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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Women’s empowerment along the agriculture to nutrition pathways in a participatory community project in western Kenya

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Abstract

Background: This study is based on a participatory community-based nutrition project with the aim to diversify women’s and children’s diets through traditional and locally available foods in Vihiga County, Kenya.

Objective: The objective of this study was to assess how the project contributed to women’s empowerment, with a focus on pathway (1) agriculture as a source of food (2) agriculture as income source.

To get a more in-depth understanding of where the impact occurred, women’s empowerment was integrated into the analysis.

Method: The data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 25 beneficiary households in five sub-locations in Vihiga. The sample consisted of married couples. Both the husband, and the wife were interviewed (in total 50 interviews). Thematic analysis was used to determine where along the agriculture-nutrition pathways the project had an impact.

Result: The data shows that the community-based nutrition project contributed to women’s empowerment along pathway one 1) women’s time burden decreased as a result of men’s support and involvement in vegetable production that previously was perceived as a women’s task; 2) Women were able to expand their production and invested in off-farm activities such as kiosks. Along pathway two: 1) women reported that they have greater decision-making or bargaining power over expenditures as they now see themselves as providers and not dependents; 2) Women reported to be independent and rely less on their husbands to provide food for the household. At the same time husbands showed reduced responsibility to contribute to food provisioning and decision-making power over income remained dependent on who brings in the income.

Conclusion: To maximise the nutrition outcomes and increase the impact on women’s empowerment along the pathways, interventions aiming to involve both men and women from the start are needed to tackle the divide within a household and the prevailing gender norms. A household action plan may be integrated into projects to generate a common goal and vision at household level to potentially reduce the divide between men and women. A sense of togetherness could also mitigate the risk of men controlling women’s income.

Keywords: Agriculture-nutrition pathways, empowerment, gender, nutrition, nutrition-sensitive agriculture

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