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INDIVIDUALIZED NUTRITION EDUCATION AND GROUP COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS INCREASE KNOWLEDGE ON FISH CONSUMPTION AMONG CAREGIVERS

By Elizabeth Kamau, Catherine Sarange, and Francis Mbogholi

Bora is a 42-year-old fisherman from Kenya. His wife travels for work in another country to earn income for their family, while he cares for their four-year-old son. Bora says he wants to take care of his son by himself and not take him to other relatives, which is the common practice in coastal communities like his. The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish project called *Samaki Salama* (which means "fish security" in Kiswahili) is providing nutrition education and cooking lessons to help Bora make sure he and his son are getting the nutrition they need.

During the first home visit by a Samaki Salama nutrition educator, Bora explained what he and his son typically eat. Then, the nutrition educator shared information on the importance of dietary diversification, especially for the health of his young child.

Seated, Bora, a male caregiver from Kuruwitu village, received nutrition education on the multiple nutrients in fish. (Photo provided by Francis Mbogholi, nutrition educator assistant for the Samaki Salama project)

"After I wake up, I prepare us breakfast, and then I get my son ready for school and give him some money for snacks at school, which usually include *viazi karai* (deep fried potatoes coated with wheat flour), cakes, or *mandazi* (doughnut-like snack)," Bora said. "My son also gets lunch at school. In the evening when I get home from work, I help him do his homework before preparing supper."

The fishermen in the village said the child is very healthy, and since his mother left a year ago, he has only been sick once. Further conversations with Bora revealed he mainly fed the child boiled fish and ugali/sima (this is a stiff maize flour cake eaten with vegetables or meat stews as accompaniments). The nutrition educator asked him why he did not include vegetables or fruits in their diets, and he replied that, while they like vegetables, he does not know how to prepare them well.

"I only know how to boil the vegetables, but my son does not like boiled vegetables," he said. "Also, I must admit that I do not know about the importance of eating fruit."

Bora also was not aware that stunting is caused by nutrient deficiences. He was excited to learn how adding fruits and vegetables could improve his family's diet and wished he learned from his wife how to prepare other meals like stewed vegetables.

When Bora learned about the two cooking demonstrations that would take place in his village teaching cooking methods and meal ideas for a well-rounded diet, he looked forward to participating.

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Cooking demonstrations are part of the Samaki Salama social marketing strategy, implemented with the aim of increasing participants' understanding of the nutritional value of fish and, in turn, increasing fish consumption and eventually improving the nutritional status of young children.

The cooking demonstrations incorporated several different sessions. In one session, the caregivers participated in a food menu game where they planned menus for the young children and had to consider the nutrient density of various foods pictured. During the activity, Bora mentioned that, thanks to the information they received, he noticed the women choosing foods they did not typically cook for their children.

The highlight of the training was the hands-on cooking session where the caregivers prepared a meal from three food groups (carbohydrates, protein which was specifically fish, and indigenous vegetables) to encourage them to practice the same in their homes.

Bora actively partcipated in the preparation of ingredients and in the cooking process. He also wanted to understand which fish provided more nutrients, so he could be sure to provide certain fish to his child. He was informed that all fish had nutrients, so he could bring home any type of fish he was able to catch and prepare it with vegetables and fruit.

During the feedback session after the cooking demonstration, Bora said, "Much of the information was new to me. I usually just cook food for satisfaction and do not consider the nutrition aspect. Now, I know how nutritious fish is and the role of those nutrients in health. When I get home, I will prepare a meal for my son using the skills I have learned today.

"We should educate the whole community with this information, so they can learn the risks of diseases and deficiences and how they can be reduced through a balanced diet."

Note: Bora is a pseudonym out of respect for the participant's privacy.

ABOUT THE FISH INNOVATION LAB

The Fish Innovation Lab supports the United States Agency for International Development's agricultural research and capacity building work under Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative. Mississippi State University is the program's management entity. The University of Rhode Island, Texas State University, Washington University in St. Louis, and RTI International serve as management partners.

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