

Perception of proposed preliminary food-based dietary guidelines for Lake Victoria region of Kenya: findings from a qualitative study among adult community members

EC Korir^{a*}, PJ Tuitoek^b  and D Marais^c 

^aDepartment of Human Nutrition, Faculty of Health Sciences, Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya

^bMurang'a University of Technology, Murang'a, Kenya

^cWarwick Medical School, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

*Correspondence: korirem@yahoo.com



Background: Diets in the Lake Victoria region of Kenya have been described as monotonous, consisting chiefly of starchy staple foods, accompanied by green vegetables and oil. To promote healthy eating in the region, 11 food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) were proposed.

Objective: This study was designed to assess perception of the proposed FBDGs amongst consumers in Lake Victoria region.

Design and setting: A qualitative, descriptive cross-sectional design was used to collect data from 36 focus-group discussions (FGD) among adult males (18) and females (18) in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties.

Subjects: A total of 207 adult males (26–74 years) and 211 females (18–71 years) participated in this study.

Data collection and analysis: Proposed FBDGs were printed on posters and presented to FGD participants. Proceedings were audio-taped, transcribed, translated and analysed based on themes.

Results: The proposed FBDGs were perceived as promoting the consumption of a balanced diet. As a concept, a balanced diet was misrepresented as composed of only three nutrients: carbohydrates, proteins and vitamins. There was no mention of fats/oils and minerals as other significant nutrient constituents of a balanced diet. Other concepts, which included 'three regular meals', 'snacks', 'food variety', 'healthy and physically active lifestyle', were polysemous.

Conclusion: The findings provide insight to guide the adaptation of the national FBDGs. The findings also provide a basis for nutrition advocacy programmes and a rationale for the revision of nutrition education materials, including the school curriculum, to align content with current evidence-based information.

Keywords: food-based dietary guidelines, perception, healthy eating, Lake Victoria, nutrition education

Introduction

Almost half of the world's population eats low-quality diets.¹ Analysis of the diet showed that suboptimal diets were the leading global dietary risk factors for mortality in 2017.² Non-optimal intake of wholegrains, fruits and sodium accounted for more than 50% of 11 million global deaths in the year.² Generally, diets in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including those in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), are characterised by high proportions of starchy foods, and are low in animal proteins, and low in fruits and vegetables.³ Persistent prevalence of underweight (24.1%),⁴ a rise in non-communicable diseases (from 18.6% in 1990 to 29.8% in 2017)⁵ in association with nutrition transition⁶ and co-occurring micronutrient malnutrition are issues of public health concern in the region.⁷

Similar to other LMICs in SSA, the population in Kenya, Lake Victoria region experiences the triple burden of malnutrition. A cross-sectional study among 384 children (aged 2 years) in Kisumu found that 23% were underweight, 30% were overweight, 90% consumed insufficient carbohydrates and 31% consumed foods rich in iron.⁸ A survey in Homa Bay found that diets in the region chiefly consisted of staple starchy foods, accompanied by green vegetables and oil.⁹ The Kenyan government's Food and Nutrition policy objective is to increase the quantity and quality of food available and accessible to ensure that all Kenyans enjoy safe food in sufficient quantity and quality throughout the life cycle.¹⁰ However, to improve

diet quality among populations most vulnerable to malnutrition within environmental targets,¹¹ individual countries have been called upon to align the national dietary goals and food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs).¹²

The development and use of FBDGs to promote the consumption of appropriate diets and healthy lifestyles was a goal given priority consideration in the First International Conference on Nutrition (ICN).¹³ Ninety-four countries, including Kenya, have formulated FBDGs.¹⁴ The Kenyan National Guidelines for Healthy Diets and Physical Activity was launched in 2017,¹⁵ when the research reported here was under way. The proposed FBDGs were developed by a 30-member panel of policy-makers in the Health and Agriculture sectors in the Lake Victoria region to promote healthy eating among all individuals above five years of age. The guidelines were then consumer-tested for perception. This paper seeks to present qualitative findings of community members' perceptions of the proposed FBDGs.

Methodology

A qualitative, descriptive cross-sectional design was used in this study. A 30-member panel of policy-makers proposed 11 FBDGs, which were translated into 'Dhuluo', the local language (Table 1). This study was conducted to explore the community members' perceptions of the proposed guidelines. The study was conducted in the year 2017–2018.