 3) creating school gardens and optimising production through innovative agricultural approaches by working with dedicated agricultural services to strengthen the abilities of both pupils and staff. These workshops allowed participants to share their everyday challenges, become aware of one another's constraints, and jointly offer concrete, context-appropriate solutions. They encouraged the community to take ownership of nutrition problems, an essential first step to their full involvement.

TAKEAWAYS

This participatory approach allowed for the production of knowledge that closely reflects the problems and expectations of the school community's various members while facilitating co-construction of solutions by providing everyone with a space for expression and exchange where they could feel like agents of change within their institution. The aim now is to translate these ideas into feasible interventions that account for the viewpoints and constraints of decision-makers and managers in implementing the interventions in school environments. This is the objective of a second research project currently being led by UMR Moisa 'Generation-H'.

SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Volume 4

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Photo p. 12: "Phil'eau" workshop to raise awareness among young people in rural areas about environmental issues and water conservation, Saint-Louis, Senegal.

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Photo p. 38-39: "Phil'eau" workshop in an Ameth secondary school, Saint-Louis, Senegal.

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Photo p. 58: Farmer hoeing the soil (E-Flows-Moz project).

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Photo p. 100-101: Coastal erosion at Djogué in the Casamance River estuary after the storm at the end of May 2014.

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