Technical Brief for Nutrition Field Staff in Sub-Saharan Africa on the Composition of Nutrient-Rich Local and Indigenous Foods

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Adequate nutrition during infancy and early childhood is fundamental to the development of children’s full human potential. Because of the rapid rate of growth and development during the first two years of life, children’s nutrient needs per kg/body weight are very high compared to adults. From 6 months onward, breast milk alone is no longer adequate and needs to be augmented by nutrient-rich complementary food.

There is increasing interest in the use of nutrient-rich locally available and affordable foods, including indigenous foods, for improved complementary feeding. Depending on availability and ease of access, locally available foods may be affordable and potentially more acceptable than other feeding options. Recent research[[1]](#footnote-1),[[2]](#footnote-2) shows that much of the nutrient gap can be closed by foods to which families already have access (even though in the short term supplementation programs may be needed to help children meet nutrient requirements). However, in many cases mothers and nutrition workers are not aware of available nutrient-rich foods and need easy-to-use information about the kinds of food and how to feed a young child.

PROPOSED TECHNICAL BRIEF

To address this information gap and provide easily accessible user-friendly information on the nutrient content of local foods, FAO’s Nutrition Division has begun to compile a technical brief for nutrition field staff in sub-Saharan Africa on the composition of nutrient-rich locally available and indigenous foods that are suitable for complementary feeding. The aim is to provide community nutrition workers with accurate and concise information on the nutrient content of different types of local foods that are suitable for infant and young child feeding. The brief also aims to illustrate the variation in nutrient content of the different foods and their varieties, cultivars or breeds and provide information on how to optimize complementary feeding.

As a first step, we have prepared a food list including currently used and/or recommended foods for complementary feeding which we identified based on a review of complementary feeding recipe books and scientific publications. The food list focuses primarily on raw and cooked foods which also could be used to prepare dishes. Prepared dishes could be added in a second step. The food list is attached and contains 264 foods and ingredients.

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

Your help in reviewing the food list and providing your feedback would be highly appreciated. Please let us know if you consider the foods suitable for complementary feeding; whether any foods are missing that are typically used or could be suitable for complementary feeding in your country (or the sub-Saharan African country you have information for), or provide any other information that would contribute to this effort. We would also appreciate you sharing any compositional data you have for these or other foods, or recipes:

**Foods and recipes:**

* + According to your experience, are there any missing important complementary foods missing in the food list? If so, which ones?
  + So far, no recipes are included. In your view, which ones should be included in the second phase? Please send them together with the name of the recipe, the full description of all ingredients and their quantities in the raw recipe; and the weights of the raw and cooked recipe.

**Food composition:**

* + Can you please provide data on the composition of complementary foods, together with their documentation? Both the compositional data of raw ingredients and ready-to-eat foods are of interest to us. Any format would be suitable; it would however be appreciated if the data could be compiled in the format of the Compilation Tool available at <http://www.fao.org/infoods/infoods/software-tools/en/>
  + If you have any analytical data on the composition of mixed dishes used for complementary feeding, we would highly appreciated it if you could share them, e.g. data on weight and nutrient content of the raw ingredients (including water) as well as weight and nutrient content of the respective prepared dishes.

This project is carried out by Ellen Muehlhoff, Ruth Charrondiere and Verena Nowak

(coordination).

Please feel free to distribute this e-mail to your colleagues.

If you have any additional question, please do not hesitate to contact us ([verena.nowak@fao.org](mailto:verena.nowak@fao.org)).

Thank you very much in advance for your kind help!

1. USAID (2011) Consulting with Caregivers - formative research to determine the barriers and facilitators to optimal infant and young child feeding in three regions of Malawi. <http://www.manoffgroup.com/documents/Consulting-with-Caregivers-Report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. FAO (2014) TIPs report Malawi - summary report (draft). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)