A REPORT ON INFLUENCES OF CULTURE AND GENDER ON NUTRITION BY KANJI NYAMBO, FIKANAYO MSYANI AND ZIONE MAJAWA

**Introduction**

Nutrition is the science that studies food and how food nourishes our bodies and influences our health. (Thompson , Manore, & Sheeshka, 2007) A person’s nutrition status is influenced by a number of factors including socioeconomic status, gender and culture. This paper takes a closer look at nutrition in relation to culture and gender. The authors conducted this survey during their learning by living experience in Idrussi village T/A Jalasi in Mangochi District.

The aim of the survey were to find out the connection between nutrition and culture and to explore the relationship between nutrition and gender.

The methodologies used in data collection were one to one interviews, observation and focus group discussions.

**Findings**

**Nutrition vs culture**

The Yao’s have a rich culture which values farming; they grow a lot of crops such as maize, beans, vegetables. They also rare animals such as goats, chickens and ducks among others.

The culture restricts consumption of certain foods such as pork but have a variety of choices within their community which have the same nutritional value as the profane foods.

Due to cultural influence, the girls drop out of school and rush to early marriages this affects their decision in the type of food to eat and food preparation for various groups such as infants and pregnant women.

**Nutrition vs Gender**

The community gives men more superior roles than women. Women and children have more nutrition needs but men are given priority in most of the households.

In polygamous families not all are supported by the husbands hence more households are female headed. Women take the primary role in sourcing food, preparation and food processing to feed their children and they usually have limited access to property, income and land.

Many households however involve both their male and female children in food processing and preparation. Thus there is almost equal distribution of roles.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:**

It was discovered that culture influences nutrition by determining what type of food one should eat. There was a relationship between gender and nutrition; women are the ones responsible for sourcing, processing and preparation of food. There is a need to promote gender equality and women empowerment if we are to significantly improve nutrition and health statuses of families.