transform nutrition

Guidance note

Teka GebreMichael, 67, and his son Kahsay, nine stand in the family's fruit and vegetable garden their village in Tigray region, Ethiopia.

AMERTI LEMMA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Nutrition sensitive social protection and agriculture

Introduction

This guidance note from the Transform Nutrition research consortium summarizes our social protection and agriculture work and highlights three key findings for action.

The key audience for this guidance note is DFID and other development partners and donors; development practitioners designing and implementing development programmes; national government personnel.

Background

Ten best bet nutrition specific interventions (including micronutrient supplementation and fortification, community based nutrition behaviour change communication interventions aimed at strengthening breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices and community management of severe acute malnutrition) can dramatically reduce infant and child mortality. Research undertaken by Transform Nutrition has shown that there is a powerful economic case for these interventions, with every dollar invested returning around 15 dollars in economic benefits. Yet these nutrition specific interventions, powerful though they are at reducing infant and child mortality, appear to have limited impacts on chronic undernutrition. This limited impact has sparked interest in the potential for nutrition sensitive interventions – complementary programmes on other sectors that address the underlying determinants of malnutrition. A major component of Transform Nutrition's research portfolio was an examination of the potential of two sectors, social protection and agriculture, in two countries – Bangladesh and Ethiopia, to reduce chronic undernutrition.

Three core findings emerge.

1 Social protection by itself may have little effect on improving children's nutritional status. In both Bangladesh and Ethiopia, while providing food and/or cash improved household food security, it had no effect on chronic undernutrition. Our work in Bangladesh points to the importance of **linking social protection to intensive nutrition behaviour change communication (BCC) activities**. These improved women's nutrition knowledge and enhanced their status within their homes and communities; combined with a cash transfer, they result in pre-school children consuming a more diverse set of foods, including animal source foods.

2 Food is needed for children to grow. So agricultural interventions that increase food supply should improve children's nutritional status. Transform Nutrition's work suggests that this simplistic narrative is misleading. Our work in Bangladesh finds little evidence that rising rice yields reduced chronic undernutrition. Nor is simply providing nutrition BCC in rural communities sufficient. In Ethiopia, we find that even when mothers are knowledgeable about good child nutrition practices, this has little effect on the quality of children's diets when children live in households with poor market access. Instead, **agricultural development may contribute most to improvements in children's nutritional status when it includes market-integration activities**, such as improvements in value chains that make available a wider range of foods (especially animal source foods) **and when these also include nutrition BCC activities.**

SAVE THE CHILDREN

A woman processes rice in front of her house in Pukra, Habiganj district, Bangladesh.

3 There are two common threads linking our social protection and agriculture work: (1) By themselves, each sector appears to have limited impacts on chronic undernutrition; **both social protection and agriculture need to be explicitly linked to the nutrition sector in order to be effective; and (2) Animal source foods are vital**. In Bangladesh, children in households where mothers received both cash and intensive nutrition BCC were more likely to consume flesh foods, eggs and dairy; these children were the only ones who saw their nutritional status improve. In Ethiopia, we find that children with access to dairy products were less likely to be stunted. These results are consistent with recent work in nutritional sciences that emphasize the importance of essential amino acids and choline, found in animal source foods and eggs respectively, for child growth.

Credit

This guidance note was written by John Hoddinott, co-research director for Transform Nutrition and H.E. Babcock Professor of Food & Nutrition Economics and Policy, Cornell University

Further reading

Eldis key issues guide: The role of social protection and agriculture in tackling chronic undernutrition

IFPRI INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

IDS Institute of Development Studies

Save the Children

icddr,b

phfi PUBLIC HEALTH FOUNDATION OF INDIA

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