

Tufts University-ENGINE Programme

Evaluating Multisectoral Strategies for Improved Nutrition and Food Security in Ethiopia

What is the rationale for the study? Although Ethiopia has been one of the few countries that has made significant progress towards the Millennium Development goals, a large portion of the population continues to suffer from malnutrition, even in areas considered to be relatively food secure. With the majority of the country engaging in smallholder farming, policy makers and nutrition experts alike have begun to reconsider the role of agriculture as a potential pathway to improved nutrition. Large evidence gaps remain, however, regarding how best to link agriculture and nutrition at the programmatic level to achieve desired impacts.

This study will examine ENGINE's role in affecting nutrition, food security, and livelihoods outcomes through its integrated programming, by answering the following key questions: 1) To what extent, and through which pathways, do ENGINE's nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions improve food security, dietary intake, and nutrition outcomes, and for whom? 2) What factors predict the adoption and sustainable application of nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices? Part of this analysis will explore household decision-making related to market engagement and the use of income from agricultural sales for improved dietary quality. 3) To what extent have agriculture extension workers integrated nutrition-sensitive approaches and messages into their work? What do they perceive as key barriers or facilitators to doing so? and, 4) Why does stunting persist in areas (and in households) of relative food surplus?

How is the study designed? We intend to follow a sample of smallholder agricultural households randomly selected from areas where both the ENGINE and Agricultural Growth Program (AGP) are active. These households will be followed over a period of two years, and surveyed twice per year in the post-harvest and 'lean' seasons. In addition, qualitative research will be carried out with a sub-sample of these households and with agriculture service providers and kebele leaders to explore in-depth behavioural dynamics. The research will be conducted collaboratively with Jimma University, Hawassa University, and EHNRI in order to strengthen their institutional capacity to carry out these types of investigations.

What will the results tell us? These results will inform how best to link agricultural and nutritional interventions so that optimal nutritional outcomes may be reached. By elucidating household and service provider behaviour with regard to nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions, these results will also provide essential information about the best ways to sustainably improve the delivery and uptake of nutritionally-enhanced agricultural practices.

Why is this important for ENGINE? A key mandate of ENGINE is to strengthen nutrition through the health sector while also collaborating with existing governmental agricultural initiatives, such as the Agricultural Growth Program. Without a solid understanding of the individual and household dynamics that exist with regard to these multi-sectoral interventions, neither objective can be successfully achieved. As Ethiopia takes strides toward integrating nutrition-related considerations into its agriculture policy and programs, this study will help ENGINE promote urgently needed evidence-based recommendations to enhance the success of the outcome.

Where are we now? The first round of data collection for this study began at the end of February and is scheduled to wrap up by mid April 2014. A team of 6 supervisors and 26 data collectors were deployed to 10 woredas across SNNP and Oromiya regions to collect data from 1200 rural households. The data collectors are conducting household interviews with the head of household and food preparer in the household on topics ranging from food security, diet, agricultural production, income, health and sanitation and collecting height and weight measurements. Data collection is done electronically on handheld tablets and submitted to a secured server via an internet connection. The qualitative data collection began in early March and wrapped up by the end of the month. The qualitative team conducted 32 focus group discussions and 30 key informant interviews in 5 woredas. The second round of data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, is currently planned for the middle of the year.