

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Addressing the Gaps in Maternal, Infant, And Young Child Nutrition Policies in Kenya Post-Covid Era.

Ruth Waithira Chege¹

¹Clinical Nutritionist, Kiambu County

¹Corresponding Author Email: waithiracharles98@gmail.com

Abstract

Proper nutrition during pregnancy, lactation, and early childhood helps to prevent micronutrient deficiencies for mothers and children. Improved maternal nutrition during pregnancy has been associated with improved birth outcomes and minimized risk of pregnancy-related complications. Poor nutrition during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of preeclampsia, anemia, hemorrhage, and death in mothers. In addition, poor nutrition status of mothers leads to stillbirth, wasting, low birth weight, and delayed developmental milestones in children. Mothers are the source of many generations. Thus, their nutrition status predominantly influences the nutrition status of the forthcoming generations.

Given the sensitivity of maternal, infant, and young children nutrition services, the government of Kenya, in partnership with international agencies such as UNICEF and WHO, has developed policies and guidelines to ensure the well-being of this key population. These guidelines and policies address malnutrition, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, health education and counseling, access to healthcare, food security, and policy coordination and implementation.

Although Kenya has come a long way in implementing these policies, there appear to be several gaps in the promotion and application of these policies. Kenya is still struggling with potential gaps in maternal and infant nutrition policies in Kenya including limited coverage of nutrition counseling and support to pregnant women, inadequate focus on preconception nutrition, inadequate support for exclusive breastfeeding, poor integration of nutrition into maternal and child health programs, inadequate coverage of complementary feeding programs especially to children above 24 months of age, poor monitoring and evaluation of systems to examine the effectiveness of various maternal, infant and young children practices.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the uncertainties in the application of nutrition guidelines in maternal nutrition. In particular, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated misperceptions in antenatal nutrition practices, breastfeeding practices, and complementary feeding. These misperceptions persist three years after the onset of the pandemic, thus adding to the existing gaps in the country's maternal, infant, and young child nutrition policies. Within this context, the proposed study will explore the present gaps in Kenya's maternal, young, and infant child feeding policies post-COVID-19 era and suggest sound recommendations to address these gaps effectively.

Key Words: COVID-19 Pandemic, Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition Guidelines, Gaps in Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition Policies, Key policy recommendations, Evaluation of maternal and child nutrition programs