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Abstract

The study aimed at determining the food consumption patterns of women and children under five years of age in the Lake Victoria region. A cross-sectional study was carried out on purposively selected sites located near major towns in each of the three countries of East Africa. Three sites (Kisumu, Jinja and Mwanza) representing each of the three East African countries were selected and one thousand two hundred and twenty four women and children randomly selected were targeted. A questionnaire, (24 hour frequency) was used to collect information. The nutrient intake was determined by comparing the actual intake with that of the FAO/WHO 1989, RDA. Among the children, although the mean intake of nutrient in the selected sites were below RDA for all the nutrients, there were a good number of respondents who had above RDA calories and protein. Iron and retinol intake were the least consumed nutrients. Most women in the wetlands did not meet their RDA with much lower means being recorded for Kenya relative to other countries. The mean intakes for Uganda were high for most nutrients. Consumption patterns of foods among children and women indicated a change in taste from the traditional foods to exotic foods. This was more pronounced in vegetables and cereals. Consumption patterns indicate a low consumption of essential nutrients especially retinol and iron for women and children. Promotion of consumption of local foods rich in essential micronutrients is recommended to enhance nutritional status of women and children.

Keywords: Food, Nutrients, Women, Infants, Lake Victoria Basin

1. Introduction

The Lake Victoria Basin is facing environmental and socio-economic problems that have led to escalating poverty levels. The Lake Victoria Basins known to be an important base of economic activities for a substantial number of people (Batumuzi et al 2003; Kinabo et al 1997; Uganda Govt 2003 and UDHS 2001) which provides families with means of making a living. However, socio-economic and environmental changes taking place in the lake basin have caused considerable adjustments in the lifestyles of these populations. For example, although indigenous plants and animal foods formed a large part of the diet in the past, environmental degradation and intensification of economic activities such as commercial fishing has led to reduced food availability due to depletion of their indigenous livelihood sources such as fishing.

In order to adapt to the emerging food shortage, communities living in the Lake Victoria Basin have had to change their tastes and preferences. In East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) maize became a leading staple food replacing other foods such as millet and cassava. In Kenya for example, maize is consumed

by 89.9% of the population (UNICEF, 2004) and cassava has become a famine food consumed in large quantities during period of food shortages. Vegetables particularly exotic ones such as kales and cabbages are the main relish often consumed accompanying staple foods (Kinabo et al, 1997). Consequently, many poor households suffer from intermittent food shortages that grossly lead to severe hunger and malnutrition during the rainy season and period prior to harvesting (Olenja, 1991). In spite of their productivity, wetlands community are not immune to these trends. For example, UNICEF 2004 reported low consumption of energy, protein, micronutrients, fats, animal foods and fruits by nearly three quarters of children in Kenya, which subjected them to the risk of nutrient deficiencies.

In addition, according to ACC/SCN (2000), the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their children exclusively by 6 months in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda was 12.7%, 32.5% and 70.4% respectively. In Kenya, the use of complementary feeding starts early as 15 percent of babies under 2 months and 45% of 2-3 months are given complementary foods (KDH, 2003). Nonetheless,