

2.3 Promoting healthy diets and improving nutrition: Gender transformative behaviour change in Telangana, India

Despite substantial improvement in health and well-being since Indian independence, malnutrition remains a silent emergency in the country. TIGR²ESS researchers from ICRISAT found that even in areas where diverse crops are cultivated and there is access to government food security and nutrition programs, levels of stunting and wasting amongst children remain high.

The study focused on two tribal locations in Telangana where, for example, 57% of adolescent girls are underweight. Starting from the premise that what is on the plate is what matters for nutrition, they asked why plates in the area studied did not contain the kind of diversity essential to better nutritional outcomes.

Using participatory action research methods, the researchers collaborated with the communities to identify the issues involved, engaging with people of all ages, genders and walks of life, to take into account their particular needs.



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Pictures show recommended “Healthy Plate” vs “My Plate” in rural and tribal areas.

Together with frontline workers they then developed a series of nutrition education sessions, covering nine focus topics, tailored to the needs of each section of the community.

Knowledge exchange and constant interaction were important elements; learning what was available in communities and understanding local food know-how, rather than imposing outside ideas.

The study found that enhancing the nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices of the target population led to better food awareness. For example, families were enabled to allocate resources (scarce due to the Pandemic) according to need and thereby improve the nutrition of all.

The team are now working on scaling this up and developing digital tools/apps in the local language for use by front-line workers and communities as a whole.

The overall goal is the adoption of these practices as a regional policy, in particular using knowledge exchange to improve self-help and dietary expertise for females within rural communities.



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Nutrition messaging on balanced diet for adolescent girls in Telangana.

“Working with the communities and co-designing nutrition education sessions will lead to transforming community attitudes towards healthy diets, food and nutrition alongside enhancing agency of women, men and frontline workers to challenge traditional norms and cultures around healthy eating.”

Dr R Padmaja, ICRISAT

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