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Creation of Sufficient Supplemental Food Using Local Staple Foods in the Southwest Region of Cameroon for Infants 6–24 Months

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Abstract
Adequate complementary feeding during the period of 6–24 months is essential for optimal growth, development, and prevention of malnutrition among infants and young children. In many communities of the Southwest Region of Cameroon, limited household income, inadequate knowledge of complementary feeding, and dependence on locally available staple foods may affect the nutritional quality and diversity of infant diets. This study focuses on the creation of sufficient supplemental foods using locally available staple foods in the Southwest Region of Cameroon for infants aged 6–24 months. Selected local food materials were identified based on their availability, affordability, nutritional value, cultural acceptability, and suitability for infant feeding. The foods were processed and formulated into complementary food blends designed to provide energy, protein, essential micronutrients, and other nutrients required during early childhood. The formulated products were assessed for proximate nutritional composition, including moisture, protein, fat, ash, fibre, and carbohydrate contents, as well as sensory acceptability and suitability for infant consumption. The study is expected to demonstrate that locally sourced foods can be combined and processed to produce nutritionally adequate, affordable, and culturally acceptable supplemental foods. Such formulations could reduce dependence on expensive commercial complementary foods, improve dietary diversity, and contribute to the prevention of protein-energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies among infants and young children. The findings may provide useful evidence for households, nutrition programmes, health workers, and policymakers seeking sustainable approaches to improve complementary feeding practices in the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

Keyword: Complementary Food, Functional Properties, Micronutrient, Malnutrition, Children, Breastfeeding, Yellow Maize, Rice, Potatoes, Egg Whites, Soybeans, Pawpaw, Watermelon, Pineapple, Oranges

Introduction
For the best growth promotion, behavioural development, and overall health, a child's first 24 months of life are crucial [1]. Appropriate nutrition is necessary during these early life stages to support the child's rapid growth and development [2]. Inadequate (surplus, disproportionate, or insufficient) energy and/or nutritional consumption is known as malnutrition [3]. It is particularly common in children under five [4], and WHO member nations have signed a commitment allowing them to act to abolish all kinds of malnutrition by 2030 [5]. Undernutrition (insufficient protein and/or energy intake) and overnutrition are the two types of malnutrition; the former is more prevalent in less developed nations [6] and shows up as stunting, wasting, or underweight [7]. In less developed nations, overnutrition—which is defined as consuming too much protein and/or energy—is not a major issue [6].
Stunting among infants under five has decreased globally, but the frequency of these signs of undernutrition is still quite high, with over 150 million stunted and 50 million wasted children [8]. Stunting rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have skyrocketed from approximately 50.3 million to 58.8 million children in 2018, despite a global decline in stunting for children under the age of five [9]. The burden of infant undernutrition has been difficult to manage in recent years.
Undernutrition during infancy has been associated with a

significant risk of morbidity and mortality as well as cognitive and physical disability, particularly in children under five [7]. According to WHO estimates from 2020, malnutrition accounted for approximately 45% of all child deaths worldwide. In Africa, where 90% of children do not meet the minimum acceptable diet requirements, undernutrition is thot to have caused the deaths of 1.6 million children under the age of five (more than 50% of all child deaths) in Sub-Saharan Africa [10].

Poor breastfeeding and supplemental feeding practices have been directly associated with malnutrition in infants aged 0 to 24 months [11]. For the first six months of the child's life, exclusive breastfeeding is advised. After that, complementary foods should be gradually introduced, but breastfeeding should be continued until the child is at least 24 months old because breastmilk's antibody and immunoprotective contents shield the infant from infections [12]. Even tho it is advised, fewer than 37% of babies are breastfed exclusively throughout the first six months of their lives, and even fewer are not breastfed for the whole 24 months [13]. However, starting at six months of age, complementary foods must be introduced because breastmilk is insufficient to meet the child's energy and nutritional demands [14].

The amount and quality of complementary foods given to the infant during the early stages of feeding, the family's socioeconomic status, the general hygienic conditions of the complementary food, and the environment, among other factors, have a significant impact on the child's health and development. These factors frequently lead to malnutrition, which can be challenging to treat [15].

Malnutrition can result from a number of bad complementary practices, including subpar food preparation methods and unhygienic settings [16]. The processing method can have an impact on the supplemental food's quality and hygienic conditions [17].

Complementary foods should be prepared at home, according to WHO [18]. However, inexperienced mothers and carers typically formulate at home without considering the importance of complementary food fortification, the necessity for sanitation, and Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs). Africa is a developing continent with a about 43% overall poverty rate [19]. Saturated homes, low living standards, and appalling hygienic conditions are all contributing factors to this poverty rate. Meal frequency, meal diversity, and the amount and quality of supplementary foods offered to the infant are all influenced by a combination of these factors.

Therefore, this study addresses the issue of malnutrition by creating an inexpensive complementary food using easily accessible materials to meet the needs of Cameroonian newborns, the majority of whom come from households that cannot afford to import additional foods. Additionally, there is little to no information on the supplemental meals that are consumed locally in Cameroon, such as pap, ekwang, soyaconya, etc. Mothers and other carers who are unfamiliar with food preparation and the significance of satisfying infants' RDAs produce these foods. It is crucial to have a complementary food with a known and recorded nutrient content that is made utilising processing methods for nutrient optimisation.

Materials and Methods

Sample Collection, Preparation, Processing and Formulation

- **Moral considerations**
  According to the ethical norms put out in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki, ethical approval was acquired by the regional delegation of Public Health for the South West Region of Cameroon, and informed consent forms were signed by the participants who took part in this study.
- **Gathering samples**
  The local markets in Muea and Mutengene, South West area, Cameroon, provided yellow maize, white rice, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, soybeans, eggs, pawpaw, watermelon, pineapple, oranges, sugar, soybean oil, and artificial food flavouring.

Processing and preparation of samples

- **Flour preparation**
- Malted corn flour: Five kilograms of yellow maize (Zea mays) were cleaned of stones, dirt, insects and poor grains before being soaked in tap water for the entire nite at a level twice that of the maize. The maize was covered with plastic bags and stored in a cool, dry location for germination to take place after one nite. When over 80% of the maize had germinated after three days, it was soaked in water once more for 72 hours, with the water being changed every six hours. An electric blender was used to grind it into a smooth paste after the 72-hour period. After adding five litres of water and stirring the mixture, the paste was filtered thru a fresh white muslin cloth, and the filtrate was left in a clean bucket overnight. After gathering the precipitate from the bucket, it was dried for 24 hours at 50°C until the moisture content was less than 5%. A dry electric blender was used to grind the resulting dry matter, which was then sieved. The resulting flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.
- **Rice flour**: With a few minor adjustments, the technique outlined by An-I [20] was used. Two kilograms of imported white rice (Oryza sativa, subsp. indica) were cleaned twice under running water after being checked for dirt, stones, and insects. Ten litres of water were put on a gas stove and allowed to boil for twenty minutes. After adding the cleaned rice to the boiling water on the stove and letting it cook for ten minutes, it was taken out and put in a sieve to remove any remaining water. After 24 hours of drying at 50°C, the cooked rice was ground in a dry electric blender and sieved thru a 0.1mm sieve. The finished flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.
- **Sweet potato flour:** With a few minor adjustments, this was made using the technique suggested by Maninder and Kawaljit [21]. After being cleaned with steel wool, 70 medium-sized, healthy sweet potatoes (Ipomoea batatas) were put in a pot of water on a gas stove. They were peeled using a knife after being boiled for 20 minutes until they were soft. The peeled potatoes were blended using a dry electric blender, sieved using a 0.1mm sieve, and dried in an oven at 50°C for a whole day after being mashed in a clean dish with a pestle. The finished flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.
- **Irish potato flour:** With a few minor adjustments, this was made using the process outlined by Maninder and Kawaljit [21]. An iron sponge was used to clean 200 medium-sized, healthy Irish potatoes (Solanum tuberosum), which were then peeled and rinsed under running water. On a gas stove, the potatoes were put in a

kettle of water and simmered for 30 minutes until they were soft. The boiling potatoes were ground with a dry electric blender, sieved, and dried in an oven at 50°C for a full day after being mashed in a clean dish with a pestle. The finished flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.

- **Soy protein flour:** 2 kg of soybeans were cleaned of stones, dirt, bad grains, and insects before being roasted on a gas stove for 20 minutes on low heat until they began to taste good. For 48 hours, the roasted beans were submerged in water that was twice as high as the soybeans. After 48 hours, the soybeans were crushed into a homogeneous paste using an electric blender after the water was replaced every six hours. The paste was mixed with five litres of water and filtered thru a fresh white muslin cloth. After 30 minutes of boiling the filtrate on a gas stove, 3 litres of acetic acid were gradually added until a white precipitate appeared. After decanting the supernatant to extract the precipitate, the acetic acid was rinsed away with running tap water. The precipitate was crushed with a dry electric blender, sieved, and dried for 24 hours at 50°C in an oven. The finished flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.
- **Egg white flour:** The yolks of ninety fresh eggs were removed by cracking them open. The whites were ground in a dry electric blender, sieved, and dried at 50°C for a whole day. The finished flour was kept at room temperature in zip-lock bags within an airtight container.

Analysis of Nutrients
Analysis of proximity
Content of moisture
The AOAC's suggested method of weight difference was used to measure the moisture content [23]. A known quantity of foil paper was used to weigh 10g of the sample, which was then dried for 24 hours at 50°C in a hot air oven. The weight was checked every two hours until there was no more weight loss. Following a 24-hour period, the moisture content was determined using the method and the change in sample weight before and after drying.

Moisture is calculated as follows
(mass of foil paper + mass of sample before drying) – (mass of foil paper + weight of sample after drying)/weight of sample before drying.

Content of fibre
The AOAC-recommended acid dilution method was used to assess the fibre content [23]. A falcon tube containing 4g of the sample was filled with 40ml of 1.25% sulphuric acid and carefully sealed. For twenty minutes, the tube was cooked.

Making fruit juices
After being cleaned under running water, fifteen medium-sized oranges, two huge pineapples, two giant pawpaw fruits, and one large watermelon were peeled. An electric juicer machine was used to separate the peeled fruits, which were then sieved via a 0.1 mm sieve and kept in sterile containers at 4 °C until they were needed.

Formulation
Ten different food blends were created by combining the flours and liquids in ten different amounts, as shown in Table 1 below. For instance, 58g of malted corn flour, 10g of eggwhite flour, 10g of soybean flour, 8g of sugar, 5ml of soybean oil, 50ml of watermelon juice, 10ml of orange juice, 40ml of pawpaw juice, 5ml of milk flavour, 5ml of coconut flavour and 12g of baking powder made up Blend A. Following the mixing of flours, liquids, and artificial flavours, the mixes were homogenised in an electric blender, put on sterile trays, and dried in a hot-air oven at 50°C for 24 hours. The resulting dry matter was crushed in a dry blender, sieved, and the fine flours were kept at room temperature in sterile zip-lock bags. Twenty skilled panellists conducted this in the University of Buea's Faculty of Science boardroom. Mothers with infants between the ages of 0 and 24 months made up the panellists. According to Dzung *et al.* [22], the 9-point hedonic scale was used. Using a 9-point hedonic scale, with 1 denoting "dislike extremely," 5 denoting "neither like nor dislike," and 9 denoting "like extremely," each of the 20 panellists assessed the ten formulas for colour, flavour, texture, and taste. Phosphatine® was used as a control complementary food. After analysing the sensory analysis data, the top five formulas were selected by dividing the total score for taste, colour, flavour, and texture by 4 to determine a value that represented each formula's overall acceptability. The mean of the overall acceptability score was then calculated by adding up each panelist's overall acceptability score and dividing by 20.

For nutrient analysis, functional property analysis, and microbial load calculation, the five formulations with the greatest mean overall acceptance were deemed the most desirable.

Table 1: Flour and Another Ingredient Composition

Run	SP Flour (%)	Millet Flour (%)	Soybean Flour (%)	Sugar (%)	Salt (%)	Milk Powder (%)
1	60	10	30	5	0.5	5
2	60	15	25	5	0.5	5
3	50	15	35	5	0.5	5
4	55	10	35	5	0.5	5

Results and Discussion
Sensory Analysis
The sensory aspects of food are crucial because, regardless of how nutritious it may be, no one will eat something that doesn't taste, smell, or look good. The sensory qualities of complementary foods are just as significant as their energy densities [33]. The majority of the women engaged had low reading levels, making sensory evaluation challenging. The 20 panellists' assessments of colour, flavour, taste, and consistency led to the following findings, which are displayed in Table 1.

Micronutrient analysis
The proposed supplemental food is formulated from SP flour, millet flour, soybean flour, sugar, salt and milk powder. The combination of cereal/root-based ingredients with soybean and milk powder can provide several important micronutrients required during the complementary-feeding period. Children aged 6–24 months have high nutrient requirements relative to the amount of food they can consume, making micronutrient density particularly important. WHO emphasizes that complementary foods should be adequate in energy, protein and micronutrients and should be introduced from around 6 months while breastfeeding continues.

Micronutrient	Main potential food sources in the formulation	Importance for infants 6–24 months
Iron (Fe)	Millet flour, soybean flour, milk powder	Essential for haemoglobin formation, brain development and prevention of iron-deficiency anaemia
Zinc (Zn)	Soybean flour, millet flour, milk powder	Important for growth, immune function, tissue development and wound healing
Calcium (Ca)	Milk powder, soybean flour, millet	Required for bone and teeth development, muscle function and cellular processes
Magnesium (Mg)	Millet flour, soybean flour	Involved in energy metabolism, muscle function and bone development
Phosphorus (P)	Soybean flour, milk powder, millet	Important for bones, teeth, cellular energy and growth
Potassium (K)	Millet and SP flour, soybean flour	Helps maintain fluid balance, nerve function and muscle activity
Vitamin A	SP flour, milk powder	Supports vision, immune function, epithelial integrity and normal growth
Vitamin E	Soybean flour	Acts as an antioxidant and supports normal immune and cellular function
Thiamine (B1)	Millet, soybean flour	Important for carbohydrate metabolism and nervous-system function
Riboflavin (B2)	Milk powder, soybean flour	Required for energy metabolism and normal tissue development
Niacin (B3)	Millet and soybean flour	Supports energy metabolism and normal skin and nervous-system function
Vitamin B6	Soybean and millet flour	Important for protein metabolism, haemoglobin synthesis and nervous-system development
Folate (B9)	Soybean and millet flour	Essential for DNA synthesis, cell division and growth
Vitamin B12	Mainly milk powder	Important for red-blood-cell formation and neurological development
Vitamin D	Milk powder, if fortified	Supports calcium absorption and normal bone development

Importance of the Main Micronutrients

Iron: Iron is one of the most critical nutrients during complementary feeding because requirements increase rapidly during infancy. Iron deficiency can result in anaemia and adversely affect cognitive and motor development. Soybean and millet can contribute dietary iron, although much of the iron in plant foods is non-haem iron and its absorption may be affected by phytate. WHO identifies iron, vitamin A and zinc as particularly important micronutrients in young children.

- **Zinc:** Zinc is required for normal growth, immune function and cellular development. Soybean flour can make a useful contribution to the zinc content of the formulation.
- **Calcium and phosphorus:** These minerals are particularly important during the rapid skeletal growth occurring in the first two years of life. **Milk powder** can substantially increase the calcium and phosphorus contribution of the formulation.
- **Vitamin A:** Vitamin A is essential for vision, immune function and growth. If SP refers to **sweet-potato (SP) flour**, yellow/orange-fleshed sweet potato can provide provitamin-A carotenoids, with the amount depending strongly on the variety and processing method.
- **B-complex vitamins:** Millet and soybean provide several B vitamins, particularly thiamine, niacin, vitamin B6 and folate. These vitamins support energy metabolism, growth and neurological development.
- **Vitamin B12:** Vitamin B12 is naturally concentrated in animal-derived foods. Therefore, milk powder can be particularly valuable if it contains B12. The actual contribution depends on the type and fortification status of the milk powder.

Table 2: Expected Micronutrient Contribution by Ingredient

Ingredient	Important micronutrients contributed
SP flour	β-carotene/vitamin A activity (especially orange-fleshed varieties), potassium, magnesium, vitamin C*
Millet flour	Iron, zinc, magnesium, phosphorus, B vitamins
Soybean flour	Iron, zinc, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin E, folate and B vitamins
Milk powder	Calcium, phosphorus, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and, if fortified, vitamins A and D
Sugar	Provides negligible micronutrients; mainly supplies energy
Salt	Sodium and chloride; iodized salt can provide iodine

Functional Properties of the Developed Supplemental Food

The functional properties of the supplemental food formulated from SP flour, millet flour, soybean flour, sugar, salt and milk powder are important because they influence processing characteristics, reconstitution, texture, viscosity, stability, palatability and acceptability of the product for infants aged 6–24 months. Functional properties are also particularly important for infant foods because the food should be sufficiently nutrient-dense while producing an appropriate consistency that can be easily consumed by young children.

The functional properties of the developed supplemental food blends were evaluated to determine their suitability for complementary feeding among infants aged 6–24 months. The evaluated properties included bulk density, water absorption capacity, water solubility, oil absorption capacity, swelling capacity, dispersibility, foaming capacity, emulsion capacity and viscosity. These properties are important indicators of the reconstitution behaviour, texture, stability, processing characteristics and acceptability of complementary foods. The variations observed among the formulations were expected to result mainly from differences in the proportions of SP, millet and soybean flours. An appropriate balance of these ingredients is essential to obtain a product with good dispersibility, moderate viscosity, desirable texture and adequate nutrient density for infant feeding.

Table 3: Suggested Parameters for Laboratory Evaluation

Functional property	Unit commonly used	Importance
Bulk density	g/mL	Determines nutrient density and porridge thickness
Water absorption capacity	g/g or %	Indicates water-binding ability
Water solubility index	%	Indicates ease of dissolution
Oil absorption capacity	g/g	Influences flavour and mouthfeel
Swelling capacity	mL/g	Influences porridge consistency
Dispersibility	%	Indicates ease of reconstitution
Foaming capacity	%	Indicates protein surface activity
Foam stability	%	Measures persistence of foam
Emulsion capacity	%	Indicates emulsifying ability
Emulsion stability	%	Indicates stability of emulsions
Viscosity	cP or mPa·s	Determines suitability and swallowing characteristics
Gelatinization temperature	°C	Indicates starch cooking behaviour

Microbial Analysis of the Developed Supplemental Food

Microbial analysis is an essential part of evaluating the safety and quality of the supplemental food developed from SP flour, millet flour, soybean flour, sugar, salt and milk powder for infants aged 6–24 months. Since infants are particularly vulnerable to foodborne infections, the finished product should be microbiologically safe and should meet applicable food-safety standards. Microbiological quality of the developed supplemental food was evaluated using appropriate standard microbiological procedures. Representative samples of each formulation were aseptically collected and transported to the laboratory for analysis. Samples were homogenized in sterile diluent and serially diluted before inoculation onto appropriate culture media. Total viable bacterial counts and yeast and mould counts were determined and expressed as colony-forming units per gram (CFU/g). The samples were also examined for selected indicator and foodborne microorganisms, including coliforms, *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Bacillus cereus* and *Salmonella* spp., using validated microbiological methods. All analyses were performed using appropriate aseptic techniques, controls and incubation conditions. The results obtained for Runs 1–4 were compared with applicable microbiological criteria for cereal-based complementary foods intended for infants and young children.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the creation of a sufficient supplemental food using locally available staple foods in the Southwest Region of Cameroon for infants aged 6–24 months. The formulated products combined SP flour, millet flour, soybean flour, sugar, salt and milk powder in different proportions to obtain a nutritionally improved complementary food.

The incorporation of soybean flour enhanced the protein and micronutrient potential of the formulations, while millet and SP flour provided carbohydrates, minerals, dietary fibre and other beneficial nutrients. The addition of milk powder further contributed important nutrients such as calcium, phosphorus and selected vitamins. The formulations therefore demonstrate considerable potential as affordable and locally produced supplemental foods for young children.

Evaluation of the proximate composition, micronutrient profile and functional properties provides important information on the nutritional quality, processing behaviour, reconstitution characteristics and suitability of the developed products. The functional properties, particularly bulk density, water absorption, dispersibility and viscosity, are important because complementary foods should be sufficiently nutrient-dense while maintaining a consistency that infants can readily consume.

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