



INFORMATION NOTE 1



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
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WHO EATS THE LAST AND THE LEAST?

Influence of gender norms on food access and consumption within households in Uttar Pradesh, India

Everyday, poor and vulnerable families must make difficult decisions on how to share the food among the members of their households. Prevailing discriminatory social norms lead to unequal distribution of food, often depriving vulnerable groups, such as adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women, of adequate quantity and quality of food to meet their specific requirements, thereby leading to undernutrition, related morbidity, and even excess mortality.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) supports the Government of India in improving the coverage, operational efficiency, and quality of food-based safety nets, particularly the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), the PM-POSHAN (school meals) programme in schools, and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for young children and pregnant and lactating women.

In early 2021, WFP conducted a study in three districts of Uttar Pradesh to explore community practices, knowledge and perception around intra-household food distribution and consumption, food insecurity within households and the impact of

COVID-19 on household food availability and access. This information note summarizes results of intra-household behaviour/patterns of food distribution and consumption and its association with individual food security and nutrition.

STUDY OBJECTIVES:

1. Map the intra-household pattern/behaviours of food distribution and consumption among the members (women, men, girls, and boys), and how it affects their food security and nutrition.
2. Assess the access to food-based safety nets (TPDS, ICDS, MDM) and their influence on intra-household food access and utilization, especially by women and children.
3. Assess the impact of COVID-19 on intra-household food distribution and food security among vulnerable people and migrant families, comparing with the December 2019 survey results where possible.

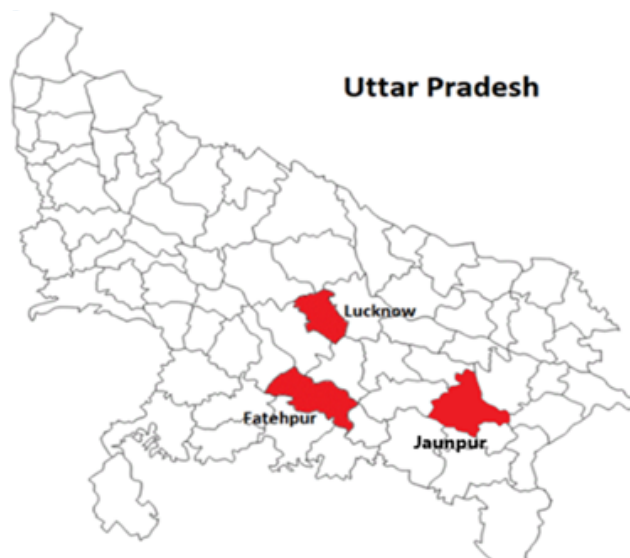
SURVEY DETAILS

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

Period of data collection: January-February 2021
Locations surveyed: Fatehpur & Jaunpur (Rural); Lucknow (Urban poor)

Quantitative: Household survey of 1049 households (700 Rural; 349 Urban)

Qualitative: In-depth interviews (20), Key informant interviews (8), Focus group discussions (12), conducted in 2019 & 2021



HOW WAS FOOD DIVIDED AND CONSUMED WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS?

- The prevailing social norms in the patriarchal Indian system stipulate that while men and boys are responsible for getting food to households, women and girls are responsible for cooking and serving food to all members, after which they eat, when all else have eaten.
- In most of the study households, while serving food, men were served first, being given the first preference to eat, followed by boys, possibly an investment in current and future earners. The only exception was female headed households, where women got to eat first, perhaps again reflecting preference for the bread earners.



"She will give her share of food to children and husband. This kind of custom is still seen in most households. But she will prepare food for herself afterward." - Anganwadi worker (F), Lucknow

- The practice of women and girls eating at the end declined slightly with increasing income, just as the practice of eating together increased. This indicates that gendered norms of food distribution are changing gradually towards a more egalitarian system, with household members increasingly eating together.
- With respect to gender norms dictating food consumption by women, men, girls and boys, a small proportion of households believed in greater food preference for boys over girls, such as boys needing more breastfeeding than girls. Such norms, however, seemed to have declined significantly.
- Norms placing restrictions on foods consumed by pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and children seemed more prevalent. For example, children should not consume 'cold' foods during winter, such as yogurt, guavas, and oranges, or that adolescent girls should avoid sour and spicy foods during menstruation.
- About a third of the households believed that pregnant women should eat less, as smaller sized babies would be easier to deliver.

"If a pregnant lady eats less, the baby will not grow too large. Also, eat less fruits otherwise, the baby grows in size, and then it is difficult to deliver." - Service Provider, Fatehpur

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

To enhance gender equity in food access and consumption, it is important to address gendered norms that may deprive women and girls from adequate and nutritious food.

- **Generate awareness to address gender norms** through community level social behavior change communication (SBCC) such as through small campaigns, gatherings and forms of street plays. Male participation should be ensured in all such activities.
- **Sensitize women and girls** to raise their voices against any form of discrimination. This will give them the confidence to take their own decisions and raise their voice for any discrimination they are facing, including those related to food consumption.
- **Special nutrition programmes for women and girls** from poorer households could be implemented, as they are at higher risk of being undernourished.
- **Specific messages could also be targeted to males** to encourage them to ensure better nutrition of women and girls in their families. There should be a strategy to increase men's

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