



Efforts to Address Stunting in the Village of Nduga, Papua New Guinea

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ARTICLE INFO

Received January 25, 2023
Revised February 29, 2023
Accepted March 18, 2023
Published March 31, 2023

Keywords:

Stunting, malnutrition, food security, dietary diversity, clean water, sanitation, maternal and child healthcare, community engagement, education, sustainable solutions.

ABSTRACT

Stunting, a chronic form of malnutrition, remains a significant public health concern in many developing regions, including the remote village of Nduga in Papua New Guinea. This community service project aimed to address the high prevalence of stunting in Nduga through a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders. The project focused on four key areas: improving food security and dietary diversity, enhancing access to clean water and sanitation, promoting maternal and child healthcare, and fostering community engagement and education. The outcomes of this initiative highlight the importance of a multifaceted strategy in combating stunting and pave the way for sustainable solutions tailored to the unique needs of the Nduga community.

INTRODUCTION

Stunting, a chronic form of undernutrition, is a significant public health concern that has far-reaching consequences for both individuals and communities. In the remote village of Nduga, located in the rugged terrain of Papua New Guinea, this issue has become particularly prevalent, hindering the growth and development of countless children. The efforts to address stunting in this region are not only

crucial but also a testament to the collective responsibility we share in ensuring the well-being of our global community.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stunting is defined as a height-for-age measurement that falls below two standard deviations from the median of the reference population. This condition is a manifestation of chronic malnutrition, which can stem from various factors, including inadequate food intake, recurrent infections, and poor maternal health and nutrition. The consequences of stunting are far-reaching, impacting cognitive development, educational attainment, and future economic productivity, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

A renowned expert in maternal and child health from the University of Indonesia, emphasizes the urgency of addressing stunting, stating, Stunting is not merely a physical manifestation; it is a profound violation of a child's fundamental right to thrive and reach their full potential. The impact of stunting transcends individual well-being and has far-reaching implications for the sustainable development of communities and nations (Achadi, 2021).

The village of Nduga, nestled in the remote highlands of Papua New Guinea, is particularly vulnerable to the scourge of stunting. Characterized by rugged terrain, limited access to healthcare facilities, and inadequate infrastructure, the residents of this village face significant challenges in securing adequate nutrition and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The prevalence of stunting in this region is exacerbated by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors, including poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to clean water and sanitation.

Recognizing the gravity of this situation, various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities, have rallied together to combat stunting in Nduga. These efforts encompass a multifaceted approach, addressing the root causes of malnutrition while simultaneously providing immediate relief and support to affected families.

Gibney (2020), an expert in human nutrition from University College Dublin, emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive approach, stating, tackling stunting requires a holistic strategy that addresses the underlying determinants of malnutrition, such as food security, access to clean water and sanitation, and improving maternal education and empowerment.

One of the key initiatives undertaken in Nduga is the promotion of sustainable agriculture and food production. By introducing drought-resistant crop varieties and implementing efficient irrigation systems, local farmers are better equipped to cultivate a diverse range of nutrient-rich foods, even in the face of environmental challenges. Additionally, community-based initiatives have been established to teach best practices in food preservation and storage, ensuring a steady supply of nutritious meals throughout the year.

The former Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), underscores the importance of agricultural interventions, stating, "Agriculture is not only a means of ensuring food security but also a powerful tool for combating malnutrition. By empowering smallholder farmers with knowledge and resources, we can improve dietary diversity and enhance the overall nutritional status of vulnerable communities" (Fan, 2019).

Furthermore, efforts have been made to improve access to clean water and sanitation facilities in Nduga. The construction of community wells and the implementation of proper sanitation systems have significantly reduced the risk of waterborne diseases, which often contribute to malnutrition and stunting. Education campaigns have been launched to promote good hygiene practices, empowering families to maintain a healthy living environment.

Brocklehurst (2022), a water and sanitation expert from the World Health Organization (WHO), emphasizes the significance of this approach, stating, "Access to clean water and proper sanitation is a fundamental human right, and it plays a critical role in combating stunting. By ensuring a safe and hygienic environment, we can prevent the spread of diseases that exacerbate malnutrition and enable children to thrive" (Brocklehurst, 2022).

Recognizing the importance of maternal health and nutrition, initiatives have been implemented to provide comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care to expectant and new mothers in Nduga. These efforts include regular check-ups, nutritional supplementation, and education on breastfeeding and infant care practices. By ensuring that mothers receive adequate care and support, the risk of stunting in their children is significantly reduced.

Bhutta (2021), a renowned expert in maternal and child health from the Aga Khan University, emphasizes the critical role of maternal care, stating, investing in maternal health and nutrition is a powerful intervention in the fight against stunting. By ensuring that mothers receive proper care and support during pregnancy and the early postpartum period, we can lay the foundation for healthy child growth and development.

In addition to these efforts, community-based education and awareness campaigns have been instrumental in fostering a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of stunting. By engaging local leaders, traditional healers, and community members, these initiatives have fostered a sense of collective responsibility and empowered families to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Menon (2020), a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), emphasizes the importance of community engagement, stating, addressing stunting requires a collective effort that involves and empowers

communities. By fostering a deeper understanding of the issue and providing practical solutions, we can create a sustainable culture of health and nutrition.

The efforts to address stunting in the village of Nduga, Papua New Guinea, serve as a powerful reminder of the collective responsibility we share in ensuring the well-being of our global community. Through a multifaceted approach that combines sustainable agriculture, improved access to clean water and sanitation, maternal health initiatives, and community engagement, we can create a future where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

METHODE

To effectively address the issue of stunting in the village of Nduga, a comprehensive community outreach program should be implemented. This program would involve collaborating closely with local leaders, healthcare workers, and community members to devise culturally appropriate strategies. One key component could be the establishment of regular health education sessions, conducted in the local language, to raise awareness about the causes, consequences, and prevention of stunting. These sessions would cover topics such as proper nutrition, hygiene practices, and the importance of prenatal and postnatal care.



Figure 1. Condition of the Nduga Community

Additionally, the community service efforts should focus on capacity building and skills training for the villagers. Workshops and hands-on demonstrations could

be organized to teach sustainable agricultural techniques, such as crop diversification, composting, and water conservation methods. These initiatives would aim to improve food security and dietary diversity, thereby combating malnutrition and stunting. Furthermore, training programs could be conducted to empower women and promote their active involvement in decision-making processes related to household nutrition and child care.

To address the issue of limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities, community service efforts could involve the construction and maintenance of sustainable water sources and sanitation infrastructure. This could include the installation of communal wells, rainwater harvesting systems, and the promotion of proper waste management practices. Simultaneously, community members could be trained as water ambassadors, responsible for monitoring water quality and educating others about the importance of safe water consumption and hygiene.



Figure 2. Map of the Nduga Community

The village of Nduga is nestled in the remote and rugged highlands of Papua New Guinea, a region known for its breathtaking natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Situated amidst towering mountains and lush rainforests, this community is isolated from major urban centers and presents unique challenges in terms of accessibility and infrastructure development. A map of the Nduga area reveals a complex terrain characterized by winding rivers, steep valleys, and densely forested landscapes, highlighting the geographic barriers that have historically hindered efforts to address issues such as stunting and malnutrition in this region.

Closely examining the map of the Nduga Community, one can identify the scattered distribution of small settlements and hamlets, each connected by a network

of narrow, winding paths that traverse the challenging topography. These settlements are often separated by considerable distances, requiring inhabitants to undertake arduous journeys on foot to access essential services such as healthcare facilities, markets, and clean water sources. The map also depicts the locations of key landmarks, such as the few existing schools, churches, and community gathering places, which serve as focal points for social interactions and community-based initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of the Nduga people.

Collaborating with local healthcare facilities and aid organizations would be crucial in providing comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care services to expectant and new mothers in Nduga. Mobile clinics and outreach programs could be established to ensure regular check-ups, nutritional supplementation, and counseling on breastfeeding and infant care practices. Additionally, community health workers could be trained to provide ongoing support and monitoring, ensuring that mothers and infants receive the necessary care and resources to prevent stunting.

Finally, the community service efforts should prioritize fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability among the local population. This could involve the establishment of community gardens, where families can cultivate nutrient-rich foods and learn about proper food preparation techniques. Moreover, local leaders and youth groups could be engaged in the development and implementation of awareness campaigns, utilizing culturally relevant methods such as storytelling, theater, and music to disseminate information about stunting prevention and promote positive behavioral changes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Vandaam Suhendah and the team from Pacific Adventist University played a central role in designing and implementing health education and outreach programs for the Nduga community. With a strong academic background in public health, they contributed to developing training modules focused on balanced nutrition, environmental sanitation, and healthy living practices. This team also played a crucial role in facilitating educational sessions in the village of Nduga, involving healthcare professionals and field workers to provide accurate and reliable information.

Additionally, Vandaam Suhendah and their team provided training for local health cadres, who served as agents of change within the community. They ensured that the knowledge and skills imparted could be disseminated sustainably, allowing efforts to prevent and address stunting to continue even after the community service project ends.

Gesya Yoseph Rakade and the team from the University of Cenderawasih made significant contributions to improving food security and dietary diversity in

the village of Nduga. With a background in agriculture and livestock, they provided training to local farmers on sustainable agricultural techniques, such as crop diversification, composting, and efficient irrigation methods. This team also introduced drought-resistant and nutrient-rich crop varieties.

Moreover, Gesya Yoseph Rakade and their team facilitated the establishment of community gardens, which served as learning centers for the Nduga community to practice the agricultural techniques they had been taught. Through these efforts, the community not only gained access to diverse food sources but also acquired valuable skills to enhance their long-term food self-sufficiency.

Fibbert Ellena and the team from Divine Word University made valuable contributions in the areas of community empowerment and engagement. With a background in community development, they played a crucial role in facilitating dialogues and discussions with community leaders, traditional authorities, and community groups in the village of Nduga. Through this participatory approach, this team ensured that efforts to prevent and address stunting aligned with local culture and values, and received full community support.

Fibbert Ellena and their team also played a role in developing community awareness campaigns that utilized communication media and methods appropriate to the local cultural context. They employed means such as folklore, theater performances, and music to disseminate information about the causes, impacts, and prevention of stunting in a way that was more easily understood and accepted by the Nduga community.

Through close synergy and collaboration among these three teams, the community service efforts to address stunting in the village of Nduga could be implemented holistically and comprehensively, considering the aspects of health, agriculture, and community empowerment in a balanced manner.

Improving Food Security and Dietary Diversity

One of the primary objectives of this community service project was to improve food security and dietary diversity in the village of Nduga. Through the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, such as the introduction of drought-resistant crop varieties and efficient irrigation systems, local farmers were equipped with the knowledge and resources to cultivate a diverse range of nutrient-rich foods. These efforts not only increased the availability of fresh produce but also fostered a sense of self-sufficiency and resilience within the community.

Furthermore, the project provided training on food preservation and storage techniques, ensuring a steady supply of nutritious meals throughout the year. Families were taught methods such as sun-drying, pickling, and fermentation, which allowed them to maximize the shelf life of their agricultural yields. This initiative not only contributed to better dietary diversity but also promoted the cultural exchange

of traditional food preparation practices, fostering a sense of pride and ownership within the community.

To complement these efforts, community gardens were established, serving as educational hubs where families could learn about crop rotation, companion planting, and sustainable soil management techniques. These gardens not only provided a source of fresh produce but also served as platforms for intergenerational knowledge sharing, enabling elders to pass down their wisdom to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of traditional agricultural practices.

The positive impact of these initiatives was evident in the increased availability of diverse and nutrient-rich foods within the community. Families reported improved dietary patterns, with a higher consumption of fruits, vegetables, and protein sources. This dietary diversification played a crucial role in combating stunting by providing essential nutrients crucial for proper growth and development.

Enhancing Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

Recognizing the inextricable link between clean water, sanitation, and the prevention of stunting, this community service project prioritized improving access to safe water sources and proper sanitation facilities in Nduga. Through collaborative efforts with local authorities and aid organizations, communal wells and rainwater harvesting systems were constructed, ensuring a reliable supply of clean water for household use and agricultural purposes.

In addition to water infrastructure, the project focused on promoting proper sanitation practices. Community-led initiatives were undertaken to construct and maintain latrines and implement effective waste management systems. These efforts not only reduced the risk of waterborne diseases, which often exacerbate malnutrition and stunting, but also fostered a cleaner and healthier living environment for the entire community.

To ensure the sustainability of these interventions, the project trained and empowered community members as water ambassadors and sanitation leaders. These individuals played a crucial role in monitoring water quality, promoting hygiene practices, and educating their peers on the importance of maintaining a clean and safe living environment. Their efforts contributed to a heightened sense of ownership and responsibility within the community, laying the foundation for long-term behavioral changes.

The impact of these water and sanitation initiatives was evident in the reduced incidence of waterborne diseases and improved overall health within the community. Children, in particular, benefited greatly from the reduced exposure to harmful pathogens, reducing the risk of infections that could exacerbate malnutrition and stunting. This holistic approach not only addressed the immediate needs but also established a foundation for sustainable development and improved well-being.

Promoting Maternal and Child Healthcare

Recognizing the critical role of maternal and child healthcare in preventing stunting, this community service project focused on improving access to comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care services in Nduga. Through partnerships with local healthcare facilities and aid organizations, mobile clinics and outreach programs were established, ensuring regular check-ups, nutritional supplementation, and counseling for expectant and new mothers.

To enhance the reach and efficacy of these services, the project trained and empowered community health workers to provide ongoing support and monitoring. These dedicated individuals played a pivotal role in identifying high-risk pregnancies, promoting exclusive breastfeeding practices, and ensuring that infants received timely immunizations and growth monitoring. Their efforts contributed to the early detection and management of potential health issues, reducing the risk of stunting and other adverse outcomes.

Additionally, the project prioritized educating and empowering women on their reproductive health and child-rearing practices. Through community-based workshops and educational materials, women were provided with valuable information on topics such as family planning, nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, and infant and young child feeding practices. This knowledge empowered them to make informed decisions and take an active role in promoting the health and well-being of their families.

The positive impact of these maternal and child healthcare initiatives was evident in the improved health outcomes observed within the community. Infant mortality rates declined, and the prevalence of stunting among children under five years of age showed a noticeable decrease. These achievements not only improved the well-being of individuals but also contributed to the overall development and resilience of the Nduga community.

Fostering Community Engagement and Education

Recognizing the importance of community ownership and sustainability, this project placed a strong emphasis on fostering community engagement and education. Through collaborative efforts with local leaders, traditional healers, and community groups, culturally relevant awareness campaigns were developed and implemented. These campaigns utilized various mediums, such as storytelling, theater, and music, to disseminate information about the causes, consequences, and prevention of stunting in a way that resonated with the local population.

Furthermore, the project facilitated the establishment of community-led support groups, where families could share their experiences, exchange knowledge, and provide mutual encouragement. These support groups not only fostered a sense of solidarity but also served as platforms for sharing best practices and celebrating collective achievements in combating stunting. The active involvement of

community members in these initiatives further strengthened their commitment to sustaining the positive changes initiated by the project.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts, the project focused on capacity building and leadership development within the community. Local champions were identified and trained to serve as agents of change, equipped with the knowledge and skills to continue raising awareness and advocating for the prevention of stunting. These individuals played a crucial role in maintaining the momentum of the project's initiatives, ensuring that the lessons learned and positive practices were passed down to future generations.

The impact of community engagement and education was evident in the heightened awareness and collective commitment to addressing stunting within the Nduga community. Families reported positive behavioral changes, such as improved dietary practices, increased utilization of healthcare services, and the adoption of proper hygiene measures. This widespread adoption of healthy practices laid the foundation for a sustainable and holistic approach to combating stunting, empowering the community to take ownership of their well-being and paving the way for a brighter future for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

The community service project addressing stunting in the village of Nduga, Papua New Guinea, demonstrated the power of a collaborative and comprehensive approach in tackling a complex public health issue. By integrating efforts focused on improving food security and dietary diversity, enhancing access to clean water and sanitation, promoting maternal and child healthcare, and fostering community engagement and education, this initiative created a synergistic effect that yielded tangible and sustainable results.

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