FOCUS | Gender and Equity

Highlight 1: Empowering Women to Improve Child Health and Nutrition

Improving nutrition through informal dairy markets

The MoreMilk project assesses whether enhancing certification, milk handling, and marketing skills through training for vendors in Nairobi’s informal dairy markets can benefit child health and nutrition. The intervention includes training informal vendors on milk safety, business skills, and marketing, as well as the health and nutritional benefits of drinking milk. This training is expected to promote better child feeding and milk consumption practices among low-income households, improving child health and nutrition.

Empowering female milk traders

Women play an important role in the milk value chain in Kenya. In urban Kenya, about 45 percent of informal milk traders are women. However, even in value chains where women make up a large portion of the work force, formalizing markets can unintentionally discourage women from participating. To make its intervention gender-responsive, MoreMilk is studying the gendered constraints and opportunities that traders experience in the informal milk sector. The project will then assess whether the training, certification, and marketing intervention can empower female milk traders. Training in marketing and business skills may improve traders’ profits and productivity. With higher profits, female traders could have higher incomes, improved bargaining power in their households, and increased ability to make decisions about their livelihoods. These changes may also increase women’s autonomy, self-efficacy (or confidence in their ability to succeed), and life satisfaction. A gender-responsive intervention is expected to enhance women’s empowerment by targeting their identified constraints and leveraging existing opportunities.

This gender component of the MoreMilk project is part of the portfolio of the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project, Phase 2, which is currently developing the project-level Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI). Because the pro-WEAI is designed primarily for households that participate in agricultural production, MoreMilk will adapt this tool to a dairy value chain setting to measure women’s empowerment among peri-urban milk traders. The pro-WEAI measures empowerment for both female and male decision makers in a household. MoreMilk’s adaptation of the pro-WEAI will allow the project to compare women’s empowerment in households where the milk trader is female to those where the milk trader is male.

Using qualitative work to understand context

In June 2017, MoreMilk conducted qualitative field work to investigate opportunities and constraints in Nairobi’s informal milk markets, gender roles among milk traders, and local definitions of empowerment and disempowerment. Through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and key informant interviews, investigators asked both female and male milk traders about why they became traders, what obstacles they faced in becoming traders, what opportunities milk trading provides, what resources they need to be successful, and how the community perceives milk trading. They also delved into the characteristics that the respondents associate with empowered and disempowered men and women, and the factors that can empower or disempower female and male milk traders. This formative work helped the project to create quantitative tools, including an adapted version of the pro-WEAI survey, that are sensitive and relevant to the local context.

Rigorous impact evaluation

The MoreMilk project uses a cluster randomized controlled trial to assess whether the training intervention improves health and nutrition outcomes for children ages 12 to 48 months and whether the training empowers female milk traders.

The MoreMilk project is led by the International Livestock Research Institute, in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute, the International Institute for Environment and Development, and Emory University. It is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, and the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health.