

Ownership of Cows to Tackle Malnutrition in Ethiopia

By Kenaw Gebreselassie

Cow ownership raises children's milk consumption, increases linear growth and reduces stunting; a new research paper from Transform Nutrition has found. In a seminar organized by IFPRI with support from Save the Children in Addis Ababa, John Hoddinott, Transform Nutrition research director, presented key findings from his paper [‘Cows, Missing Milk Markets and Nutrition in rural Ethiopia](#) to around 55 relevant stakeholders.

The study, having drawn a sample from 94 high agricultural potential woredas, with 304 villages, looked into the relationship between ownership of cows, consumption of dairy products by pre-school children and anthropometric outcomes in rural Ethiopia, where dairy markets are incomplete. The findings highlighted cow ownership has a large and positive impact on milk consumption by children 6–12 months and linear growth.



“A household ownership of a single cow predicts a stunting reduction by seven to nine percentage points,” the research showed.

The research, however, found that household cow ownership is less important where there is good access to either formal or informal local markets, suggesting that market development can substitute for household cow ownership.

Following John's presentation, attendees reflected on the findings and why it's important that they influence programming and policy. Peter Muhangi, head of Food Security and Livelihoods at Save the Children, raised the potential significance of the research for new program design and intervention. Mentioning previous studies done by Save the Children and its partners, one on the role and value of milk and the other on livestock feeding intervention, Peter said this new research together with other related findings can provide relevant evidence to design new programs and contribute to the reduction of malnutrition in rural Ethiopia.

Closely related to this, other participant said that the findings could provide evidence to influence and reinforce policy around nutrition sensitive agriculture and livelihoods, which more often involve livestock development and marketing. On this front, of course, the research itself finds out indicative evidence supporting experimentation with three possible classes of intervention: (1) interventions to increase cow ownership; (2) interventions to increase dairy productivity; and (3) interventions to increase dairy market development.

It was also noted that widening the research to explore the benefits of owning other animals that are used as sources of milk (goats in pastoral areas, for example) could provide further information to inspire action. This makes sense particularly for organizations, like Save the Children, which link nutrition and livelihoods interventions partly with livestock development (milking goats and sheep). Further findings in this area are, therefore, likely to provide important evidence of what works in addressing malnutrition in Ethiopia.