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Topic: Capacity development for public health nutrition

Title: What does an enabling environment for IYCN look like at implementation level? Perspectives from initial stages of a multi-stakeholder process in the Breede Valley Sub-District, Western Cape, South Africa

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This research formed part of initial stages of a multi-stakeholder engagement process at implementation level. It explored elements of an enabling environment aimed at improving infant and young child nutrition (IYCN) relevant at this level.

Focus group discussions were conducted with a broad base of IYCN stakeholders in the Breede Valley.

Findings showed that many competing agendas and focus areas are spreading public resources thinly, leaving limited scope for promotion and prevention activities. Participants viewed knowledge and evidence about the first 1000 days of life as important in finding solutions for IYCN problems at implementation level. A good frame for the IYCN storyline in the Breede Valley would focus on intellectual development and scholastic achievement resulting in better income and healthier children and adults. A well-structured advocacy and communication campaign was seen as a priority.

Conversations about politics and governance elicited strong opinions about what could or should be done through direct intervention, policy formulation and legislation to impact on IYCN. Participants could not identify a lead government agency for taking the IYCN agenda forward, due to its complexity. They proposed it should be referred to an existing, informal, inter-governmental body where directors and senior managers meet to address issues of cross-cutting importance in the Breede Valley.

The study illustrated that knowledge and evidence, politics and governance and capacity and resources, elements of the international definition of an enabling environment, also apply at implementation level. In addition, our findings also indicated that a people-centred approach is critical at this level.