



Practitioner's Guide:

Nutrition Education



Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Technische Zusammenarbeit
(GTZ) GmbH



Bundesministerium für
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
und Entwicklung

Nutrition Education

Brief Description



Nutrition Education is an essential component to improve the nutritional status of a population and is crucial for the well-being of people in general. The ongoing methodological debate keeps addressing the failure of conventional nutrition education and is searching for key issues and lessons learnt in successful educational approaches. Within the integrated Food Security Programmes of GTZ, nutritional education is an integrated part of the concept and has been developed in many projects.

In the past, nutrition education consisted mainly of face-to-face conversations between the health or community worker and individual persons. People were informed about “what to do” instead of encouraged about nutrition and health.

But in recent years, more effective nutrition education approaches, with well-defined strategies in communication and behavioural psychology, have been used by inter-disciplinary teams.

A global approach to nutrition education, based on causes of malnutrition, culturally determined norms and social communication of a community, will be presented in this chapter to bring about long-term behavioural changes in the population.

Figure 1: What do you think about the “Three Food Groups”?



Source: King, F.S.; Burgess, A.: Nutrition in Developing Countries. Oxford Univ. Press, 1996

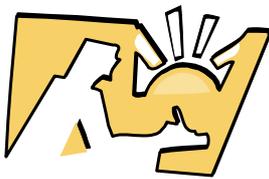
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Proposed Main Users

- ▶ Technical project staff with knowledge in nutrition or public health.
- ▶ Experienced community and public health workers or nutrition specialists with skills in methods of communication



Purpose of the Method



Nutrition Education involves learning new information on nutrition, and its relationship and influence on other sectors such as agriculture, health or environment.

The aims of Nutrition Education are:

- ▶ Knowing which sort of problems it might solve and how to use resources in the most efficient way.
- ▶ Helping people to develop new attitudes and confidence that they need to improve their nutritional habits, and how to feed to their families.
- ▶ Developing, together with the communities, effective educational strategies and communication channels in order to plan adequate messages on nutrition.
- ▶ Training local key persons, health workers, agricultural extensionists and other community or project workers for further promotion of the messages.
- ▶ Reaching men and women as receptors of nutritional messages, women, by themselves, often cannot remove the causes of nutritional problems.

In the past, nutritional advice was not always practical or appropriate for the people, since the messages were decided by nutritionists or health experts of government offices, rather than worked out in association with the local community.

Many times, educators told people what to do, instead of discussing with them what they might be able to do.

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Advantages



- ▶ Nutrition Education is interdisciplinary, combining the sectors of education, communication, nutrition, health and agriculture.
- ▶ Nutrition Education is integrative, because it helps to make the link between physical assets, such as agricultural production or rural infrastructure, and social assets, such as knowledge, attitudes and practices, for a better use of these goods.
- ▶ Nutrition Education enables sustainable and long-term behavioural changes in the field of food consumption and other nutrition related subjects, i.e. health practices.
- ▶ Nutrition Education facilitates the relationship between the project staff, the local leader and the target population through communication.

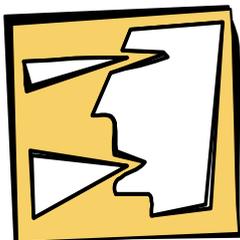
Limitations



- ▶ Nutrition Education has no influence on long-term behavioural changes, if the causes of malnutrition are not known and if the enabling factors for these changes are not ensured (e.g. food consumption can only be changed if the necessary food items are available).
- ▶ Nutrition Education requires specific skills and many resources for appropriate conceptualisation and implementation in the field.
- ▶ Nutrition Education is not an ad-hoc programme with short term effects, but requires a long-term and integrative approach.
- ▶ Nutrition Education needs to respond adequately to the causes of the identified nutritional problems, to the cultural attitudes and psychological constraints. If not, nutrition education remains ineffective.

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Principles & General Procedures



Characteristics and the logic of planning Nutrition Education activities:

Nutrition Education is not an end in itself. Nutrition Education interventions should be part of an integrated programme aimed at linking nutritional messages with other programmes and services.

Community participation, in the attempt to resolve nutritional problems, is recognized as the key approach to design interventions by development planners and nutritionists.

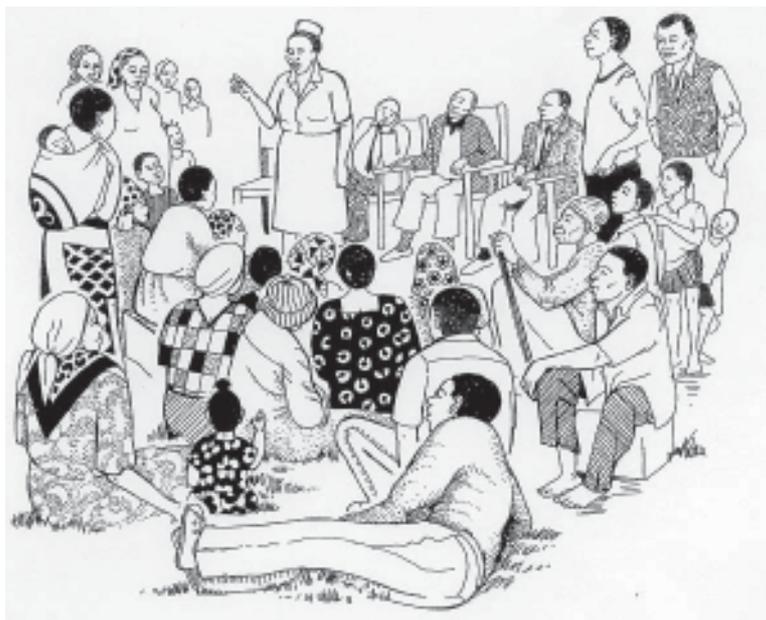
Systematic community participation can be achieved by involving:

- ▶ Representatives of the community (men and women) from village committees or community-based organisations,
- ▶ Local leaders or village chiefs,
- ▶ Religious leaders,
- ▶ Community workers or change agents of local organisations.

These representatives are important facilitators for the modification of socio-cultural beliefs to change nutritional behaviour.

Furthermore, different representatives of the local institutions should be involved. Integrating teachers, agriculturists or health workers to transmit nutritional messages can be crucial for long-term behavioural changes and assure the collaboration between sectors.

Figure 2: Talking at a public meeting



Source: King, F.S.; Burgess, A.: Nutrition in Developing Countries. Oxford Univ. Press, 1996

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Principles & General Procedures

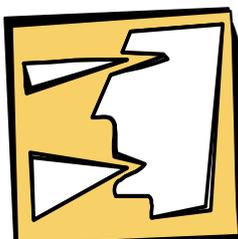
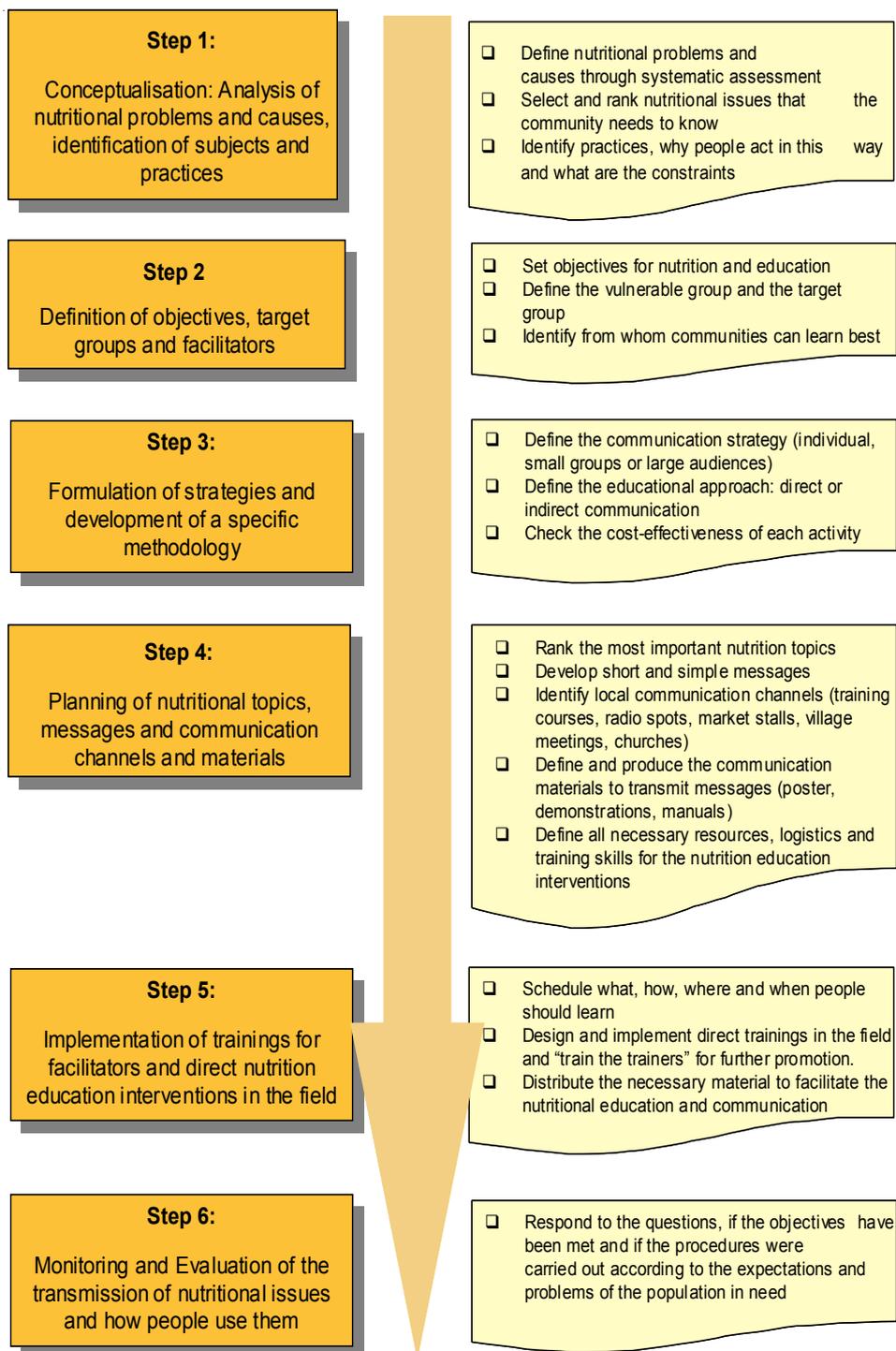


Figure 3: The main steps for planning and implementing Nutrition Education activities



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Principles & General Procedures

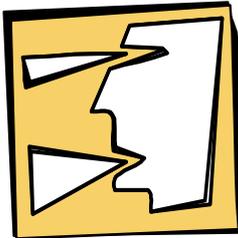


Table 1: General considerations for successful Nutrition Education

- ⇒ Provide a clear formulation of the nutritional problems. Apply relevant assessment procedures, such as Nutrition Baseline Surveys, focus group discussions or in-depth interviews, to determine the type and magnitude of the nutrition problem.
- ⇒ When designing "messages": Keep them short and simple and ensure that they are clear; provide reliable information and show the relationship between the nutritional problem, its causes and the recommended behaviour; and make use of local expressions.
- ⇒ Make people think about nutrition problems. Take materials or photos as a "starter" to introduce the topic of interest during the first few meetings or training sessions.
- ⇒ Have something to demonstrate - a learning aid. Real things, such as food items or utensils that people use, are better than pictures or posters. They make the theoretical message more practical and enable their application.
- ⇒ Get the audience to participate - encourage them to ask questions and discuss issues of importance.
- ⇒ Ask the audience questions to review the topics of the nutrition education session. The more people who participate actively, the higher the acceptance of putting the messages into practice.
- ⇒ Use different methods and tools of Nutrition Education to transmit the same messages through various communication channels to the same person or group. These practices have resulted in the highest impacts of nutritional improvements within a community.

Figure 4: Doing food demonstrations with local women



Source: King, F.S.; Burgess, A.: Nutrition in Developing Countries. Oxford Univ. Press, 1996

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