

Putting Training into Practice for Better Infant and Young Child Nutrition in Nigeria

A Community Volunteer's Story

By SPRING/Nigeria



Photo by SPRING/Nigeria

Mary (third from left) and her baby, Osogbon, attend a C-IYCF support group meeting in Eror community.

The SPRING C-IYCF training has helped me a lot. The things I learned worked for my baby and me. Today I now know that the IYCF training was for the greater good of my baby.

—Mary, Osobgon's mother and a community volunteer

From Skeptic to Nutrition Champion

A community volunteer in Eror, a remote area of Nigeria's Edo State, Mary Ohamije was skeptical at first about the value of community-based infant and young child feeding (C-IYCF). In June 2014, she attended a three-day training on the topic even though she felt that she had nothing new to learn about feeding babies. At the time, she was pregnant with her fourth child and planned to feed her new infant a mix of breastmilk and other liquids and foods the way she had with her first three children. Although Mary was wary of being told what to do by a government-sanctioned program, she was pleasantly surprised by what she learned.

Mary now knows not to give a baby any food or drink other than breastmilk (not even water) for the first six months. She learned the value of "first milk," or colostrum, to a baby's development and how to express breast milk by hand (manually) and keep it sanitary for safe feeding later.

Rollout of the C-IYCF Package

Funded by the U.S Agency for International Development, the Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project promotes improved nutrition practices and access to quality nutrition services in Nigeria through the rollout of the *Nigeria Community-Based Infant and Young Child Feeding Package*. The rollout, which depends on

community volunteers like Mary for its success, seeks to increase the adoption of optimal nutrition practices for infants and young children as a way to reduce stunting and malnutrition in the country. Highly motivated C-IYCF support group leaders like Mary complete a series of technical trainings that equip them to teach caregivers proper infant and young child nutrition and hygiene. They lead support group meetings, typically once a month or every two weeks, with 12-15 community members—including fathers, mothers-in-law, and other caregivers, as well as mothers—to talk about IYCF practices.

Practicing What She Teaches

When Mary's baby, Osogbon ("the new phenomenon"), was born, she decided to apply the knowledge that she had gained about IYCF to feeding her own child. She says, "It is a source of joy and relief knowing that my husband can feed my baby with my expressed breast milk as well as spending less on baby food and drugs. My baby is growing well and is very healthy. Our incomes have increased as we have had no reason to buy drugs or go to the hospital for treatment of common child diseases."

Mary and her husband continue to educate other households, particularly those with women of reproductive age, about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. She remains an active member of Omokhodion ("the child comes first")



Photo by Peggy Koniz-Booher, SPRING

As a community volunteer, Mary Ohamije helps women like this member of a local C-IYCF support group adopt optimal infant and young child feeding practices.

C-IYCF Support Group in Eror so that she can help other women benefit from this SPRING-facilitated initiative to improve lives by improving nutrition.

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 reduce maternal and child undernutrition; improve HIV-free survival of infants and young children; improve the national, social, and policy environments as they relate to priority nutrition practices and services; and increase access to nutrition information, counseling services, and other efforts to prevent undernutrition.

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JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.
1616 Fort Myer Drive, 16th Floor
Arlington, VA 22209, USA
Phone: 703-528-7474
Fax: 703-528-7480
Email: info@spring-nutrition.org
Internet: www.spring-nutrition.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com