

Community-Based Development of Agricultural Activities Aiming to Improve Dietary Diversity in Western Kenya

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Overview

This research examines the suitability of community-based participatory workshops for developing agricultural activities in order to diversify diets. It represents the second part of a project that consists of a diagnostic phase documenting agricultural biodiversity and nutrition (phase I), participatory development of activities to improve nutrition (phase II) and participatory implementation of the activities (phase III). The study is part of the Humidtropics and Agriculture for Nutrition and Health CGIAR Research Programs.

Methodology

A series of six participatory workshops was carried out in five sub-locations of Vihiga County in Western Kenya. The workshops aimed to raise awareness on nutrition, to discuss the results of the diagnostic phase (phase I) and to identify and plan community activities to improve nutrition. Per sub-location, 36 men and women were selected to participate in the workshops (180 participants in total).



Fig. 1: Vihiga county is located in the western region of Kenya. About 98.7 % of the land in this county is under subsistence farming which includes livestock and crop production, tree growing and fish farming.

The participatory community workshops



Fig. 2: Participants use food cards to learn about food groups and dietary diversity.



Fig. 3: The participants develop a community action plan for the activities they have decided on during the workshops: kitchen gardening and poultry keeping.

ACTIVITY	WHAT HAS TO BE DONE	WHERE	WHEN	RESOURCES	HOW TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE ACTIVITY	WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE	ESTIMATED COST
1. Assessment of agricultural resources	Conduct a survey of agricultural resources in the community	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	40
2. Participatory development of activities to improve nutrition	Identify and plan community activities to improve nutrition	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	40
3. Participatory implementation of the activities	Implement the activities	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	40+
4. Planning	Develop a community action plan	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	140
5. Evaluation	Evaluate the impact of the activities	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	120
6. Dissemination	Disseminate the findings of the study	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	40
7. Policy advocacy	Advocate for policies that support agricultural activities	At the farm	At the farm	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	Interviews, focus group discussions, field observations	Agri-extension officer, farmer, researcher	50+

Fig. 4: Draft version of a community action plan for vegetable planting

Some quotes by Beveling Malesi, one of the 180 participants in the community nutrition workshops:

"Through the workshops I have learnt many new things. Before, I did not know that a diverse diet is important for health."

"We have improved eating at home, thanks to the workshops. We never used to eat fruits. As we did not know the importance of fruits we did not buy them in the market. Now we eat at least two types of fruits a day, for example banana and watermelon. I have created a timetable to diversify food consumption at home. The food I eat today, I try not to eat tomorrow."

"I did not know that some plants are actually foods, for example cassava leaves and passion fruit leaves. I also started to plant a vegetable, dania, as I have learned it is important and can also be mixed with other vegetables such as sukuma wiki (kale) or spinach."

Discussion

Except for one less successful sub-location, the workshop groups well developed agricultural activities for improved nutrition. Harmony within the group was a crucial factor for good performance. Sensitivity to group dynamics is thus very important for participatory development of community activities. It was observed that the continuous workshops built trust between researchers and participants and that ownership was developed among the groups. These findings are in line with similar studies on participatory intervention development in Africa. Other related projects in low-income countries stress the importance of community-based approaches in improving nutrition and livelihood outcomes.

Conclusion

A community-based approach in form of participatory workshops is well suited for developing agricultural activities in order to diversify diets in Western Kenya.