An Integrated Agriculture-Nutrition Program in Burkina Faso Can Change Gender Norms on Land and Asset Ownership

Mara van den Bold, Abdoulaye Pedehombga, Marcellin Ouedraogo, Agnes Quisumbing, and Deanna Olney

The goal of Helen Keller International’s Enhanced-Homestead Food Production (E-HFP) program is to improve the nutritional status of infants, young children, and mothers through improved access to nutritious foods year-round and the adoption of optimal nutrition and care practices. The E-HFP program helps mothers establish homestead gardens in the Fada region of Burkina Faso. The program provides inputs (such as hens and seeds) and training in gardening, irrigation, and small animal rearing to female beneficiaries. The program also develops a system of community-level trainers who instruct women in improved nutrition and care practices.

Helen Keller International (HKI) carried out a two-year Enhanced-Homestead Food Production (E-HFP) program (2010–2012) in Gourma Province in eastern Burkina Faso. The program’s goal was to improve women’s and children’s nutrition and health through production and nutrition interventions. One way in which the program sought to improve its production and nutrition outcomes was by directly increasing women’s access to and control over productive assets. To accomplish this objective, HKI trained women and gave them inputs for raising small animals and growing nutrient-rich foods, as well as health- and nutrition-related education delivered through a behavior change communication (BCC) strategy (Dillon et al. 2012).

Agricultural programs seeking to transform gender norms often specifically target women in the belief that transferring control or ownership of assets to them will empower them and improve the program’s agricultural, nutritional, and health impacts. However, evidence about agricultural interventions’ impact on women’s asset ownership and control is limited (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). HKI therefore partnered with the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP) to measure the impact of the program’s interventions on men’s and women’s access to and control over productive assets.

1 Mothers of children between 3 and 12 months of age at the time of the 2010 baseline survey were eligible for the program.

INTERVENTION AND STUDY SITE

Gourma Province was selected for the E-HFP program because of HKI’s previous experience in the region. Villages that had access to water even during the dry season—and therefore could garden year-round—were selected for potential program participation. Selected villages were separated into three groups: 25 control villages and two groups of 15 intervention villages. The two sets of intervention villages differed only in who delivered the BCC strategy: either health committee members or older female leaders. All households in the intervention villages and control villages with children between 3 and 12 months at baseline were invited to participate in the study.

HKI worked closely with communities in the intervention villages to identify land for Village Model Farms (VMFs). The E-HFP program obtained rights to community land in the intervention villages. This land was later managed by female Village Farm Leaders who were program participants. On the VMFs female farmers learned about homestead food production and raising small animals. HKI provided inputs including seeds, seedlings, chickens, and agricultural tools and, in some cases, drip irrigation kits (Dillon et al. 2012; Olney et al. 2013; HKI 2012).
The program also provided education designed to improve health and nutrition practices through the BCC strategy. Among the behaviors targeted through the BCC strategy was the intake, especially among participating women and their young children, of nutrient-rich foods produced through E-HFP program activities.

**STUDY OBJECTIVES**

During the program HKI partnered with GAAP to assess the program’s impacts on men’s and women’s assets (such as animals, land, and tools) and to qualitatively assess perceptions of and changes in men’s and women’s control over and use of productive assets. Results from the program’s impact evaluation and associated qualitative studies were used to address three questions:

1. Did the program increase ownership of assets among men, women, or both?
2. Did the program activities influence community norms vis-à-vis women’s land ownership or land rights, and if so, how?
3. Were women able to maintain control over program activities and outputs as intended? What made it difficult or easy to maintain or not maintain this control?

**OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

Evaluating HKI’s E-HFP program involved a longitudinal impact evaluation consisting of a quantitative baseline and endline household survey. In 2010, as part of the baseline study, 1,757 household surveys were completed (734 from control villages and 1,023 from intervention villages). The same households were surveyed in 2012, which resulted in 1,470 households (590 from control villages and 880 from intervention villages) that provided both baseline and endline data. Program impacts were measured at both the household and individual level and both male and female respondents were interviewed separately about issues such as assets, agricultural production, and livestock ownership.

Two separate rounds of qualitative research were also conducted during the quantitative survey period. The qualitative research was primarily designed to provide insight into why the program did or did not improve women’s agricultural production and maternal and child health and nutrition outcomes, by examining issues related to the delivery and utilization of program services. In addition, it was designed to examine the gendered implications of the E-HFP program in terms of access to and control over productive assets.

In 2011, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were conducted with five randomly selected households in each intervention village and in 15 of the 25 control villages. Two of the five households selected from each village were chosen to complete a longer SSI. A total of 145 households from intervention villages and 75 from control villages participated in the basic SSIs. Of these households, 58 from intervention villages and 30 from control villages completed the more in-depth SSIs (Olney et al. 2013). The households that participated in the first round of qualitative research also participated in SSIs during the second round of qualitative research in 2012, if possible. If a particular household was unable to participate in the second round, a replacement was randomly selected from the list of program participants who had participated in the quantitative baseline survey.

**RESULTS**

Certain changes occurred during the two years of the E-HFP program’s operation:

**Women Made Gains in Asset Ownership**

While men continued to own the majority of assets, women began to own more assets. Further, women’s assets increased more in intervention villages than in control villages. The average number of agricultural assets and small animals owned by women in intervention villages increased to a statistically significant degree relative to the average number owned by women in control villages. Moreover, the proportional gap between men and women in ownership of agricultural assets narrowed more in intervention villages than in control villages.

**Women Gained More Control Over Their Gardens and Profits**

The qualitative research showed that women’s control over productive assets increased in intervention villages. Women were primarily responsible for the care of the garden, and they were more likely to make decisions about the use of their gardens’ products and the proceeds earned from these products than men. Although men generally retained control of the larger livestock (in this case, goats), women’s decision-making power with regards to chickens and goats increased. Also, both men’s and women’s perceptions of and opinions about who could own and control certain assets appeared to have become more open to female control and ownership. This change was more pronounced in intervention villages than control villages.

---

2 One village dropped out of the E-HFP program and related evaluation activities before the first round of qualitative research. Therefore, a total of 29 rather than 30 intervention villages were in the two rounds of qualitative research and in the endline survey of the impact evaluation.
**Perceptions about Women’s Ownership and Control Over Land Are Changing**

Men and women across villages stated that while men could inherit land, women could not and could only obtain land through gifts or marriage. Even if their husbands died, women generally would not inherit the husbands’ land. “Social considerations prevent women from inheriting land from her husband if she does not have children or if she has only girls,” one woman said.

Nevertheless, half of men and women in intervention villages reported that their opinions on who could own land, use it to grow fruits and vegetables, or both, had changed. Their opinions had altered because of changing gender roles, the HKI program, and changes in consumption (the growth of vegetable consumption during the dry season, for example). “The women proved that they had the capabilities to manage the land well,” said one respondent. “Thanks to HKI I realized that a woman can garden,” another said.

**CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Between 2010 and 2012, the HKI program appeared to significantly improve women’s ownership and control of lower-value assets such as seeds and produce. Women’s control and ownership of higher-value assets such as chickens and goats also changed notably. These findings were consistent with other asset studies in Africa (Njuki et al. 2011). Additionally, women’s and men’s perceptions of the importance of traditions governing gender roles in agriculture and women’s rights to land reportedly changed, and almost half of the program participants interviewed expected these traditions to continue to change.

Whether women’s increased asset ownership and control will stay the same, continue to change, or revert to how they were prior to the HKI pilot program remains to be seen. Changes encouraged by the program may or may not be sustained after the program ends.

Nevertheless, the impact study and associated qualitative research demonstrate that agricultural projects can improve women’s asset ownership and control and can alter perceptions of and opinions about gender norms. These changes could have longer-term positive impacts on food security, child nutrition, education, and women’s own well-being (Quisumbing 2003; Smith et al. 2003; World Bank 2001).
REFERENCES


FOR FURTHER READING


Mara van den Bold (m.vandenbold@cgiar.org) is a research analyst in the Poverty, Health, and Nutrition Division of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington, DC. Abdoulaye Pedehombga (apedehombga@hki.org) is monitoring and evaluation coordinator for the Enhanced-Homestead Food Production (E-HFP) program at Helen Keller International, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Marcellin Ouedraogo (marouedraogo@hki.org) is the program coordinator for the E-HFP program at Helen Keller International, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Agnes Quisumbing (a.quisumbing@cgiar.org) is a senior research fellow in the Poverty, Health, and Nutrition Division of IFPRI, Washington, DC. Deanna Olney (d.olney@cgiar.org) is a research fellow in the Poverty, Health, and Nutrition Division of IFPRI, Washington, DC.

The Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP) aims to promote women’s ownership and control of productive assets in developing countries by evaluating how well agricultural development projects improve men’s and women’s access to assets and identifying ways to reduce gender gaps. GAAP is jointly led by the International Food Policy Research Institute and the International Livestock Research Institute and receives funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for 2010–2014. For further information on GAAP, see gaap.ifpri.info.