

How Gender Transformation Can Help Improve Nutrition in Young Children

Since November 2017, Save the Children International, Mozambique (SCI) and Helen Keller International (HKI) have been implementing a project called Linking Agriculture and Nutrition (LAN) in 5 districts in Manica (Guro, Tambara, Machaze, Barue, Macossa), and 5 districts in Tete (Changara, Cahora Bassa, Moatize, Mutarara, Tsangano). The project, which is financed by the British Government (DFID / FCDO), has the overarching goal of reducing chronic malnutrition in children under 5.

In order to achieve its goal, the project aims to increase household food and nutrition security year round in the target households, as well as improving the diets of children under 5, pregnant and lactating women (PLW), and adolescent girls. The project has several components:



Demonstration garden, Fututu, Moatize district

The project focuses on improving agricultural production through climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agricultural production through demonstration plots and the promotion of replications and home gardens. Produce from the gardens are used in cooking demonstrations in the nutrition groups and during home visits.

The LAN project promotes nutrition and WASH behaviour change nutrition through education sessions, cooking demonstrations, home visits, and routine screening for acute malnutrition. Children who are classified as acutely malnourished are referred to the local health facilities and parents are enrolled in the nutrition groups.



Nutrition education session, Munene, Barue district



We help communities to establish Village Savings and Loans groups and provide training on basic accounting and how to establish income generating activities.

The project promotes gender equality in households through gender dialogue clubs. In each group, 5 to 6 couples (including polygamous couples) attend weekly sessions over 3 months (12 sessions). The aim is to encourage equal access to financial resources and foods, and shared decision-making and household chores in the homes. The clubs also talk about topics such as domestic violence, child marriage, and other sensitive issues.



Gender Dialogue Group in Fotutu, Moatize district



Adolescents in Muzunga conducting a theatre piece about the prevention of child marriages, Tambara district

LAN works with adolescents, teaching them about nutrition, as well as teaching them about the different project components so that they are better prepared for food and nutrition security when they start managing their own households.

The project supports several other complimentary activities, including agriculture and nutrition fairs for promoting best practices and new technologies. We support for households to help them to budget and plan for year-round food and nutrition security, and provide technical assistance for improved food and seed conservation practices.



community fair, Tsangano district, Tete



ICS filming a documentary about the LAN project, interviewing a project beneficiary, Nov, 2019

We also work with local radio stations and mass media institutes, such as the Institute of Social Communication (ICS) to broadcast key messages and information about the project in order to promote and reinforce behaviour change. Programmes about the LAN project have also been broadcast on the national television station, TVM, and ICS recently won a national media prize for best documentary for the programme that they made on the LAN project.

One of the main assumptions of the LAN project is that if women and men are both equally informed about nutrition, and they take decisions and actions jointly in the households, this will contribute towards better nutrition for children under 5. Joint decision making includes shared decisions about which foods to grow, which foods to purchase and prepare, how foods are distributed within the household, how domestic chores are shared, and other decisions related to nutrition, such as when to seek health care when a child falls ill.

Studies have found that educating women alone on child feeding practices may have limited impact if women have neither the access to resources nor sufficient decision-making power to implement the recommendations.

Gender transformation, as implemented in the LAN project, attempts to not only ensure that children receive nutritious foods, but that women and men are equally and fully informed about the nutritional needs of the different family members, and couples can, together, plan to use their resources towards ensuring optimal health for all household members.



Dialogue Club graduation, Nhapadze, Macossa district

This also includes influencing other dynamics inside the household, such as sharing household tasks so that men and boys do a fair share of the domestic chores (and particularly the heavier work such as water collection and agricultural production), so that PLW, in particular, can rest as needed.



Polygamous gender champion couple, Moatize district

The LAN project has aimed to strengthen gender equality from all angles, both integrating it into all the project components, as well as implementing specific gender transformation activities. Regarding the latter, the LAN project, with technical support from the Mozambican male engagement organization, RedeHopem, implements gender dialogue clubs in the target communities. The curriculum for the gender dialogues were also adapted for adolescents so that they would have

the skills to analyse gender norms in their communities and households and understand the impact that these have on the various aspects of their lives.

Between the period of mid-2018 to September 2020, 4,014 LAN beneficiaries (1,832 males and 2,182 females) have graduated from gender dialogue clubs, and over 900 have become gender champions, either as part of a monogamous or polygamous couples or individually. The gender champions then assist other individuals or couples through counselling, conduct education sessions (often through role plays and discussions / debates), and help with the recruitment and implementation for the next group of gender dialogue clubs.

In 2019, the donor (DFID/ FCDO) contracted the UK-based Bath Social & Development Research organization to conduct an external midline QulP (Quality Impact Assessment Protocol) in order to document any changes in the communities since the start of the project, and link these, to the extent possible, to the project's interventions, including the impact of gender transformation on behaviour change. According to the QulP, gender transformation did have a significant impact. The report states:

A majority of LAN participants reported new understanding on relationships, about half reported improved household relations and increased sharing of decision making between husband and wife. A few reported increased sharing of household tasks and the wife having increased control of household finances. Perhaps surprisingly, responses were quite similar for both women and men. There were frequent causal links made between learning, increased household decision making and improved

household relationships, and a few linked this further to improved wellbeing. These changes were strongly attributed to HKI and STC.

There was also clear evidence to suggest that acute malnutrition rates in children under 5 were lower in the target communities than in the surrounding areas, as that the GAM (Global Acute Malnutrition) rates were consistently below 1%, despite the communities being in areas classified as being food insecure. In fact, to date (November 2020), the GAM rates in the LAN communities have never risen above 1% since January 2019, which is remarkable bearing in mind that four out of the five target districts in Manica (with the exception of Bárue) and four out of five districts in Tete (with the exception of Tsangano) have been continuously classified as either IPC¹ 2 (stressed) or IPC 3 (crisis) during the same period, according to FEWS NET (Famine Early Warning System Network).

Participants in the QulP study (who were kept anonymous) stated:

'Before children would only eat the feet and other bad parts of chicken. All the good pieces were given to the father, but no more, the fathers now prioritize the children.'

'In this household we no longer have taboos relating to food issues. Before anyone would rumour something and all believed it. For instance, we believed babies born without hair was a result of the mother eating eggs during pregnancy period and now we know that such was a lie.'

The LAN team also recorded quotes from Gender Dialogue Club graduations, such as the following:

"I would like this group to continue because our lives have changed a lot at home. Before I used to cook chicken only after my husband authorized it. But because of what we learned here without his authorization, I cook chicken when I feel it is necessary and the children also eat without restraint..."

As the project has many components, it is difficult to clearly separate out the impact that the integrated gender equality approach and specific transformational activities have had on food and nutrition security and under 5 chronic malnutrition. However, the evidence from the LAN



¹ Acute Food Insecurity Phase, which is a scale ranging from 1 (minimal) to 5 (famine).

project suggests that gender equality within a household can positively contribute towards the decisions and actions that lead to better nutrition for children under 5.