

## Nigeria's Nutrition-Savvy Dads

### The Benefits of Involving Fathers in Infant and Young Child Feeding Support Groups

By SPRING/Nigeria



Photo by SPRING/Nigeria

Community-IYCF support group member David Kershima and his son, who has benefitted greatly from his father's participation in the group.

**“My wife and I have had the opportunity to learn from the support group. We learned about nutrition during pregnancy and how to care for our child after delivery through the appropriate infant and young child feeding practices.”**

**-David Kershima,  
C-IYCF Support Group member**

A farmer, David Kershima lives in Mbaïam community in Benue State. He and his wife joined a community-based infant and young child feeding (C-IYCF) support group in June 2014, when his wife was almost nine months pregnant with their first child. As new parents-to-be, they were eager to learn about optimal nutrition in a country where 37 percent of children are stunted, 18 percent are wasted, and 29 percent are underweight due to malnutrition.<sup>1</sup>

To provide their children with the best diet possible, parents and caregivers need up-to-date nutrition information and counseling support. The USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project builds the capacity of local partner organizations to create awareness of IYCF through community sensitization meetings and the establishment of IYCF support groups. Prior to the formation of IYCF support groups in Benue, most community members had very little knowledge of appropriate IYCF practices, which meant that many of the community's children were not properly nourished.

David and his wife heard about the IYCF support group through a civil society organization (CSO) trained by SPRING. Members of the CSO, which conducts community sensitization meetings on IYCF prior to establishing support groups, explained to David and his wife that the C-IYCF support group

<sup>1</sup> National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF International. 2014. *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2013*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF International.

would teach them the most effective ways to care for and feed their child. They have been active members of the group ever since. David attends meetings even when his wife is not available to participate.

In the IYCF support group, leaders and participants discuss key behaviors for optimal IYCF, such as the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for six months, with an emphasis on demonstration, sharing of personal experiences, and counseling. The support groups typically include 15-20 mothers and their children, but other family members—such as mothers-in-law and husbands—also attend.

Just one of the many nutrition-savvy dads emerging in Nigeria through participation in C-IYCF support groups, David makes it a point to put what he learns at the group meetings into practice. “I started to support my wife by buying fruits and vegetables to include in her diet. When my wife delivered, she breastfed our son exclusively, giving him only breastmilk without water or other foods or drinks. When our child was six months old, we started complementary feeding. We gave him locally available foods so we did not have to buy things we did not have.”

David continues to participate in the IYCF support group and shares the lessons he has learned with other members of their community. “I am very happy with the outcome. We have never had to take our child to the clinic for treatment of any



Photo by SPRING/Nigeria

Parents attend a C-IYCF support group meeting in Benue State, Nigeria to learn about optimal nutrition practices.

ailment. He is now a year and eight months old, and he is strong, active, and healthy.”

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Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, SPRING has provided technical support focusing on the first 1,000 days of life to prevent stunting and anemia in Nigeria since 2012. SPRING works in 104 local government areas across 16 states to strengthen community support systems by training community volunteers, establishing support groups, building the capacity of primary health care facilities in IYCF, and fostering linkages between support groups and facilities.

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