



Information Note 3

Understanding Food Insecurity Among Women and Children from Poor Households in Two Locations in Uttar Pradesh

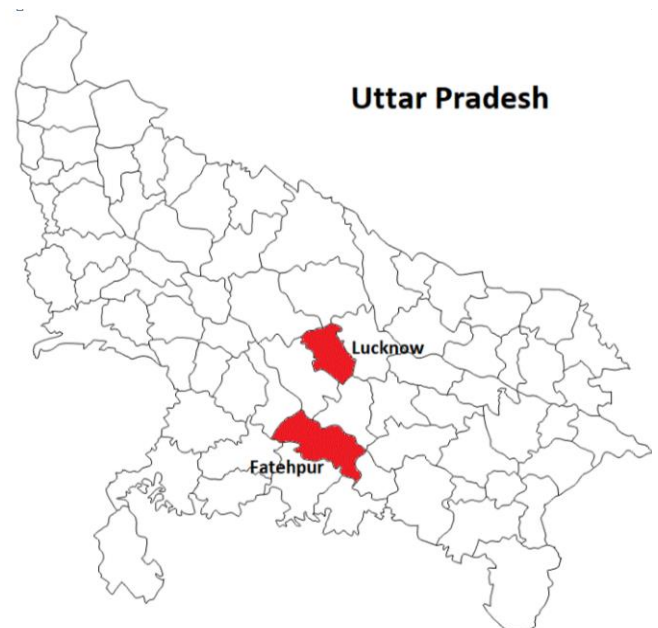
Background

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)

Experience of food insecurity by women and children in households

- Owing to discriminatory social norms, **women are often disproportionately affected by food insecurity in a household.**
- Close to **one-fifth of the women surveyed across both districts said that they had to eat less food in the last 30 days because they did not have enough money to buy food.** One fourth of them had to reduce their meal size as they could not buy more food. These changes were more likely to be reported by women in the Lucknow slum as compared to those in Fatehpur.
- A few women said that they sometimes **didn't get to eat for a whole day because of no money** to buy food. Most of them said that this happens less than five times in a month.
- Besides poverty, **work pressure also often affected food consumption by women.** More than one-quarter of women from the sampled households in Lucknow and 18 percent in Fatehpur often did not get time to eat during the day due to work pressure.
- Owing to the prevailing social norms, among food-insecure households, when **food is scarce women have to sacrifice their share of food in favour of men and children.** Women accepted and justified this practice as being in the interest of their families.

"Nothing will happen if I don't eat for a day".

– Community woman, Fatehpur

- These patterns of reduced food consumption by women in times of food insecurity indicate that **women's nutrition is disproportionately**

more adversely affected than other household members in food insecure households.

- Such episodes of **lack of money to buy food were more common among the urban poor** than the rural poor.
- In houses which did not normally suffer food insecurity also, women have to sacrifice their share of food in situations when food fell short, such as when guests come home.

"When more guests arrive then food might fall short. In that case I eat only chapati with salt and oil." – Community woman, Fatehpur.

- Overall, food insecurity was faced by a small proportion of households and very few people had to compromise with food/skip meals due to lack of money to buy food. In the group discussions, **people shared that food scarcity has come down considerably in recent years.**

Recommendations

- The study findings underscore the **need for community education and social behavior change communication** to give equal priority to women's nutrition.
- Messages to reinforce positive practices should be communicated, such as **encouraging family members to eat together, sharing equal food servings and taking care that no one goes hungry** because of extreme household work pressure.
- Higher risk of women's undernutrition in poor households points to the **need for special nutrition programmes for women in high poverty populations.**

Cover illustration by: WFP/SanjnaSudan

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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