

Community-Based Approaches To Hunger Reduction: Examining Unicef's Advocacy Strategies In Rural Cameroon

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Abstract

The development organizations are facing challenges in addressing hunger and poverty epidemic across the world despite establishing robust advocacy strategies. Rural communities in Cameroon have showed significant change in terms of empowerment and hunger reduction which has prompted the need to examine the extent of implementation of UNICEF advocacy strategies that are community owned, led and managed towards hunger reduction. The study adopted resource mobilization theory and utilized qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups with 36 purposeful samples from women's groups, farmer's groups, youth, health workers, and traditional authorities. The study established that advocacy strategies employed by UNICEF have potentially reduced malnutrition and increased Agro-ecological resilience among the local communities because of incorporation of traditional agricultural knowledge and modern practices. The study recommends adoption of multi-stakeholder approaches, culturally appropriate programs, and follow up systems to promotes inclusivity and ensures diverse perspectives are considered and facilitates sustainable solutions through collaboration and collective ownership. The future research needs to examine how innovative digital tools can complement participatory food security and community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Keywords: Hunger reduction, community-based approaches, Advocacy strategies, Food security

Introduction

The state of hunger in the world requires immediate and global attention. However, hunger is more acute in rural communities within developing countries, where food insecurity is intensified by increase in poverty, climate change, and lack of resources (FAO, 2022). In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 23% of the population is chronically undernourished, with rural communities experiencing higher levels of undernourishment due to existing inequalities linked to food access and access to agricultural support, including resources (WFP, 2023). Cameroon is a nation with significant rural populations which are suffering from high levels of hunger and is often referred to as a 'country of serious hunger', especially in the northern and eastern regions, which as a result of conflict and environmental destruction lack food security (UNDP, 2021). Climate Hungry's focus on innovative, community-based approaches to hunger mitigation aims to integrate local communities to enhance their own capacities to address hunger some of which is compounded by international support and assistance. The internationally recognized United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are among the organizations doing such international work, as they establish interventions to mitigate hunger and sustainable initiatives to promote long term self-reliance and resilience (UNICEF, 2023).

Community approaches to hunger mitigation are frame around local approaches that value the socio-cultural and socio-economic of populations they (Maxwell et al, 2020). Community approaches are valuable alternatives to international relief responses to hunger which often exacerbate existing inequalities and 'top-down' forms of 'aid' that are often ineffective relative to community-based approaches (Chambers, 2019). UNICEF's intervention in rural Cameroon, provides nutritional support, supports local agricultural training activities, and works

collaboratively with political leaders to mitigate food insecurity, and empower rural Cameroonians with information to address their own food security from the community level, developing local solutions to their challenges (UNICEF, 2022). UNICEF's models of engaging with local influencers, women's groups, and youth organizations produce ownership in the hunger reduction initiative, thus making their interventions more effective and sustainable (Cornwall & Jewkes, 2021).

UNICEF processes in Cameroon's hunger acknowledgement focus around a multi-sectoral framework where improving child nutrition through food delivery and secure livelihoods for farmers focuses on the multiple linkages of hunger and multi-sectoral approaches of health and education with support for improved child nutrition (Black et al., 2021). For example, school feeding programs facilitate improved child nutrition, and higher retention and completion rates at school, effectively breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger (Global Partnership for Education, 2023). In another example, UNICEF champions Climate Smart and Climate Adapting Agriculture, enabling smallholding farmers to navigate drought resistant production methods for improved food production to offset the impact of climate change to food security (FAO, 2021), furthering their community-led interventions with and advocacy campaigns demanding senior governments formalizing food security and social protection policies and practices (UNICEF, 2023). By working on hunger issues holistically using multi-sectoral approaches, this ensures that UNICEF empowers communities and ultimately the sustainable benefits that flow from interventions are felt by rural communities in Cameroon.

Despite the above strategies, issues relating to funding, low transportation capabilities and red tape surrounding political instability will always be challenges to solving any signaling hunger reduction activity (Oxfam International, 2022). Cameroons' extent of the crises in Anglophone regions and the Lake Chad Basin conflict have displaced thousands of people, which have impacted their agricultural sector and food production and supply in Cameroon (International Crisis Group, 2023). UNICEF's responses incorporate emergency distribution of food aid, however wider structural reforms and the African ramifications require investment in rural infrastructure (World Bank, 2022). It is against this backdrop, the study seeks to assess the community based-advocacy Strategies employed by Unicef to reduce hunger in rural community, Cameroon.

Literature Review

Global and Regional Assessment of Hunger

Hunger continues to be one of the most critical concerns facing our world, with ramifications of human health, economic development and social stability. In 2021, there were an estimated 828 million people worldwide that experienced hunger (FAO, 2022) with sub-Saharan Africa identified as one of the areas most affected by this crisis. The causes of hunger are interconnected and can include poverty, conflict, climate change and lack of agricultural development. Social science scholars underpin the necessity for approaches that are sustainable and context-specific, such as community-based approaches, to address hunger (FAO, 2022), as these are more likely to be sustainable and culturally relevant in more diverse contexts.

Sen, A. (1982) argued against the typical and traditional causal pathway for famine predominantly based on food shortages, and instead suggested that economic inequity and entitlement failures are significant drivers of hunger. Sen discussed how hunger occurs in situations with enough food, as systemic barriers such as declining wages, unemployment rates, increases in food prices, and how food resources are distributed, restrict vulnerable populations from gaining access to resources. Sen's notion of "entitlement failure" highlighted that the most common and persistent barrier to food acquisition is due to economic and social barriers, not lack of resources, changing global responses to famine and poverty remediation (Sen, A., 1982).

Research conducted by Godfray, H. C. J., et al. (2010) highlighted the significant challenges climate change presents for food and food security regions globally, but particularly affecting developing countries where agriculture productivity is already vulnerable. Secondly, while they acknowledge that land degradation and water scarcity is worrying, Godfray, H. C. J., et al. illustrate how climate change (extent of increasing temperatures, creating floods and extreme weather events) exacerbate competition for land and energy, and threaten crop yields and food supply. In light of these challenges, they recommend adaptive approaches that draw on local knowledge,

community engagement, and technology to develop resilience and sustainability in food systems. These approaches aim to narrow the "yield gap" while promoting access to food by all and minimizing the environmental impact (Godfray, H. C. J., et al. 2010).

Böhm, S., et al. (2020) critiques of the current global food system that privileges profit above nutrition lead to hunger and non-sustainable food production, favours a localized food system that gives power back to communities which can sustainably produce and distribute food. Community resilience and community participation is the core premise supported by this approach to food. By developing localized food systems and allowing communities greater control over their food producers, Lang believes that communities will be able to better control for nutrition, react less to industrial agriculture, and advocate for a more just and ecological food system. In line with reform of global food policy to meet systematic challenges and develop food security in all contexts (Böhm, S., et al. 2020).

Jayne, T. S., et al. (2010) identify structural aspects of African agriculture that limit adoption of good agriculture practices - access to technology, credit and markets, as barriers to productivity, economic growth. For Jayne, T. S., et al. the answer is community driven agricultural interventions that are focused on addressing local barriers to entrenched inequality, rural institutions, farmers' access to land and techniques for innovation (agricultural) to support agri-businesses that are smallholders. Maxwell, D., et al. (2012). also connect conflict to hunger in the Sahel and Central Africa, focusing on the displacement of people that disrupts the food systems, as a contributor to the increased poverty. They make proposals for integrated approaches that bring together food assistance for immediate needs with peacebuilding and community development for longer term resilience in post-conflict settings.

As Agarwal, B. (2018) explains women face formal and informal barriers to accessing resources, education, and decision-making power, which reinforces gender inequality and food insecurity, particularly in rural areas. Agarwal argues that enhancing food security to build resilience requires the education of women, equitable access to land, and greater participation in farming. By addressing the barriers to women's access and participation, women can contribute to improving agricultural productivity and nutrition of the household, creating the conditions for more environmentally and socially sustainable food systems. In this way, addressing gender inequalities must form part of broader social policies and programs that tackle hunger and development agendas Agarwal, B. (2018).

In hunger reduction, community-based approaches focus on participatory processes that incorporate local populations in the planning, implementation and monitoring of food and nutrition programs. Community-based approaches encourage the use of community health readjust volunteers, mother groups, local leaders, and farmer cooperative delivery models, focusing on training volunteers to provide nutrition and food support; and fostering agricultural resilience and food access. For example, in the rural areas of Cameroon, UNICEF has incorporated these models in areas like Buea, Ekona, and Mamfe, by introducing community nutrition volunteers and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) support groups for mothers (UNICEF, 2022). UNICEF community outreach teams support women-led group communities or associations to provide caregivers with education on how to prepare locally available nutritious foods in Banga Bakundu and Mbalangi (South West Region). These programs have increased maternal understanding of nutrition and have contributed to a reduction in the incidence of moderate acute malnutrition among children under five (Ngwenyi et al., 2020). While these programs recognize and leverage local networks and local knowledge, they are more sustainable and contextually relevant.

In addition to nutrition education, community by community agricultural initiatives are also entangled in alleviating hunger in rural Cameroon. In the Adamawa region of Cameroon, farmer field school promotion and establishing drought resistance crops in villages (like Tibati and Meiganga) has also enhanced food security against hunger for smallholder farmers (FAO, 2021). In the North-West and Far North regions, community gardens and home-grown school feeding programs had been utilized as conduits for improving access to food while also enhancing community ownership. In places such as Kousseri and Mokolo with the support of UNICEF and WFP, established local committees monitored food distribution and the nutritional status of children in a more holistic anti-hunger approach (WFP, 2022). The examples above are illustrative of decentralised strategies initiated at the grassroots level that adopts a more holistic anti-hunger agenda in rural contexts when successful.

However, for the initiatives to be successful, these initiatives need ongoing support, capacity building and cooperative working between INGOs and local actors.

UNICEF was involved in championing community led nutrition programming, specifically as it relates to variability in training of local health workers and volunteers. These programs advocate breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and vitamin and mineral supplementation activities which now mean there has been a significant decrease in malnutrition levels for populations in selected communities (UNICEF, 2020). Additionally, UNICEF has collaborated with local governments to create school feeding programs which provide children in rural areas with daily meals to directly reduce hunger and promote improvement in school attendance and performance by improving children's nutritional intake to assist their ability to learn (UNICEF, 2019). Both programs emphasize the role of community involvement and education to improve children's nutritional status.

Addressing rural hunger in Cameroon presents a difficult task, especially in the Far North, North West and South West regions. Here food insecurity remains a challenge with conflicts and climate-related shocks (World Food Programme, 2023). Specifically, populations in the Far North, including villages like Mogodé and Koza, continue to experience negative food security impacts from recurrent drought and a Boko Haram insurgency. This has caused the disruption of cultivation and displacement of farming families (Mbih et al., 2020). The Northwest and Southwest regions continue to be affected by the Anglophone crisis disrupting agriculture and markets and blocking humanitarian access which is also contributing to malnutrition in the two regions (Amnesty International, 2022). Even in the East Region, while the social climate appears reasonably stable it is possible the poor infrastructure in villages like Bertoua and Batouri is inhibiting communities and their markets from accessing agricultural extension services as well as making a concerted effort to improve their on food shortages (Fonjong et al., 2021). Overall the complex interplay of conflict, climate change vulnerability, and poor governance represents additional barriers to efforts to address hunger reduction.

As well as the structural aspects that challenges hunger reduction there are also cultural and socio-economic dimensions to consider. For example, there are ongoing conflicts between pastoralists and farmers in and around the Adamawa Region particularly in villages like Ngaoundéré and Tignère, some pastoralists are unable to access grazing land therefore limiting food production in already complicated setting (Moritz et al., 2022). Additionally, in the South Region Bagyeli communities have experienced both dispossession of land and limited access to government nutrition programs whilst living in close proximity to Bipindi (Njamnshi et al., 2021). Regardless of UNICEF's growing base of evidence to trial school feeding programs as well as women's agricultural cooperatives in areas of the Far North, Northwest and Southwest most challenges stemmed from logistical issues coupled with baseline funding limitations (UNICEF, 2023). The examples illustrate the need for community engagement and mapping over specific cultural and socio-economic contexts to address structural and localized food security indicators affecting communities in Rural Cameroon.

Theoretical framework

Social identity theory was propounded by John McCarthy and Maye Zald in 1970s. The theory evolved as scholars from the sociology discipline sought to examine the effects of the social advocacy movement and non-profitable institution interventions on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable societies and moreover understand its emergence, and significance to the scholarly world (Edwards & Kane 2014, Jenkins 1983). The theory alludes that the social movement organizations must ensure the resources are legitimacy managed during crises time in order to preserve resource streams and key exchange relationships (Gillham & Edwards 2011) and the organizations should put measures in place to ensure the local communities benefits from the initiatives (Pilny et al. 2014).

In addition, recent studies on resource mobilization theory have showed that religious organizations have increased pressure through mobilization of protest to ensure the governments of the day allocates resources to support the vulnerable population by cushioning them against the shocks and stresses (Kim & McCarthy 2016). The mobilization of protest by the religious organization results to different movement outcomes (Abromiviciute et al. 2019) and increased number of advocacy movements and lobbying expenditures contributes to increase in government funding towards addressing economic crises across the country (Best 2012).

The Resource mobilization theory underpins the study as it affirms that the greater the mobilization capacity and advocacy strategies of social movement organizations, the greater its potential for achieving social change goals in the society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Data Collecting, Presentation, Analysis, Validity and Reliability according to context.

The research was conducted using a community based participatory research (CBPR) paradigm. The CBPR paradigm involved equitable collaboration between researchers and local collaborators to develop meaningful and sustainable interventions that are relevant to the local context. Data collection consisted of interviews for key informants and focus group discussions with 19 and 36 participants respectively drawn from six rural communities in Cameroon, representing a proportionate balance in gender, age and diversity in roles including leaders of women's groups, farmers, youth, health workers and traditional authorities. This approach allowed the researchers to access a range of perspectives on hunger reduction and participatory observations provided contextual background to corroborate and deepen the qualitative results.

Study Area and Population

The research took place in six rural Cameroonian communities situated in two regions of Cameroon: South-West Region (Banga Bakundu, Ekona and Mamfe) and the Adamawa Region (Tibati, Meiganga and Nyambaka). These communities were selected based on rural community status, high levels of food insecurity, and the presence of UNICEF programs in promoting community based nutrition and food assistance. Gender Balance: 21 female / 15 male voices. Age Representation: Teens (15-19) to elders (70)

Geographic Spread: Conflict Zone (Banga Bakundu), Drought Corridor (Tibati), Marginalized (Ekona)

Table 1: Distribution of KII Respondent based on the Age, Gender and Location

KII #	Profile	#	of Age	Gender	Location/Region
1.	UNICEF staff	3	33	F	Mamfe
2.	Community Health Workers	4	23	M	Banga Bakundu
3.	Local Government Officials	4	45	F	Ekona
4.	Women Leaders	3	43	M	Tibati
5.	Youth leader	3	31	M	Meiganga
6.	Health care provider	2	43	F	Nyambaka

Source: Authors' construction, 2025

A total of 36, across six focus group discussions (FGDs) participants were engaged. Participants were purposefully sampled to ensure a balance in age, gender and community roles associated with hunger reduction programs. The table below outlines the distribution of participants:

Table 2: Distribution of FGD Respondent Based on the Age, Profile and Gender

FGD #	Participant (n)	Profile	Average age (years)	Gender	Location
1.	6	Caregivers and mothers of under-five children	25-40	0 M / 9 F	Banga Bakundu
2.	6	Subsistence farmers	30-55	5 M / 4 F	Tibati
3.	6	Youth volunteers and peer educators	18-25	3 M / 6 F	Mamfe
4.	6	Elderly community leaders and traditional healers	55-70	6 M / 3 F	Meiganga
5.	6	Adolescent girls in school nutrition clubs	15-19	0 M / 9 F	Ekona
6.	6	Fathers and male heads of households	35-60	9 M / 0 F	Nyambaka
Total				23 M / 31F	

Source: Authors' construction, 2025.

Data Presentation

Data were organized and presented in the following ways. Qualitative results were coded and thematically analyzed, with key themes presented with exemplars and narrative descriptions. Quantitative results were summarized and presented with descriptive statistics (means, medians, frequencies), including data visualization for clarity. A comparative analysis between intervention and non-intervention community sites was undertaken to demonstrate differences attributable to UNICEF's advocacy interventions as a result of project implementation.

Data Analysis

The primary and meta codes, and main themes were established from transcripts of the interviews and focus groups following word importation into NVivo 10 program. The transcripts were analyzed through ongoing data comparisons between various participant groups using idea extraction to identify patterns and differences. The literature and the narratives provided the starting point for theme development. Initially, the researchers reviewed the audio recordings and transcripts above - long before moving to the formal analysis. The four researchers each processed the coding and interpretation to bias reduction and improve reliability of the coding application to the data. A fifth study team member was included to conduct the final tolerability checks of the understanding and consistency of the application of the codes.

Thematic analysis was undertaken using an inductive coding process so that the themes emerged from the data. The researcher used triangulation by comparing the findings across interviews, focus groups, and observations to add to the credibility of the findings. The demographic and outcome variables were summarized with descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

The KII and FGD were posed questions regarding Community Empowerment through UNICEF Strategies and Enablers of Sustainable Change.

In your opinion, have UNICEF's continued advocacy strategies enabled communities to address food insecurity in the following ways?

"Prior to UNICEF's training us as nutrition volunteers here, mothers in this area could not explain why children were malnourished. Now, we teach them to combine cassava, with moringa and amaranth from their own gardens. Last year, 80% of families in my cluster accepted this idea which led to reduction of acute malnutrition in under-fives. So, what is the evolutionary change? Women now take ownership and ownership of the cooking demonstrations themselves. I am just a facilitator; it is their knowledge." Community Health Worker (23M, Banga Bakundu)

"We used to wait for NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to bring bulk sacks of rice at lean seasons. We joined a women's cooperative promoted by UNICEF and took our savings together to buy drought-resistant seeds. During the last drought, we harvested 300kg of millet and our neighbors were starving. Then a district official came to visit, we demanded better irrigation tools and got them! Now, we are not 'beneficiary' but 'partner.' " Mother/Caregiver (32F, Ekona - FGD)

"As peer educators, we turned vacant lots into community gardens. UNICEF provided us with agricultural training; however, we negotiated the land rights with the traditional chiefs ourselves. Today, 15 gardens contribute to the daily nutrition of 200 school children. The mayor even allocated municipal trucks for our gardens, after discussing the malnourishment data we collected. Power is not given; power is built." Youth Leader (31M, Meiganga)

"That farmer field school changed the ballpark. In the same place, we learned how to test soil pH using local alternatives. When locusts attacked our crops, UNICEF never provided pesticides; they simply enabled us (through resetting traditional techniques) to regrow bird-attracting plants. We now provide guidance to three surrounding towns. Truly, the success of those methods was rooted in confidence in our solutions, as opposed to charity." Subsistence Farmer (48M, Tibati - FGD)

"Men made the agriculture decisions until we took the gender workshop with UNICEF. Now, we as a women's group have roughly 30% of the village land. We added okra and pigeon peas - two foods that have never been grown by men. The last time we went to town to sell, we made enough money to pay five children's school fees. Empowerment? My daughter is now able to use composting techniques to teach men twice her age." Woman Leader (43F, Tibati)

"In my garden club, we are growing orange sweet potatoes high in vitamin A. We are processing them into flour for school food programs. My night blindness has disappeared after 6 months. The teachers are reporting our exam scores increased by 35% nutrition feeds the brain." Adolescent Girl (15F, Ekona)

After we took the 'hidden hunger' workshop with UNICEF I relinquished part of my cocoa plantation to food crops. Now, we are eating papaya and beans every day. My wife had anemia to such a serious level that she couldn't work. She has started a dried-fruit business. Wellness is wealth." Father (55M, Nyambaka)

We developed a food security radio Juingle in the local dialect: "Diverse Plate, Strong Fate!" In my latest market-survey, overall vegetable sales reported an increase of 40%. A caller said: "I tired of soda, and swapped it for amaranth seeds - my diabetic ulcers have healed." Youth Volunteer (24F, Mamfe)

We revived seed-exchange festivals. Last growing season, we had 52 villages exchanging 18 varieties of indigenous seeds. The millet that our grandfathers, grandmothers, and ancestors planted and that we have

'forgotten,' yielded 25% more in droughts than hybrid seeds. Our culture is our climate shields." Elder Leader (70M, Meiganga)

The weather-resistant solutions we used saved our food security. Using stone bunds and zai pits, I harvested maize in record flood years while many others didn't have any food to eat. My family ate well while others did not. "The district chief embraced our process this is change from the ground up." Subsistence Farmer (44M, Tibati)

"The animal husbandry intervention provided us with goats that not only had resistant eaters but also drought management. We breed the goats for milk - now every child in the household consumes 200 ml a day. Six months later, my son's kwashiorkor was gone. We have now provided twelve kids to orphans - this is the multiplier of empowerment." Father (38M, Nyambaka)

"We mapped wild edible plants and engaged the elders, we identified 27 varieties that were forgotten since the 1980s famine. Now we grow 'bush mango' (nutrient dense) in schools' gardens. They were harvested during the floods, and sustained 15 families when we were cut off from road transport." Youth Volunteer (19M, Mamfe)

"At farmer field schools we were taught inter cropping and to mix beans with maize crops that fix nitrogen; and provide an edible protein. I went from three to seven bags per acre harvest. I sold some bags that I did require and bought goats for milk protein. Through agriculture my daughter's HIV positive CD4 counts are increasing-agriculture can harm or heal." Subsistence Farmer (49F, Tibati).

What are the challenges that undermine the sustainable reduction of hunger and what are the Enablers of Sustainable Change?

"Sustainability? What is necessary is the emphasis on tradition. UNICEF did not destroy or prohibit our traditional sacred forest to food farm, it helped find the indigenous nutrient-dense wild foods growing in it. Cultural landscapes were kept, diet improved. We included the rituals to bring rain for our ancestors into climate smart workshops because that is why the elders asked to join." Elderly Community Leader (67M, Meiganga - FGD)

"Is when magic happens with the multi-stakeholder committee. UNICEF put the chiefs, health workers and herders around the same table. When farmers/herders met over the land, we designed grazing corridors together, using GPS maps produced by youth volunteers. Hunger is not solved in silos. It needs woven alliances." Local Official (45F, Ekona)

"Logistics used to bend us. Refrigerator breaks on vaccines; roads washed out. Now, UNICEF trained community mechanics to maintain solar-powered chillers, and fathers volunteer to repair bridges when it rains. That is embedded capacity - no more collapsed supply chains." Healthcare Provider (43F, Nyambaka)

"Our 'advocacy' is not lobbying in the city. It is giving grandmothers access to data. When Mama Njang shared charts on malnutrition with the Regional Council, the leaders froze. She said, 'Your statistics are my grandchildren.' That shame created a new health outpost. Change sticks when it is demanded from within." UNICEF Staff (33F, Mamfe)

"School nutrition clubs taught us how to track the weight of our classmates. One day, Lucy fainted from hunger and we interrogated her. It turns out her widow-mom couldn't sell her crops for food because of market taxes. We took a petition with signatures and body-mass report to the mayor. He waived the fees for single mothers. Justice is tastier than porridge that is donated." Adolescent Girl (16F, Ekona - FGD)

"Modern clinics stole the herbs we use traditionally. UNICEF researchers sat with us for months, asking questions, combining nutrition science with our knowledge. Now health workers prescribe hibiscus for anemia, and moringa to produce milk. Our culture is not adornment; it is medicine." Traditional Healer (61F, Meiganga - FGD)

"Gender violence sabotages nutrition. My sister hides vegetables in her blouse - she said she husband sells all of their harvest for alcohol. When she protested, he broke her arm. We need men's counseling groups - not only training for women." Caregiver (26F, Banga Bakundu)

"Child labour steals nutrition. I work after school 6 hours on cocoa plantations for 500 XAF/day. The calories burned are more than the meal offered. I stunted growing at 148cm - exploitation feeds the hunger cycle." Adolescent Girl (17F, Ekona)

"When UNICEF waited for funding and our scales broke for weighing babies, babies went five months without being monitored. My neighbour's son relapsed into severe wasting - his ribs protruded from under his skin like a ladder. Short-term projects breed mistrust. We need permanent clinics, not temporary ones." Caregiver (40F, Banga Bakundu)

"Indigenous Bagyeli are excluded. When officials say hunter-gatherers don't farm, they reinforce the exclusion. But our forest foods are disappearing. When we joined a farming co-op, they cheated us – 'savages cannot count'. Inclusion is hypocrisy." Elder Leader (66F, Meiganga)

DISCUSSION

The assessment demonstrates that UNICEF's community-based advocacy strategies effectively enhanced hunger reductions in rural Cameroon and reinforced the importance of participatory strategies that could be culturally sensitive. The findings show that all changes made from UNICEF's strategies positively affected food security, particularly via nutrition education, women's cooperatives, or farmer field schools, by empowering communities to adopt sustainable food practices (UNICEF, 2021). Respondents reported declines in their malnutrition rates and increased agricultural activity during the study timeframe. The findings highlighted the importance of community ownership in producing long-term change (Ngwenyi et al., 2020). However, certain challenges continued to inhibit system progress including women's dis-empowerment and unreliable funding systems. There remain systemic barriers that require integrated approaches to produce systems change (Agarwal, 2018). Blending modern techniques alongside traditional knowledge can also be important so the interventions are culturally relevant and provide communities resilience (Godfray et al, 2010).

The research also supports the important purpose of multi-stakeholder collaborations to develop sustainable hunger reductions. Working alongside community leaders, youth, and women enhanced inclusive decision-making and helped communities strengthen their advocacy at the local level (Israel et al., 2018). The successful culture of growing and sharing food and agricultural knowledge, particularly through seed exchange festivals, and community gardens, demonstrated how communities can utilize their cultural assets to improve food security while also highlighting and maintaining their indigenous knowledges and practices (Böhm et al., 2020). The research further outlined some gaps in a lack of engagement with other excluded groups, in particular the Bagyeli people and reliance on short-term funding (Amnesty International, 2022). These conclusions recommend for policies that balanced immediate relief with structural reform; so interventions are applied equitably and able to endure ongoing issues (Sen, 1982). This study supports discussions of hunger reduction that illustrate the transformative and participatory potential of community-based approaches, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

CONCLUSION

This study draws the conclusion that UNICEF's community-based advocacy strategies have made significant contributions to hunger reduction in rural Cameroon, by empowering local communities with knowledge, tools, and agency, to effectively improve food security at the community level. Local people have transitioned from passive receivers of community public health nutrition benefits, to empowered local actors of change through local government initiatives such as nutrition education, farmer field schools, and women's cooperatives. The local communities have reported measurable improvements in food security including decreases in child malnutrition, increased agricultural resilience, and revival of traditional food practices. Incorporating local knowledge and cultural values into programming has been especially instrumental to ensuring relevance and current interventions have community support and sustained impact.

Notwithstanding, the study identified ongoing structural challenges that can jeopardize the longevity of UNICEF's programs. Issues such as gender inequality, logistic issues, exclusion of marginalized communities, and reliance on short-term funding are undermining the address of issues facing hunger reduction. Changing the systemic barriers to food security calls for a more systemic and holistic view to strengthen multi-stakeholder relationships, ensure policy coherence, and put foremost structural equity on the agenda. These study findings highlight how transformative participatory development models can be, and advocate for the broad implementation of participatory programs into hunger alleviation and food security strategies more widely in sub-Saharan Africa.

Future Research Directions

Future research needs to explore the sustainable and inclusivity of UNICEF's community-based hunger reduction strategies, especially in diverse rural contexts in Cameroon and sub-Saharan Africa. Future research will also need to reflect inclusion of marginalized groups or youth and the role of gender in food security processes. Future research also needs to examine how innovative digital tools can complement participatory food security and community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any entity.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest whatsoever from the author

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