Abstract

This study assessed the effect of access to microfinance credit by women entrepreneurs on household food security in three urban low income areas in Nairobi, Kenya. A total of 787 respondents comprising of 337 Microfinance Institution (MFI) clients and 450 non clients participated in this study. Methods. A structured pretested questionnaire was used to interview respondents about household food consumption patterns using a 24 hour dietary recall, seven day food frequency, household expenditure on food, sources of food and coping strategies when faced with financial constraints. Perceptions on effect of access to Microfinance credit on food consumption patterns was explored through focus group discussions with MFI clients. Access to food and adequacy of diets consumed was analysed from the 24-hour dietary recall and food frequency data. Results. Frequency in consumption of key foods differed between the two groups. Households of MFI clients consumed more diverse diets compared to those of non clients, reflected in the dietary diversity scores for the two study groups which were significantly different (P<0.01). The diversity score for households of MFI clients ranged from 2–8 with a mean score of 6.1 ± 1.1 while that of households of non clients ranged from 1–8 with a mean score of 5.2 ± 1.1. Findings of the study showed that the two groups used different coping strategies when faced with financial constraints. Non clients resorted to taking food on credit or buying ready-to-eat street foods while MFI clients coped by ‘dropping’ certain foods from the menu or buying cheaper types of food. Significantly (P< 0.001) more households of non MFI clients (73 percent) consumed ready to eat street foods which are cheaper compared to households of clients 27 percent. Overall, households of microfinance clients consumed more nutritious and diverse diets compared to those of non clients. Participation in microfinance programmes appears to have led to improved food security in households of clients. The study provides evidence that access to microfinance credit and membership in groups influences household food consumption patterns in urban low income areas.