



Information Note 1

Understanding Gender Equity through Intra-household Food Consumption Practices in Poor Households in Uttar Pradesh

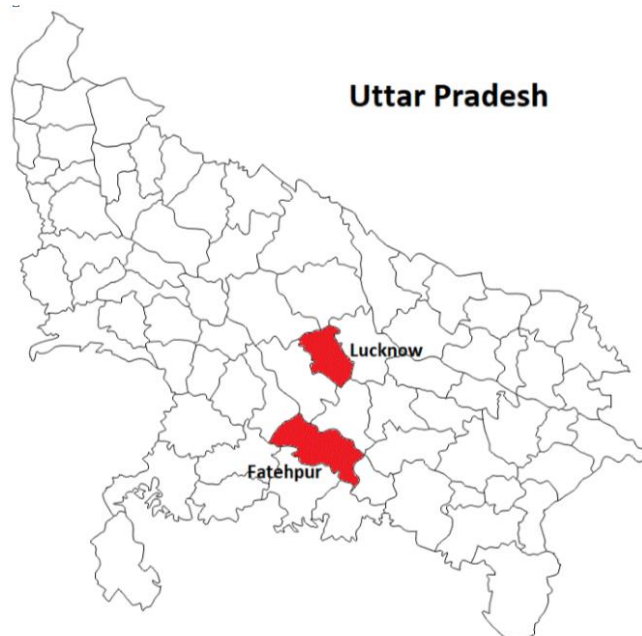
Background

India's food safety nets reach millions of vulnerable households each month to improve access to food. However, the decisions on how food is shared within the household determines individual food and nutrition security. These decisions are mostly dictated by prevailing social norms, which are often biased against women and girls.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India supports the Government in improving the coverage, operational efficiency and quality of food-based safety nets.

In late 2019, WFP conducted a study in two districts of Uttar Pradesh to understand the norms and practices that govern food distribution and consumption within the household and assess how they influence food consumption by members, particularly women and girls.

This information note summarizes results from the study on gender equity in food consumption within household.



SURVEY DETAILS

Partners: WFP and Society for Advancement of Resourceless by Training and Handholding (SAMARTH)

Month of data collection: December 2019

Locations surveyed: Fatehpur (Rural); Lucknow (Urban poor)

Quantitative: Household survey of 400 households (250 Rural; 150 Urban)

Qualitative: Focus group discussions (8); In-depth interviews with community women (20), In-depth interviews with community health workers (10); Key informant interviews (6)

Gender equality in intra-household food consumption

- Household roles with respect to food are well defined - male members are responsible for bringing food from the market and women are responsible for cooking and serving the food.
- Women have the key responsibility to decide what to cook from the available food items at home.
- It is the husband or children or the elderly (especially men) in the household who eat the food first. Women are the last to eat, after all have had their fill. These findings were more pronounced in Fatehpur which is more traditional.

“The women don’t eat with us even though children and elders sit together and eat. Women eat afterward.”

– Men’s FGD, Fatehpur.

- If any **special food items** are prepared or brought to the household (sweets, for example) then again they are served first to the men and children, and at the end women take whatever is left.
- **Pregnant and lactating women** are also subject to the same norm of eating last, thereby affecting their food consumption. Men and women both do not perceive this as a discriminatory practice - women both accepted and justified it the practice.
- The perceptions around the **amount of food consumed** by household member also favour men, as women believe that men deserve a

larger share, being the bread winners of the family.

“A woman only stays home the whole day, while the man has to go out to work. He should get the larger share [of food].”

– Women’s FGD, Lucknow

Changing norms and practices

- Traditional norms are gradually changing with growing education and urbanization and improving incomes. Increase in women’s work participation, particularly among the urban poor, is also a key factor.
- The Community health workers (AWW, ASHA and ANM) have played an important role as change agents in bringing about desirable behavioral changes in the traditional system of Intra house food distribution.

“Earlier, pregnant women were not given care as family members did not care whether she eats or not but now everyone cares whether she has eaten or not”

– Anganwadi Worker, Fatehpur

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This note has been produced as a part of four-part series based on WFP India’s study titled ‘Who eats when, what and how much?’. The study aims at understanding intra-household food patterns within poor households in two locations in Uttar Pradesh, India. Find other notes in this series here: bit.ly/2MvLOxt



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