



Information Note 4

Understanding Intra-household Food Distribution and Consumption in Two Locations in Uttar Pradesh: Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

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)

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Influence of social norms on household food behaviours

- The study brought to light the **significant effect of gendered social norms on access to food and decision making on food** within the households among the urban and rural poor in Uttar Pradesh.
- The norms usually dictate that **men get the food from the market; women decide what to cook from the items available at home; women cook, serve food to the men and children first**, and get to eat at the end when everyone else has had their fill.
- **Growing urbanization, education, women's employment and nuclear families are gradually changing the norms** with the eating order not being strictly followed, especially in urban areas.
- **Food taboos and restrictions also influenced food consumption**, and were largely targeted towards children, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women.
- Of particular **concern was the notion that pregnant women should eat less so that the baby does not grow too large** and is easy to deliver.

Patterns of food consumption in food insecure households

- A **small proportion of surveyed households reported facing food insecurity**. However, in such households, owing to discriminatory social norms **women were disproportionately more affected by food insecurity**.
- About a **fifth of the women surveyed said that they had to eat less** because they did not have enough money to buy food.

- About a fourth of the women also said that they sometimes **did not get time to eat during the day because of 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.

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.
- There is a **need to enhance nutrition education and awareness among all community members**, particularly on the nutrition of young children, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women.
- Higher risk of women's undernutrition in poor households points to the **need for special nutrition programmes for women in high poverty populations**.
- **Men also need to be involved for sustainable social change**. They need to be sensitized on enabling women the freedom to purchase their preferred food items, encouraging the family to eat together, ensuring equal sharing of food between family members and taking care of women's nutrition needs during pregnancy & lactation.

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

