FEED THE FUTURE
The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

Addressing Gender-Related Barriers to Better Nutritional Behaviors

The quality of a woman's diet before, during, and after pregnancy has direct consequences on her and her child's health and well-being. Insufficient consumption of calories, iron, and other nutrients needed for gestation, childbirth, and breastfeeding contributes to maternal mortality and morbidity, stillbirth, miscarriage, and low birth weight. Malnutrition and poverty are intricately linked and self-perpetuating. Infants born to malnourished women are at greater risk of neonatal mortality and under-nutrition early in life can stunt physical and cognitive development, leading to life-long impairments. In young girls, poor nutrition early in life increases their risk of reproductive and maternal morbidity and mortality as adults. ➤

ENGINE TECHNICAL BRIEF **5**

EMPOWERING NEW GENERATIONS TO IMPROVE NUTRITION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Save the Children

In Ethiopia, as in many contexts, women and children are the most likely groups to suffer from malnutrition. Yet nutrition programs that target only this group neglect to address several of the underlying causes of women's struggle to meet their nutritional needs, most notably the inequities in marital and family relationships that inhibit women's capacity to ensure good nutrition for themselves and their children.

ENGINE'S RESPONSE

To identify the context-specific barriers preventing women's access to proper nutrition in project-supported *woredas* and identify ways in which the project could strengthen its community-based nutrition interventions, ENGINE conducted focus group discussions, key informant interviews, expert interviews, and site observations with 470 male and female community members in 83 project-supported *woredas*. The research also assessed the gender mainstreaming capacity and institutional practices within ENGINE and regional Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs bureaus.

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Findings from the Gender Analysis

Marriage has been found to positively correlate with improved nutrition status for women in Ethiopia. However, ENGINE observed that power imbalances between husband and wife can prevent women from meeting their nutritional needs: ***"As you can see, I am pregnant! … He is not talking to me, and he mistreats our children. As a result, my health is getting poor. I do not have access to adequate food, and my body is becoming weak."***

Inequities in access to education and information exacerbate power imbalances in marital relationships and limit women's ability to advocate for healthy choices for themselves and their children. The proportion of female respondents who had received no formal education was 60 percent higher than men and nearly twice as many women as men had no access to radio or television (33 percent versus 17 percent, respectively).

Women are less likely to have control over crucial resources related to nutrition security (Table 1) and less likely to be able to make independent decisions regarding income. Just one-quarter of women said they could make decisions regarding the use of their husbands' income; 44 percent of men reported independently deciding how to spend their wife's income. Sixty percent of men stated that they alone decide on the type of food to purchase. Men prefer to sell the bulk of their harvests, thus limiting the family's diet.

Women spend more time working at home than men: 49 percent of women but just 15 percent of men spend more than six hours a day on food preparation and serving. Forty-three percent of women spent four to six hours per day on non-food related chores; 55 percent of men spent less than two hours on these tasks.

Implementation of ENGINE's Gender Strategy

With this information, ENGINE developed its gender strategy, which focused on enhancing capacities and policies regarding gender issues at the institutional level and improving women's access to and control of resources and information at the community level.

Table 1. Access to resources by gender

TYPE OF RESOURCE ACCESSED	% Respondents with access to resource	
	MALE	FEMALE
Land	65	44
Capital/credit	56	45
Gardening	49	48
Cattle	41	20
Goat and sheep	42	15
Dairy products	23	48
Food crops	32	18
Cash crops	34	26
Farming tools	39	16
Fertilizer	32	11
Telephone (cell phone)	24	12
Poultry	31	34
Bee hives	20	5
Irrigation	26	15

Enhancing Institutional Capacity and Policy Environment for Gender Mainstreaming

ENGINE shared the findings of the gender assessment with government and development partner organizations at a national workshop and used information from the assessment to integrate gender awareness concepts into the project's capacity building efforts with regional, zonal, and *woreda*-level ministry staff. Workshops for regional, *woreda*, and zonal gender focal persons and women's group representatives introduced them to the relationship between gender and nutrition and the role of each sector's gender focal person in implementing the National Nutrition Program. To raise awareness of gender issues among frontline workers, ENGINE integrated information on the impact gender roles have on women and children's nutrition into training materials for health and agriculture extension workers.

Improving Women's Access to and Control of Resources and Information

ENGINE's greatest impact on gender relationships and women's access to nutritious food arguably stemmed from its interventions with most vulnerable households (MVHHs) participating in the nutrition-sensitive livelihoods activities and through enhanced community conversations (ECCs).

Women constituted the majority of participants in the MVHH livelihoods activities. ENGINE purposively designed the activity in this way to empower women. However, through the use of the gender checklist (which was developed as part of the gender strategy's third pillar, the integration of gender into the monitoring and evaluation system), ENGINE discovered that because only one member of each MVHH was invited to the orientation sessions, some men forbade their wives from participating. The project held orientation meetings for 7,319 men to provide information on the package of activities offered to the MVHHs, maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN), nutrition-sensitive agriculture, and actions men could take to be supportive of their wives' efforts to improve the family's diet. To further engage men, ENGINE provided decision making and communications skills training, particularly regarding MIYCN practices, for more than 4,498 male members of MVHHs.

ECCs, discussed in-depth in *ENGINE Technical Brief 8: Catalyzing Change Through Enhanced Community Conversations,* engaged husbands and fathers, mothers, and grandmothers in discussions regarding barriers to practicing optimal MIYCN behaviors, including gender roles and family relationships. Nearly 37,500 people, one-third of whom were men, participated in the meetings. The ECCs proved to be particularly effective in inspiring improvements in marital relationships, which in turn allowed women greater access to necessary resources for MIYCN. To bolster these results, ENGINE identified male ECC participants who were exceptionally supportive of their wives and children, certified them as role models, and recognized them for their positive actions at community events.

RESULTS

To identify changes in gender-related behaviors in MVHHs, a September 2015 survey of participants in ENGINE's livelihoods activities asked several questions that had been included in the gender analysis. Just 17 percent of men in the MVHH survey reported that they had sole discretion to choose the types of food to purchase for the family and 14 percent reported they were the sole decision makers regarding the food the family would consume. This is a large decrease from the 2013 gender analysis, in which 60 percent of male respondents reported being the sole decision maker on food purchases and 67 percent said they decided independently what food the family would consume. While these differences are promising, the data do not necessarily represent actual changes in behavior as the cohorts of study respondents were not identical between surveys.

Results from an assessment of the ECCs are positive as well; 69 percent of men reported positive changes in male maternal nutrition behaviors, which enable their wives to eat larger quantities and more diversity of foods, reduce their workloads, and take iron folate supplements during pregnancy.

Husbands and wives noticed the affectionate dialogue between the ECCs' virtual facilitators and reported trying to emulate the characters' relationship with their own spouses. Forty-one percent of men and 29 percent of women reported that they changed their relationship with their spouse as a result of listening to the virtual facilitators. Participants explained that small acts of kindness and affection improved their relationships with their spouses; the resulting positive family dynamics appear to have been important facilitators of the improvements in nutrition and WASH practices.

To empower women, projects must engage men. In the *woredas* supported by ENGINE, men are still the household gatekeepers. To successfully work with women, projects must first earn the trust of husbands. Once the husbands felt included, they were open and supportive of the interventions.

Although domestic violence was not explicitly addressed, in SNNPR, male focus group participants spontaneously discussed domestic violence and how the ECCs had inspired them to change their behavior toward their wives. Focus groups in all three regions also reported improvements in women's status. Mothers described having greater self-esteem and feeling valued.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **To empower women, projects must engage men.** In the *woredas* supported by ENGINE, men are still the household gatekeepers. To successfully work with women, projects must first earn the trust of husbands. Once the husbands felt included, they were open and supportive of the interventions.
- **Positive role models are a powerful motivator.** ECC participants' engaged strongly with the virtual facilitators. Their charismatic and affable personalities made participants want to emulate their positive behaviors. Toward the end of the project, ENGINE began certifying "male role models" in an effort to stimulate a similar effect.
- **Use of the gender checklist during supervision visits can identify opportunities to improve projects' gender interventions.** Without the use of the gender checklist, ENGINE might not have identified the specific problem that slowed the start-up of MVHH activities. Only by looking at the situation through the lens of gender dynamics was the project able to identify the problem and quickly develop a solution.
- **Gender analysis and mainstreaming takes time but is critical for the success of nutrition projects.** The effects of gender dynamics on families' nutrition cannot be understated. Growth Through Nutrition will update ENGINE's gender strategy and continue to ensure that the design of all program components recognizes the cultural norms guiding relationships between men and women. ◆

ABOUT **ENGINE**

The Empowering the New Generation to Improve Nutrition and Economic opportunities (ENGINE) project was the U.S. Agency for International Development Ethiopia Mission's flagship multisector nutrition project. ENGINE, which was implemented from September 2011 to September 2016, built on the Government of Ethiopia's National Nutrition Program and the U.S. Government's Feed the Future initiatives to prevent undernutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, from the start of pregnancy until the child is two years of age. The project was led by Save the Children in partnership with Tufts University, Jhpiego, Land o' Lakes, the Manoff Group, Valid International, and Jimma University and worked in 116 *woredas* across the Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, SNNPR, and Somali regions of Ethiopia.

ENGINE partnered with Ethiopian ministries to strengthen existing multisector coordination and support the development and revision of nutrition policies, guidelines, and standards. It integrated instruction on nutrition into the pre-service curriculum for health and agriculture workers and built the capacity of frontline workers to provide high quality nutrition services. The project's social and behavior change communication activities promoted optimal maternal, infant, and young child feeding practices and dietary diversity at the community level. Work with vulnerable households educated participants about nutrition-sensitive agriculture techniques and livestock management to increase consumption of nutrient-dense foods and augment household income. ENGINE promoted improved water, sanitation, and hygiene practices to prevent diarrhea in children and improve nutritional status, mainstreamed gender in all its activities, and implemented a rigorous research strategy to support and guide effective nutrition policies and practices.

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