

## Article

# Is Responsive Feeding Difficult? A Case Study in Teso South Sub-County, Kenya

Eleonore C. Kretz <sup>1</sup>, Annet Itaru <sup>2</sup>, Maria Gracia Glas <sup>3,\*</sup>, Lydia Maruti Waswa <sup>4,\*</sup> and Irmgard Jordan <sup>3,5,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Applied Sciences Münster, Centre of Competence for Humanitarian Relief, 48149 Münster, Germany

<sup>2</sup> School of Public Health and Biomedical Science and Technology, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega P.O. Box 190-50100, Kenya

<sup>3</sup> Center for International Development and Environmental Research (ZEU), Justus Liebig University Giessen, 35390 Gießen, Germany

<sup>4</sup> Department of Human Nutrition, Egerton University, Egerton P.O. Box 536-20115, Kenya

<sup>5</sup> Food Environment and Consumer Behaviour Lever Africa Hub, Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT, Nairobi P.O. Box 823-00621, Kenya

\* Correspondence: maria.g.glas@zeu.uni-giessen.de (M.G.G.); lwaswa@egerton.ac.ke (L.M.W.); i.jordan@cgjar.org (I.J.)

**Abstract:** Responsive infant and young child feeding as a reciprocal relationship between the child and his or her caregiver is recommended by the WHO but has received less attention than dietary diversity or meal frequency up to now. The current study assessed common (non)responsive child feeding practices and factors that facilitate or hinder caregivers to improve feeding practices in rural Teso South Sub-County, Western Kenya. The qualitative study used focus group discussion ( $n = 93$ ) and Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs) ( $n = 48$ ) to identify challenges and opportunities in household food distribution and feeding practices. Overall, the implementation of responsive feeding practices was feasible for the caregivers. Parents reported mainly positive experiences in terms of the child's feeding behavior and effects on child health. Traditional beliefs, practices, and cultural norms hindered some households to change intrahousehold food distribution. Households who manage to implement responsive feeding even in food insecure regions should be consulted to (a) improve existing nutrition education messages that acknowledge these cultural norms, (b) to include more responsive feeding information in nutrition education material, and (c) to address gender norms to create awareness of the importance of responsive feeding practices and the need for adequate time allocation for infant and young child feeding.

**Keywords:** responsive feeding; nutrition security; consumer behavior; Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs); Kenya



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## 1. Introduction

The development of children's eating behavior and their dietary intake is influenced by parents, other caregivers, and their social interactions through verbal and nonverbal communication during feeding situations [1–5]. Mutual interactions between caregiver and child are referred to under the term “responsive feeding”, which was defined by Harbrun et al. (2013) as a reciprocal relationship between the child and his/her caregiver [5]. These interactions include the child's verbal or nonverbal communication of hunger and satiety, to which the caregiver responds immediately by offering age-appropriate and nutritious food in a supportive way and appropriate feeding environment. Although the provision of age-appropriate and nutritious food is included in this definition, the focus is usually more on the feeding situation, such as the communication between the caregiver and the child, the balance between assistance and encouragement to eat independently, the way the food is served, or the atmosphere of the feeding situation.