

Women smallholder farmer empowerment: women-only trainings and demonstrations



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1. Pioneer partnership

The Family Milk partnership is aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of milk supplied by smallholder dairy farmers to Family Milk, one of the top dairy product brands in Ethiopia processed by MB PLC . The critical challenge of low quantity and quality of milk supply was due to low willingness and ability to invest in concentrate feed and fodder, and poor milking and milk handling practices, respectively. Improving the quantity and quality of milk supply, necessitated interventions in these two areas. Accordingly, an end-to-end model linking smallholder farmers with a concentrate feed supplier and the milk processor in which the milk processor guaranteed payments by deducting the cost of feed from the milk supplied and remitting these back to the feed processor was mooted. In addition, smallholder farmers were trained on fodder production, milking and milk handling. In the mapping of the gender division of roles and responsibilities, it was learned that feeding, milking and milk handling in the dairy farm household is the role and responsibility of women. Hence, introduction of women only trainings and demonstrations were considered a panacea to the problem. This was through building the capacity of women in quality and safe milking, milk handling, feeding and backyard fodder production cognizant of their practical gender needs. Family Milk was inviting women for women-only trainings and demonstrations through their husband to get their consent and ensure that the initiative would 'do no harm'.



2. Replicable practice

This replicable practice was first introduced in the Family Milk partnership in Ethiopia in 2016. Unpacking the household in terms of gender division of roles and responsibilities and targeting the person responsible for the activity is the key to solving the problem effectively and efficiently. Usually, the man or husband is the only gender group that participates in training or extension activities. To reverse the business challenge of Family Milk (low quantity and quality of milk supply caused by shortage of feed and poor feeding, milking and milk handling practices), it was necessary to identify who does what in dairy production. The gender roles mapping showed that most of the dairy production activities (especially milking, milk handling, feeding) are performed by women. This informed the targeting of women only for the training on feeding, milking and milk handling practices. The timings and venues were carefully selected with the women to align to their triple gender role. In addition, a husband's consent was sought by inviting the women through their husbands. This ensured that a women-only approach would not cause men's resistance or do harm to prevailing gender relations. Besides, as women spend most of their time at home taking care of the household activities, providing them an opportunity to produce fodder at the backyard eases their work of collecting fodder to feed the dairy cows. Elephant grass was introduced as a backyard fodder for its adaptability to the locality and vegetativeness to frequently harvest and feed milking cows.

<p>Access to nutritious food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability: Family milk increased its collection from 7,000 to 10,000 litres per day and this contributed to increased availability of milk. • Appropriateness: Quality of milk in terms of microbial count at the collection centres improved and rejection of milk dropped. This significantly contributes to the safety of milk processed by Family Milk.
<p>Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks: Farmers were hesitant to invest on dairy concentrate feed and fodder. Family Milk now guarantees the feed processor to supply feed on credit to smallholder farmers and Family Milk deducts the feed cost from the milk supplied to pay the feed processor. Besides, Family Milk guaranteed a sustainable market for increased milk production (shared the risk of farmers' investment in feed) and developed the market for the concentrate feed. Hence, the risk was shared among the partners, increasing the mutual reward from increasing quantity and quality of milk production. • Rewards: Farmers including women increased production of milk per cow by 3 litres per day. Hence, they increased their reward.

3. Preconditions for replication

Understanding the challenge and aligning with gender map: Deeper understanding of the development challenges rooted in an inclusive business idea with deeper analysis of who is around the problem in terms of the value chain actors provides an opportunity to solve the problem of one actor by the involvement of the other actor in a partnership. Further, precisely targeting the gender group responsible for the action (unpacking the household) with due care to household structure helps to immediately improve on the challenges of the value chain. In this case, starting from Family Milk's challenge with the quality and quantity of milk supplied, it was understood that farmers were not using concentrate feed and fodder for their cows mainly because of low returns to their investment driven by lack of linkages to dairy markets with competitive prices. As a result, farmers chose to stay in a low-input low-output system. On the other side of the story, Alema Koudjs Feed had no demand for her concentrate feed from smallholder farmers. When all these challenges were modelled in a way that ensured mutual benefit for all the actors in the partnership, it came out that women were the ones to play a critical role in improving the quality of milk and the training and demonstrations should focus on addressing their gap in access to training and fodder to improve on the challenges faced.

Seeking the husband's consent for women to attend the training: Most of the time, the husband is not comfortable with his wife attending trainings without his knowledge and understanding of the purpose. For household harmony, it is instrumental to inform/engage the husband of the purpose and the reasons for targeting women only to attend the training. Family Milk invited the women through their spouses to create awareness for the man and maintain household harmony on the one hand while fostering efficiency by targeting the intervention to the person best placed to reverse the challenge coming through the value chain.

Flexibility on timing and venue of the training: Women especially in rural areas play a triple role in the community. To assure their full attention in the training and avoid unnecessary travel time, it is mandatory to consult them on the most appropriate timing and place for the training.

4. Results Achieved

335 women dairy farmers were trained on milk quality management & backyard forage development through women only trainings and demonstrations. The trainings offered to the women together with the high-quality concentrate feed have raised the quantity and quality of raw milk that they supply to Family Milk. The increase in milk production per cow per day ranged from 3 to 7 litres depending on the breed type and the amount of feed provided to the cow. Before the start of the partnership, the average milk fat content was 2.7% but after the project implementation, it has raised to 3.2%. Family Milk had never received milk with such high-quality fat content in the past and this has encouraged the company to engage more in the lower end of the value chain. On average, the farmers are now supplying 10,000 Lit/day (1,495 milk suppliers) directly to Family Milk. This has grown by 40% from 7,000 litre/day. More importantly, the reject of smallholder farmers milk by Family Milk due to low quality has significantly dropped.

Want to know more?

If you want to know more about this practice, please reach out to Addis Teshome, ateshome@2scale.org, Deputy 2SCALE Program Director.

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