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World Relief Announces Research on Improving Agriculture, Economic and Nutrition Benefits in Partnership with MEDA and University of Michigan

Findings show that households who participate in both Savings Groups and Farmer Field Schools in tandem reap greater reward

BALTIMORE – [World Relief](#), a global humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to alleviate poverty and respond to disasters worldwide, released [new research](#) in partnership with Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and the University of Michigan that found that participation in World Relief’s Agriculture for Life (AFL) and Savings for Life (SFL) programs simultaneously provides smallholder farmers substantially greater agricultural, nutritional, and economic improvements compared to either program on its own or no program intervention at all. The research was conducted with rigorous testing in ten villages in Musanze District, Rwanda.

Agriculture for Life is based on the Farmer Field School (FFS) model. Farmer Field Schools are comprised of 20-25 small-scale farmers, who are taught experimental techniques and innovation in agriculture. World Relief’s AFL curriculum also intentionally weaves in content on nutrition education and gender as it relates to production and use of agriculture. Savings for Life is World Relief’s innovative approach to the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Model that has been replicated throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. It brings credit, loans, and insurance to the poor who do not have access to formal microfinance institutions.

“The research that we conducted in Rwanda has helped our organization identify key areas of improvement and how bringing these two programs together results in lasting change for communities in need,” said **Moses Ndahiro, country director of World Relief Rwanda**. “Both the Savings for Life and Agriculture for Life programs have proven to be very effective over the years, but this research has helped us shift our mentality to be even more innovative and seek new ways to alleviate poverty.”

While World Relief has seen the effectiveness of AFL and SFL independently, this new research shows that doing these programs together greatly multiplies the overall benefits to households. Six key results emerged from this research:

- **Economic Improvement:** Participants in both AFL and SFL had 9.45 times the odds of reporting economic improvement in the prior year when compared to those who did not participate in either program.
- **Increased Food Security:** Households participating in AFL and SFL had 7.69 times the odds of household food security when compared to those who did not participate in either program.

- **Improved Nutrition:** Households in AFL and SFL had significantly higher odds (9.65) of the youngest child 6-23 months meeting minimum diet diversity requirements compared to those in neither program. Additionally, children in households participating in both programs ate two times the number of food groups compared to those households in SFL alone.
- **Increased Savings:** Those in AFL and SFL saved \$7.10 USD more in a month than those participants in AFL only. Additionally, those in AFL and SFL saved on average \$3.67 USD more in the previous month than those only in SFL.
- **Improved Agricultural Outcomes:** Participation in AFL and SFL led to the greatest relative increase in the number of innovative agricultural strategies used; on average, those participating in AFL and SFL were 1.94 times more likely to use innovative agriculture strategies than those who did not participate in either program. Participants in both programs also were 1.17 times more likely to employ innovative strategies compared to AFL alone.
- **Increased Agricultural Investment:** Finally, qualitative interviews suggest that among World Relief beneficiaries, households participating in both AFL and SFL invested more in agriculture than those participating in AFL or SFL only. Land rental was the most common investment, followed by potato seeds and fertilizer.

“World Relief’s inclusion of joint decision making and nutrition education throughout their programs encourages participants to channel the agricultural and economic improvements they receive from the programs towards the benefit of their household,” said **Kallisse Dent, MPH, Research Assistant at University of Michigan**. “Typically, in research we look for key indicators of ‘success’ such as crop productivity or the amount of savings. The quantitative and qualitative results from this study challenges us to continue to think beyond these key indicators of ‘success’ to the holistic impact that these programs can have on families. I am excited to see how World Relief continues to build off these results to provide families throughout the world with efficient and effective strategies to promote resiliency and hope.”

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About World Relief

World Relief is a global Christian humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to the world’s greatest problems – disasters, extreme poverty, violence, oppression, and mass displacement. For over 75 years, we’ve partnered with churches and community leaders in the U.S. and abroad to bring hope, healing and transformation to the most vulnerable.

Learn more at worldrelief.org.