

Food and nutrition security in Benin



Context

The food and nutrition situation in Benin has been precarious for years. People living in the rural region in the north of the country in particular suffer greatly from an unbalanced and unhealthy diet. Although women are usually responsible for preparing family meals, they themselves lack the necessary resources, such as farmland, livestock or microloans. It is often the men who decide how the household income should be distributed. Poor family nutrition is caused by a lack of access to and availability of nutritious foods. There is also limited knowledge about healthy eating and how to prepare food

properly, so the people are less aware of the problem of malnutrition. Pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and infants in particular have specific nutritional requirements that people are often unaware of. As a result, severe malnutrition, especially among infants, who then end up needing treatment at health centres, is a recurring problem. Only around a quarter of under-twos in the department of Atacora have an appropriately nutritious diet, while over a third of children experience growth delays due to malnutrition, which can lead to lifelong physical and mental impairments.

Activities in Benin

- ➔ **Community-based nutrition counselling**
Women in rural areas are being advised on what constitutes a balanced diet, how to prepare food properly, good hygiene and the nutritional needs of pregnant women and infants.
- ➔ **Competence development for nutrition advisors**
Training on nutrition and a varied diet is being provided for health centre and social centre staff and nutritionists. They pass on their knowledge to voluntary community helpers, who are then able to explain food- and nutrition-related issues and hygiene practices to women in a competent way. The volunteers also act as multipliers and help disseminate the knowledge.

- ➔ **Mainstreaming at national level**
Successful approaches are being mainstreamed via policy consultations and support for the National Council on Food and Nutrition (CAN). Support is also being provided to bolster CAN's position as coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) process. This involves drawing up recommendations for multisectoral approaches to ensuring national food security and incorporating them into relevant national strategies and programmes.

Our objective

The food and nutrition situation is improved for food-insecure people, especially women of childbearing age and infants, in the communes in the department of Atacora supported by the project.



Regions

Department of Atacora (communes: Natitingou, Tanguiéta, Toucountouna, Pehunco, Kerou, Kouandé, Boukoubmé)

Budget and term

EUR 13.5 million/February 2015 to March 2023

Commissioning party

German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Implementation partners

National Council on Food and Nutrition; Ministries of Agriculture, Social Affairs and Health; local non-governmental organisations; social and health centres, therapeutic nutrition centres

Lead executing agency

Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries

Target group

30,000 women of childbearing age, 10,000 children aged between 6 and 23 months

Sustainable Development Goals



Example of our work

In the commune of Toucountouna, located in the department of Atacora in north-western Benin, there is a small village called Moussitingou. It is home to around 1,360 inhabitants, living in 141 households with an average of 9.6 people per household. Support was provided here for an initiative designed to promote home gardens, which started out with five households and now covers almost the whole village. Surprisingly, the whole village community got on board with this scheme, which has led to an improvement in the local food supply. Now, thanks to the commitment and leadership of village leader Mathieu Tchetou, the gardens of Moussitingou have become a reality. Home gardens offer an important opportunity to make vegetables readily available and to improve the quality of food and nutrition within households. Each household has an allotment covering around four square metres, providing residents with fresh vegetables such as okra, leafy green vegetables, chilis, amaranth, moringa, aubergines and wild basil throughout the year – a situation that is rarely seen in this context.

By its own account, this initiative has had a positive impact on the lives of women in Moussitingou: “Now we no longer just eat dried okra. We vary our diet with fresh vegetables from our gardens and our children are doing well.” Another village resident added that “the introduction of home gardens in our village has strengthened the bond of solidarity between us women, so we share the produce from the gardens”.

Results

Around 14,000 people, more than 95 per cent of whom are women, and over 1,700 intermediaries have received training in the form of course and cooking demonstrations. The learning materials are easy to understand and designed in an innovative way. Particular emphasis is being placed on using highly nutritious plants that are available locally. More than 1,600 farmers have been taught how to grow mung beans and orange sweet potatoes that are rich in vitamin A. The project has also promoted the integration of measures into the communes' development and investment plans and the establishment of a coordinating body at departmental level.



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