

## Conquering Challenges to Better Nutrition: The Women of Kajuru, Nigeria



Photo credit: Susan Adeyemi, SPRING/Nigeria

Bege Support Group members discuss optimal infant and young child feeding with community leader Mai Ungwar.

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--Bege IYCF Support Group member

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### Embracing New Knowledge and Tools

Many women in Kajuru, Nigeria now understand and practice the best way to feed their infants and young children. But this wasn't always the case. It wasn't until the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and Kaduna State Ministry of Health (SMOH)—supported by UNICEF and the USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project—rolled out the *Nigeria Community Infant and Young Child Feeding (C-IYCF) Counselling Package* in June 2015 that community members adopted optimal feeding practices. Previously, without the right knowledge and tools, many households were unable to provide their pregnant women and children under two years with the nutrients they require, even in the midst of plenty.

According to a baseline evaluation we conducted as collaborating partners (FMOH, UNICEF, SPRING, SMOH), the women of Kajuru were relying on their husbands to purchase or produce foods to meet their daily nutritional needs. But the men were focused on selling what they produced instead of using the extra food in their own households.

To help the women of Kajuru overcome these challenges, we supported a series of meetings with community leaders about the importance of optimal IYCF practices for the first 1000 days from pregnancy through a child's second birthday. The meetings convinced the leaders of the need for change. We also trained and mobilized community volunteers to lead IYCF support groups and conduct visits to households wanting to try the new practices.

## Spreading Nutrition Messages

After completion of the local IYCF training for community volunteers, one woman from Unguwan Mission, Mrs. Laraba Victor, started the Bege IYCF Support Group. During meetings, Mrs. Victor shares messages and instruction on IYCF. About these meetings, one group member said, “Before I started attending [them], I had never heard of exclusive breastfeeding. Now, I am practicing it and my child is very healthy.” Another member said she only started attending antenatal care visits at the local health facility after she began participating in the IYCF support group. She was six months pregnant at that time. Since then, she has delivered a healthy baby whom she breastfed immediately after birth and is now breastfeeding exclusively.

Mrs. Victor also taught group members how to use locally available staples to produce nutritious complementary foods for young children. The members agreed that each month they would contribute ingredients and a small sum of money for additional ingredients to produce the complementary food, “Tom Brown,” a combination of soya bean, Guinea corn, and groundnut powder.

## Sharing the Bounty

Group members and their families shared the first batch of Tom Brown with their family members, then decided to give subsequent batches to poorer mothers in the community. They said this would serve as part of their contribution to improving IYCF practices and the nutritional status of children



Photo credit: Susan Adeyemi, SPRING/Nigeria

The Bege Support Group processed these soya beans to make the dish known as Tom Brown.

in their community. It would also be an incentive to attract more caregivers to the group. In addition, they plan to sell some of the food they produce and use the proceeds to start a cooperative.

It is evident that when the women of Kajuru are mobilized and given the necessary skills and support, they can overcome the challenges confronting them.

Findings from a mid-process assessment of the *C-IYCF Counselling Package* conducted by SPRING, UNICEF, and the FMOH in April 2016 indicate that IYCF support groups can provide community members—particularly women—the knowledge, skills, and the platform they need to support one another. The creativity and initiative of the Bege Support Group is an excellent example for other communities to learn from, test, adapt, and replicate.

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