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## Impact of Income on Food and Nutrition Security: A Case of Youth Employment Promotion Program in Sierra Leone

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### Abstract

The agricultural sector plays an important role in food security and the economic well-being of most developing countries. The sector contributes 15 percent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Agriculture is also the primary source of livelihood for 10 to 25 percent of urban households. Youth employment in connection with agricultural transformation in developing countries in Africa has gained attention in recent years as one way to promote youth involvement towards sustainable improvement of their livelihoods. Income is likely to influence dietary diversity if a household share of food expenditure is significant or if the income is used to source factors of production to diversify their production. Subsequently, Sierra Leone is a country with a young population, and facilitating youth participation in agriculture has the potential to drive widespread poverty reduction among youths and adults. This study evaluated the influence of the youth employment promotion (Business Loop) programme on food and nutrition security in three districts of Sierra Leone. Minimum Dietary Diversity Score (MDD-S) 24-Hour recall indicator was chosen for this study because it is designed for settings where other dietary diversity assessment methods are unfeasible in developing countries. Random quantitative and qualitative cross-sectional data were collected from 134 youth agricultural entrepreneurs where the questionnaire considered fourteen compulsory and three optional food groups adapted to local food items during the survey. Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression showed that monthly income (sales revenue) had a significant net effect on MDSD. This means that the entrepreneurs spend a significant proportion of their income on food as confirmed during the Focus Group Discussions. Income increased with the probability that a respondent was female although 10 percent of the female population achieved an MDD-S between 1 – 4 showing a lower micronutrient intake. Even though an increase in income is crucial to improving dietary diversity in developing countries, outcomes can be more visible if programs focus on women inclusion and enhancing food and nutrition knowledge.

**Keywords:** Dietary diversity , income, youth employment program