



ARCH ASSESSMENT
& RESEARCH
ON CHILD FEEDING



Helen Keller International's Assessment & Research on Child Feeding (ARCH) Project explores marketing of commercial foods and diets of young children in rapidly evolving food environments. Our research has contributed to global discussions on implementation of the World Health Organization's International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and new policies to prevent inappropriate marketing of commercial foods for children 0-3 years of age. Evidence from ARCH research also supports decision making by national-level stakeholders to promote optimal infant and young child nutrition in Asia and Africa.

From 2013-2016, the ARCH Project team conducted research on promotion and consumption of commercial foods, especially breastmilk substitutes and commercial complementary foods, in urban areas of Cambodia, Nepal, Senegal and Tanzania. The most recent phase of the project expanded our work into Indonesia and also pushed us into a new area of inquiry: the consumption of nutrient-poor snack foods and beverages among young children and potential associations with nutritional status.

OUR APPROACH

Promoting a healthy start in life

We focus on improving nutrition during the first two years—a crucial window of opportunity to shape a child's future. Good nutrition during this time helps children grow, feeds intelligence, and provides the foundation for a healthy and productive life. The World Health Organization and UNICEF recommend that babies receive only breastmilk, and no other foods or fluids, for the first six months of life followed by the introduction of nutritious complementary foods along with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age and beyond.

Using data to shape global and national policies

We aim to conduct and communicate research related to promotion of foods that are consumed by young children with the goal of helping policymakers craft and enforce policies to safeguard infant and child health. Using findings from Cambodia, Nepal, Senegal and Tanzania, ARCH has informed World Health Organization international nutrition guidelines. For example, our research on commercially produced foods consumed by infants and young children informed the World Health Organization Guidance on Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children.

We also share data to inform decision-makers who oversee national policies and programs to promote breastfeeding as an essential component of nutrition and improve the nutritional status of infants and young children. Currently, we are working in Cambodia, Nepal, Senegal, and Indonesia.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Protect, promote and support breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life provides children with the best start. The World Health Organization's International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes outlines the responsibilities of governments, healthcare systems and manufacturers in preventing promotional practices that interfere with breastfeeding. ARCH has documented widespread violations of the International Code and works alongside country governments to improve compliance with this and other policies which ensure that families can make infant feeding decisions free from commercial influence. Our research also helps shine a light on current breastfeeding practices and use of breastmilk substitutes and other commercial products in the early years.

Encourage appropriate complementary feeding

Around the age of six months, infants need complementary foods in addition to breastmilk to ensure they get the nutrients they require for healthy growth. Some commercially produced complementary foods provide micronutrients that often missing in the diets of young children, while others are of concern because they have high levels of added salt or sugar or contain industrially produced trans-fatty acids. ARCH is a leader in global conversations about the appropriate marketing, labeling and nutritional composition of these products.

Understand the use of unhealthy snack foods and beverages

Commercial foods like candies, cookies, crisps and soft drinks are often appealing to young children, but they lack essential nutrients and can displace healthy options by filling up small bellies with empty calories. To tackle the growing use of these unhealthy snack foods and beverages for young child feeding, the range of factors and perceptions influencing caregiver behavior needs to be understood and addressed. ARCH is at the forefront of this work, using our data to inform policies and programs to improve child diets.



ABOUT HELEN KELLER INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1915, Helen Keller International is dedicated to saving the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. We combat the causes and consequences of blindness and malnutrition by establishing programs based on evidence and research in vision, health and nutrition. We currently have more than 100 programs in 20 African and Asian countries, as well as in the United States.