Enhancing Opportunities for Nutrition Education in Public Elementary Schools in the Philippines

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Project title:
Improving Food and Nutrition Security in the Philippines through School Interventions

Project Implementation:
2016-2018
Enhancing opportunities for nutrition education in public elementary schools in the Philippines

Methodology

- The research involved select public elementary schools in Cavite Province and in other provinces of Region IV-A. A total of 58 Lighthouse schools (LS) (40 schools in Cavite and 18 schools from Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon provinces) were selected using purposive sampling.

- The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Baseline data were collected at the start. Interviews were conducted to document the nutrition education interventions in schools prior to the implementation of the integrated nutrition model.

- As part of the research, schools were provided four types of nutrition education forms in which activities were recorded. These were undertaken during feeding, during Parent-Teacher Association meetings/conferences (PTA/PTC), and during classroom discussions. The last form was used for recording all other nutrition education activities and platforms. Records included the date, topic, and mode of delivery. This served as reference for the project team during monitoring and mentoring visits. These visits were done weekly or twice a month for sentinel schools and on a bi-annual basis for all 58 LS. In addition, key informant interviews and focused group discussions were undertaken in the sentinel schools to further explore nutrition education opportunities, challenges, and priorities.

- At the end of the research period, the same questionnaire used at the start of the research was administered again. The nutrition education records (the four forms mentioned above) maintained by each school provided additional data sources. These were consolidated to document the status of nutrition education interventions after adoption of the integrated nutrition model.

Key Findings

- In Project Phase I, it has been proven that nutrition education effectively improves the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) of children and parents towards food and nutrition:
Among children:
- improved knowledge (65.3–76.2%) and attitude (78.2–89.1%) on the importance of having home gardens;
- improved attitude toward consumption of a variety of foods (74.1–84.4%);
- improved recognition of the negative effects of worm infestation (42.8–47.6%)

Among parents:
- improved knowledge on the importance of consumption of fruits and vegetables to prevent sickness (93.9–100%), serving breakfast for children (42.4–78.8%), having home gardens (78.8–93.9%), and the negative consequence of worm infestation (33.3–60.6%)
- more positive attitude (63.6–93.9%) and practice (27.3–87.9%) on proper preparation and serving of fruits and vegetables
- improved attitude (51.5–66.7%) and practice (51.5–93.9%) on the purchase of fortified foods for children

- There are currently no guidelines or framework specific for nutrition education in schools. It was confirmed that the legal mandate requiring all institutions to participate in the nationwide nutrition awareness campaign, which happens July of every year, made it possible for schools to conduct participatory nutrition education activities.

- Thru provision of regular technical assistance, up-to-date and valid nutrition reference materials, and designation of a nutrition education coordinator, nutrition education had been done in different platforms:
  - For children, nutrition education was integrated in classroom lessons - done in 37 Lighthouse schools (LS) (67.27%), the school feeding program (41 LS or 74.55%), and garden-based learning activities (36 LS or 65.45%).
  - For parents, it was done during PTA/PTCs (37 LS or 67.27%), and during participatory activities for community and parents (46 LS or 83.64%).

- School gardens served as venues of nutrition education for students, parents and guardians in 36 LS (65.45 %) but widespread adoption of this practice can still be further popularized to more schools.
Factors which impede successful implementation of nutrition education in schools include:
- lack of guidelines, especially to guarantee availability of sufficient human and material resources (30.91%)
- poor support from parent and community members (60.00%); and
- insufficient nutrition knowledge and skills of program coordinators/implementers (29.01%)

Recommendations

- Implementation of nutrition education program integrated with the School-based Feeding Program and Gulayan sa Paaralan Program to enhance synergy and sustain gains from each program
- Formulation of legal mandate and implementation guidelines on nutrition education especially on matters such as integration of nutrition in the curriculum across grade levels; capacity building of program implementers; designation of a nutrition education coordinator; online monitoring and evaluation scheme to track progress; and budget appropriation
- Maintenance of year-round diversity and functionality of school gardens to serve as learning laboratory for children and community members.

Complete research report is accessible at https://schoolnutritionphils.wordpress.com/