

An integrated six monthly point of contact for counselling on complementary feeding and family planning.

Report from Helen Keller International, December 2021

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has successfully transitioned from twice yearly mass vitamin A supplementary to routine services integrated with other high-impact interventions: the promotion of optimal infant and young child feeding and birth spacing to 36 months.

At weekly child health days at peripheral health centers mothers were educated on the importance of introducing a diversity of foods when their infant reaches six months of age to complement on-going breast feeding to 23 months. The BenniMix Food Company developed a pre-roasted



Photo: Ruth Fertig/Helen Keller Intl

dry blend 'PikinMix' that created a nutritious pap when mixed with boiling water. It is easy to use in busy health facilities. Mothers participate in a demonstration and learn how to make a pap from sorghum, sesame, and pigeon peas that they can access at home.

In addition, trained health workers provided routine, confidential counselling on family planning to all care-givers when they attended for child health services. Modern contraception options included long acting hormonal implants. This transition began in 2017 and was completed in late 2021. It was supported by Irish Aid, Global Affairs Canada (via UNICEF) and Give Well. At the end term evaluation feedback from key informants and focus group discussion (FGD) included:

"The demonstrations help prevent malnutrition because they are receiving the right nutrient, at the right age, the right time and hygiene protocol. Before now they didn't know that some of this local food that they have in their backyard garden are so important for the kids; instead, they were using expensive food that some could not afford. But due to our sensitization about the complementary feeding, they now use affordable and accessible food items. CHO interview

"Parents are now able to prepare the bennimix for themselves and now we have less malnourished cases in our catchment communities." MCHP in-charge

"I now know that when I am ready to feed my child, I should not use dirty water to wash my hands, but clean water and soap." FGD.

"I thought family planning was only practiced by educated women or office workers..." FGD
"Before this intervention, women and girls in this community were giving birth to children as if they were in a competition." PHU in-charge

I was aware [family planning], but I did not put it into practice, but when my wife started going there, I saw reason and now I thank God as we do not expect unwanted pregnancy." Spouse