

## Women Empower Women to Improve Children's Diets in Nigeria



Photo credit: Susan Adeyemi, SPRING/Nigeria

Aminci Support Group members contribute money to a common pool of funds that can be used to increase the diversity of foods eaten by their families.

---

**“Now we can buy little fish to add to our food and we have seen great improvement in the health of our children in the community.”**

--Zaituna Muhammed,  
IYCF community volunteer  
Unguwan Sarki, Nigeria

---

### Bringing Better Practices to Caregivers

Most women in Nigeria's Kajuru Ward are in polygamous marriages. As a result, many households must split limited resources among multiple wives and their children. In addition, caregivers in the area have little knowledge of or experience practicing optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF). This is according to a baseline evaluation of the *Nigeria Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (C-IYCF) Counselling Package* conducted jointly by the USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project, UNICEF, and the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH).

To bring better infant and young child feeding practices to caregivers like the ones in Kajuru Ward, the FMOH—with support from UNICEF—is rolling out the *C-IYCF Counselling Package*. The package uses trainer and participant manuals, counseling cards, key messages booklet, and take-home brochures to help health workers and community volunteers bring relevant information and support to caregivers. These materials provide updated technical guidelines on a variety of topics, such as breastfeeding and IYCF in the context of HIV.

The package also teaches skills health workers need for one-on-one and group counseling, including listening, learning, building confidence, and support skills. The FMOH, UNICEF, and SPRING, jointly with the State Ministry of Health (SMOH) and the Kajuru local government, are implementing the package and carefully assessing its processes, implementation, achievements, and costs to provide findings useful for future decision making about C-IYCF programming in Nigeria and beyond.

## A Support Group Innovates

As part of the rollout in Kajuru, we (the collaborating partners) have conducted a series of meetings about the importance of IYCF with community leaders to sensitize them to the need for better feeding practices. We also trained and mobilized community volunteers to lead IYCF support groups and conduct visits to homes, where they can help caregivers maintain better feeding practices.

In July 2015, after completing the C-IYCF training, community volunteer Zaituna Mohammed started the Aminci IYCF support group in Unguwar Sarki with 12 members. As the baseline evaluation had reported, many group members live in polygamous households and have limited resources, making it difficult for them to feed their children a diversity of foods. One woman explained that she has to “ask [her] husband for money to buy even seasoning cubes.”

To support optimal feeding practices, the women in the Aminci support group decided to start a revolving savings scheme also known as “*adashe*” or “*bashi*” in Hausa. Each month, group members contribute a specified amount to a common fund. During the meeting, the entire contribution is given to two members chosen according to a schedule.

Members have put these savings to good use. Some have started businesses to generate income for food. All of the women report that they no longer have to ask their husbands for money to buy additional food, which has allowed them to improve their children’s dietary diversity.



Photo credit: Susan Adeyemi, SPRING/Nigeria

Community volunteer Zaituna Mohammed holds a card depicting optimal feeding practices.

“Now we can buy little fish to add to our food and we have seen great improvement in the health of our children in the community,” said Zaituna.

## A Powerful Collaboration

The collaborative efforts of the FMOH, SMOH, UNICEF, and SPRING to bring better infant and young child feeding practices to Nigeria are bearing fruit. Zaituna now has 26 support group members and has started a second support group, *Rahama*. Members in both groups have embraced the new feeding practices as well as the savings scheme. Their initiative to establish the *adashe* has played an important role in the increased adoption of optimal complementary feeding in Unguwar Sarki.

For more information about the ongoing evaluation of the *C-IYCF Counselling Package*, visit: <https://www.spring-nutrition.org/about-us/activities/evaluation-community-iyfc-counseling-package>.

This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement AID/OAA-A-11-00031 (SPRING), managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) with partners Helen Keller International, the Manoff Group, Save the Children, and the International Food Policy Research Institute and by funding and technical support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) with leadership of the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) of Nigeria. The contents are the responsibility of JSI, UNICEF, and the FMOH of Nigeria and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. We are thankful for the input and feedback provided by staff of the USAID Bureau of Global Health. This work would not be possible without the work of UNICEF, FMOH, and SPRING staff; the National Bureau of Statistics; the Kaduna State Ministry of Health (SMOH); the Kajuru local government area (LGA); Kajuru health workers; and the Community Volunteers of Kajuru.