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Women Empowerment and Intra-household Nutritious Food Distribution and Consumption in Crop-livestock Production Systems: Empirical Evidence from Bangladesh

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Abstract

Despite world leaders' commitment to end hunger by 2030, malnourishment remains rather high in many developing countries. While in South Asia, there is progress in food security, health services, and some other development indicators, but malnourishment is still high, which researchers called as 'Asian enigma of malnutrition.' Women's disempowered situation is the root cause of these contradictory findings. Focusing on this fact, some studies posit that empowering rural women through livestock interventions can set them on the path to better achieve nutritional outcomes within their households. However, it is unclear how 'the triple linkage' of livestock-empowerment-nutrition unfolds in reality and how it shapes the intra-household nutritious food consumption where discriminations against girls in food allocation are largely set in literature. This study explores 'the triple linkage' within villages in rural Bangladesh that have adopted livestock rearing as a means to their empowerment, adopting a mixed-method study approach. Quantitative data was collected from 287 farmers along four dimensions: livestock production decision-making, marketing of livestock products, access and control over income from livestock, and decision-making over food choices. We found that the children and partners of empowered women by the livestock intervention had better protein intake with a reduction in the women's own protein intake and the protein food intake of the girls and boys from the household with higher empowerment level of women is much equal than the others. The results from the 23 gender-disaggregated focus group discussions revealed that livestock farming has contributed to the milk intake of every household member considerably. The socio-cultural norms, strong patriarchal influence, poor economic conditions, a large number of family members, poor participation in training or social groups are the reasons for unequal food distribution. While livestock interventions may not be necessary upset gender norms, it imposes new labour demands on women, with negative implications for their nutrition. Development agencies need to implement safeguards to mitigate this negative spillover.

Keywords: Intra-household food distribution, livestock, Nutrition, Women's empowerment