



MARKET CONNECTIONS

How Evaluation Builds Stronger Households in Rural Bangladesh

Recently, the World Bank reported that agricultural growth and development have contributed to reducing poverty in Bangladesh from 48.9 percent in 2000 to 31.5 percent in 2010. However, high levels of malnutrition remain prevalent in children and women in rural Bangladesh despite considerable reductions in poverty. Many households are not consuming diverse, nutritious diets to sustain their health and the majority of rural households often face seasonal food deprivation without sufficient access to animal and plant-based protein and micronutrient-rich fruits and vegetables.

Gender norms influence many dimensions of smallholder farmers' livelihoods, particularly women's decision-making power, control over household resources, and physical mobility. Cultural and gender norms influence the amount and distribution of nutritious foods among members of a household, i.e., between women and men, old and young, infants and older children, boys and girls. As a result, even if there is sufficient food within the household, an individual's nutrient requirements may not be met. There is a critical need to address the range and depth of underlying gender-specific constraints to food and nutrition security.

Beginning in 2013, Caritas Bangladesh partnered with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to implement two pilot projects in poor rural villages in two districts of Bangladesh: the Egiye Jai ("Move Forward") and the Nijera Gori ("We Build it Ourselves") projects. The Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension (INGENAES) project, funded by USAID, engaged with these two nongovernmental organizations in 2015 to generate rigorous evidence concerning nutrition-agriculture linkages for Egiye Jai and Nijera Gori through performing an impact evaluation.

CRS and Caritas aimed to increase the yield of year-round quality homestead production and improve household food security and nutrition through introducing and facilitating agricultural innovation adoption, increasing women farmers' access to extension services, and linking smallholders to markets. INGENAES, led by the AgReach team at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (i) developed survey questionnaires that adequately capture rural households' farm livelihoods and food security and nutritional outcomes; (ii) guided the selection of the

control group rural households that did not receive any CRS and Caritas project services; (iii) designed a randomization sampling procedure for rigorous impact evaluation; (iv) trained extension trainers (project directors, monitoring and evaluation officers, animators, and other project-related staffs); (v) and assessed the impacts whether the projects achieved the objectives through analyzing data. To round out the evaluation process, AgReach disseminated project evidence through various publication channels to reach all those concerned with improving agricultural extension services.



Increasing women’s access to extension services can greatly improve household food security. © INGENAES taken by Han Bum Lee, 2016

The INGENAES team found that the projects increased beneficiaries’ income (on average of 23-25 dollars a month in Egbye Jai and 35-44 dollars a month in Nijera Gori), likelihood of rearing poultry and planting vegetable gardens with more plant varieties, and marketing poultry and vegetables. Additionally, the projects enhanced women’s empowerment, as they were more likely to be actively involved in a greater number of community organizations and make decisions on poultry and vegetable marketing. The projects also improved women’s access to markets and positively impacted their income and spending on

healthcare, education, and transportation. These factors became the means to improving household food security and dietary diversity scores (McNamara et al., 2017a; 2017b).

Ultimately, INGENAES’s project evaluations enabled CRS and Caritas to prove whether the intervention strategies successfully addressed the needs of the poor and understand how and to what extent the projects affected the households. In addition, strengthened research components in the projects enhanced the implementers’ capacities to implement, operate, and manage the extension projects, as well as deliver robust evidence for contemporary issues. Specifically, two joint action-oriented research and learning workshops (held in Dinajpur district and Dhaka in Bangladesh between 2016 and 2017) concentrated on the linkages between a project’s extension services and beneficiaries’ income, health, and food security and nutritional outcomes. Workshop participants also clarified what the suitable roles of extension workers are and explored ways to overcome a variety of challenges for project implementation, agriculture, and rural development.

Through a program called the “Sustainable Food and Livelihood Security Project Phase II” (SuFoL II), CRS and Caritas are currently expanding their projects to the national level. They are using evidence found through INGENAES’s impact evaluation to adjust program design and implementation to better suit the needs of rural households in Bangladesh. SuFoL II, which began in January 2017, aims to reach 10,000 households (approx. 54,000 individuals) in 48 vulnerable rural villages in six districts including Barisal, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh.

Story written by Han Bum Lee and Katy Mosiman

Cover photo © INGENAES, taken by P. McNamara in Dinajpur, Bangladesh in June 2016.

The publication was made possible by the generous support of the American people through USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.



© INGENAES 2017. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License. Widespread dissemination and use are encouraged.