

Decolonising Implementation Science: Adaptive Scaling-up of the Ying Yang Bao Nutrition Programme in China

Yangmu Huang

School of Public Health, Peking University, China

Yan Guo

School of Public Health, Peking University, China

Abstract

Child malnutrition persists globally, reflecting structural failures when externally conceived interventions lack contextual adaptability and local agency. The Ying Yang Bao programme reflects principles aligned with calls for more locally led and adaptive global health practice. Launched nationally in 2012, the YYB Programme provides a soy-based fortified complementary food enriched with key micronutrients (iron, zinc, calcium, vitamins A, B2, and D) to children aged 6–23 months in poverty areas, alongside caregiver education on complementary feeding. The programme was grounded in scientific studies from the late 1990s and pilots conducted from 2008 to 2012. Between 2012 and 2021, coverage expanded from 100 counties in 10 provinces to 832 counties in 22 provinces, reaching over 19 million children. It was developed through participatory pilots grounded in local diets and caregiver input, then scaled nationally through domestic financing, cross-sector collaboration, and adaptive health system integration. YYB not only reduced malnutrition but also empowered caregivers, strengthened community health capacity, and institutionalised data-informed decision-making. These outcomes demonstrate that implementation science, when redirected through local leadership and iterative co-creation, can achieve sustainable and equitable nutrition improvements. YYB's evolution from field trials to nationally embedded policy illustrates a transferable framework—rooted in equity, ownership, and contextual innovation—that low- and middle-income countries can adapt to advance ownership and leadership in global health implementation.

Keywords

Implementation science, Global health decolonization, Adaptive scaling-up, Ying Yang Bao programme.