Behavioural Change for Improved Nutrition among Pastoralists (BCIN)

Research into maternal, infant and young-child feeding practices in pastoral households of Somali Region, Ethiopia

Project Summary

The Behavioural Change for Improved Nutrition among Pastoralists (BCIN) project focuses on research into behavioural aspects of maternal, infant and young-child feeding practices in pastoral households of Somali Regional State, Ethiopia. Following a proposal call from Transform Nutrition and Agriculture for Nutrition and Health, VSF-Suisse will work on a project to deepen understanding in this area of pastoralist-centred research.

People living in Ethiopia’s Somali Regional State regularly face the threat and reality of under-nutrition. The need is therefore great for evidence-based nutrition interventions which are integrated with pastoral/agricultural interventions, are sustainable, and which foster behavioural change among communities themselves.

Experience to date has shown that behaviour is a critically limiting factor to improved nutritional practice, and one that is too often overlooked. Participatory analysis conducted previously by VSF-Suisse has demonstrated that under-nutrition in under-fives is usually due to insufficient access to milk and to inappropriate feeding. At the same time, understanding of social behavioural-change communication (SBCC) approaches and their effectiveness is limited, especially considering the huge cultural and behavioural diversity among target groups.

VSF-Suisse has established two community-based structures for resilience building and livelihoods improvement in pastoral communities of Moyale and Mubarek Woredas, Liben Zone (Somali Region). First, the platform of Pastoral Field Schools (PFS) allows communities to analyse, discuss and share experiences on the conditions, opportunities and challenges for both their livestock and rangelands during periodic discussions. Second, Village Community Banks (VICOBAs) collectively organise savings and loans for times of crisis. VICOBAs comprise mainly women and are structured to meet the needs of community members at the local level and in a sustainable way.

Therefore, this action research aims to gauge how effectively and sustainably these two community structures can increase awareness about optimal maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) and feeding practices, and thereby can employ SBCC to foster behavioural changes and improve them.

The proposed study period is sixteen months (April 2015 – August 2016). The study groups to be engaged are community members in Moyale and Mubarek Woredas (Districts), where PFS and VICOBAs are currently active. Meanwhile, control groups in Hargelle and Gode Woredas of Shebele Zone (in which no such platforms have been established) will be studied for comparison. Random sampling will be used to select 471 households from communities in the intervention woredas and 471 households from communities in the control woredas during each phase of the study; the target study individuals are mothers with children under 23 months old.
Baseline data will be collected in both the target-study and the control woredas. Subsequently, intervention in the form of cascaded training in high-impact maternal, infant and young-child feeding practices is planned for the PFS and VICOBAs in Moyale and Mubarek. Following this, data collection will be repeated using the same methods as for the baseline survey. Qualitative studies of focus-group discussions (FGDs) and key-informant interviews (KII) will be conducted to triangulate the findings and capture the lessons learned following the intervention.

The findings from the study, as well as the IEC/BCC (Information-Education Communication / Behavioural-Change Communication) approaches set in motion by the BCIN intervention, will serve as a set of reference tools to be applied in wider numbers of pastoralist communities targeted for optimal-MIYCN interventions through SBCC.

BCIN is a gender-sensitive development project integrating nutrition with pastoral and agricultural interventions. The preliminary research described above has been design to directly address the question posed by Transform Nutrition and A4NH in their call for proposal: how can agriculture and agri-food systems become more nutrition-sensitive and have a greater impact on nutrition outcomes?