



EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF A TARGETED HOMESTEAD FOOD PRODUCTION INTERVENTION ON THE NUTRITION OF COMMUNITIES

Helen Keller International, Bangladesh

The Challenge

Despite recent improvements, malnutrition remains a major public health issue in Bangladesh. Rates of undernutrition are still among the highest in the world with acute and chronic undernutrition disproportionately affecting women and children. With 35% of children stunted and 17% women undernourished,¹ Bangladesh is facing an intergenerational cycle of underdevelopment, malnutrition, poverty and poor health, especially in rural areas. Studies show multisectoral approaches to nutrition—from food production to consumption—can have a positive impact on overall health outcomes for women and children in developing countries.

The Intervention

Helen Keller International's Making Markets Work for Women (M²W²) aimed to eliminate extreme poverty in remote communities of Bangladesh by improving food security, diets and women's empowerment. Beneficiary women formed marketing groups who then received training on new technologies for farming and livestock care. The programme provided quality seeds/saplings for agricultural production, and grants to improve poultry and livestock care. M²W² engaged with local markets to establish fair prices and improve market access for these households. Beneficiaries also received micronutrients for infants and adolescent girls, counselling for infant and young child feeding (IYCF), and participated in group meetings on health, hygiene and nutrition.

The Evaluation

This quasi-experimental study was conducted in two upazila of Khagrachhari district in Bangladesh over 2.5 years. The study included 24 intervention villages matched to 24 comparison villages. The



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evaluation looked at how the intervention affected the dietary diversity and nutritional status of entire villages, and how different groups (e.g. women and infants) benefitted from the presence of the intervention. Three rounds of data collection occurred through the life of the programme using a household level structured questionnaire. Outcomes of interest included household economic output, household food security, dietary diversity, IYCF practices and women and child nutritional status.

The Results

Evaluation results indicated many positive changes attributed to the intervention, but many were not statistically significant. In all three rounds of data collection, the intervention group had higher monthly per capita income in agriculture and livestock than the comparison group, but not for other forms of income. A greater percentage of intervention households had members involved in agricultural production and livestock rearing than the

comparison households. Fewer intervention households were food insecure by the end of the programme (33% vs. 44%). Women in the intervention group had higher dietary diversity and lower chronic energy deficiency than women in the comparison group, but this difference was not significant. On the other hand, more children (24–59 months) in the intervention group had significantly diverse diets in the first two rounds of data collection (59%, 50%) than the comparison children (43%, 36%). They also had lower rates of stunting by the end of the intervention (32% vs. 36%), but the difference was not significant.

The Lessons Learnt

Seasonality in the data collected from rural Bangladesh on nutrition outcomes can be a barrier for measuring impact of project interventions. The evaluation was redesigned to utilise rolling surveys that allowed data collection in all seasons, which was helpful in minimizing the seasonal effects. Additionally, numerous women in the study travelled to their cultivation sites in the early morning and returned in evening. Reaching them for interviews was a challenge during this season. The data collection team stayed nights in the villages to conduct interviews and take measurements.

Looking Ahead

This evaluation broadened its focus to capture the intervention effects in the wider community beyond just project beneficiaries. This provides evidence on the broader development implications of the project interventions. Further research needs to be undertaken allowing adequate time between the intervention and the assessment to capture community level changes on nutritional indicators.

References

¹ Helen Keller International and James P. Grant School of Public Health. *State of food security and nutrition in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Helen Keller International and James P. Grant School of Public Health; 2014.

From the Publication

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