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Smallholder farmers’ food production and dietary diversification: a qualitative study in Lindi, rural Tanzania

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Abstract

Background

Improving small holder farmers’ ability to produce a diverse range of foods has been identified as a significant technique for increasing food and nutritional diversity. In Tanzania, nevertheless, there is little evidence linking household production to dietary diversification.

Aim and methods

The extent to which farm output diversity is connected with dietary diversity is investigated in this study, which uses cross sectional data of 440 households in two semi-arid villages in Lindi region in Tanzania.

Results

The results revealed a moderate level of dietary diversity in households. The farm households majorly produced four food groups (pulses, meat, grains, and vegetables), indicating that food purchases were more common than household production. Households that use more money on foods were more likely to eat a more diversified diet compared to those with lower spending on food, implying that market integration is linked to greater dietary diversity.

Results indicated that farming households consumed 4 out of 12 food groups on average with very low consumption of fruits and vegetables. Dietary diversity varied by demographics and socioeconomic characteristics of households. There was a positive association between own production diversification and dietary diversity. However, there was no link between production diversity and intake of micronutrient-rich foods like fruits and vegetables. It was indicated further that the disadvantaged households with a better income preferred to have tastier foods that diversified ones. Some of the primary drivers of dietary diversity among subsistence households were higher levels of education, per capita income, food spending, and geographic location.

Conclusions

The results suggest that inspiring disadvantaged households in Tanzania to grow a variety of food and animal species could be an operative technique for improving nutritional diversity.

Keywords: Dietary diversity, household own production, smallholder farmers

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