

Rendille, Borana and Burji mothers' experiences with food and their child-feeding practices in northern Kenya

Northern Kenya is inhabited by different ethnic groups who predominantly gain their livelihoods as pastoralists or agro-pastoralists. The varied geography includes arid lowlands and lush forested slopes with agricultural areas. In response to these conditions and due to differences between peri-urban and rural areas, food environments of mothers differ. This study aims at analyzing similarities and differences in child feeding practices among Rendille, Borana, and Burji mothers and contextualizing influencing factors based on place-specific, generational and cultural experiences. Using an explorative approach, qualitative data were collected from February to April 2021 using narrative and semi-structured interviews (10) as well as focus group discussions (6) with mothers from the three ethnic communities from different generations.

Inter-generational differences are pronounced in the pastoralist communities: whereas milk was the main diet of a child in the past generation, milk availability is nowadays low especially during dry seasons due to a variety of factors. In the agricultural communities, farming was formerly done organically but today it is perceived that pesticides are commonly used, and mothers are purchasing food from the markets with no control over its production. They are therefore concerned about the effects of pesticides on their children's health. Mothers living in peri-urban areas have more market access thus increased the availability of a variety of foods while those in rural areas depend on staple foods that are easy to store. Pastoral communities majorly consume animal source foods but differ in their local processing techniques and consumption. There is an inter-cultural exchange on foods among the ethnic communities which has strengthened their diet qualities. This study shows that mothers' differing experiences with food environments, including cultural practices and beliefs, differ across ethnic groups with influences from livelihood and other factors, that then shape the choices that they make for feeding their own children.

Key words

Northern Kenya, pastoralists, culture, child nutrition, child feeding practices, food environments.

Primary authors: Ms KIPRONO, Patricia (German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, and Transdisciplinary and Social-ecological Landuse Research (DITSL)); Ms KAISER, Jennifer (German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, and Transdisciplinary and Social-ecological Landuse Research (DITSL)); Ms CAROLINE, Musita (Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)); Dr LELEA, Margareta (German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, and Transdisciplinary and Social-ecological Landuse Research (DITSL)); Dr WARIO, Hussein (Center for Research and Development in Drylands (CRDD)); Prof. KAUFMANN, Brigitte (German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, and Transdisciplinary and Social-ecological Landuse Research (DITSL))