

TOPS-SPRING Gender Webinar Series

Women's Empowerment and Men's Engagement: How a Focus on Gender Can Support Agriculture and Nutrition

Webinar 1: Empowering Women in Agriculture: Maximizing Nutrition Gain

March 26, 2014, 9:00 a.m. EST

The first webinar in a series of three from SPRING, TOPS, and USAID provided an overview of women's empowerment, nutrition, and agriculture by Anna Herforth with commentary from the Bureau for Food Security's Gender Advisor Sylvia Cabus. A short summary of the webinar is provided below.

Empowering women is one of the most powerful ways to improve nutrition through agriculture. Anna Herforth cited three key ways:

- Create market access and income control
- Reduce labor and time requirements
- Enable women to have more decision making power.

There is unanimous support among implementers, donors, and policy makers that women are the nexus or central to agriculture and nutrition interactions. Women's empowerment is central for several reasons. Women have key roles as farmers and caregivers. There is evidence linking decreasing rates in malnutrition to empowerment. Women use income more often for immediate household food security needs compared to men. There is potential to harm women with attempts to empower them—time poverty and labor expectations increase, excessive activity can result especially during pregnancy, seasonal energy deficiencies have been noted, and there are occupational health hazards such as agrochemical exposure and heightened malaria risk during pregnancy.

The *Understanding Women's Empowerment Pathway* document¹ illustrates some of the key means of reaching positive nutritional impacts. There are three pathways. The first outlines women's empowerment to use income, enabled by the food market environment and nutrition knowledge and norms. The second outlines the roles of time availability and decision-making power for caring for children. This can be impacted by nutrition knowledge and norms as well as the availability and access to natural resources such as firewood and water. The third pathway closely ties time use and physical energy expenditure through labor, which can impact mother and child nutritional status.

Herforth identified five key components that should be taken into consideration for women's empowerment activities. These five are similar to the key domains included in the Women's Empowerment and Agriculture Index, which is the topic of the next webinar in April. The five components were identified as: income, time

¹ http://www.spring-nutrition.org/publications/briefs/understanding-womens-empowerment-pathway?utm_source=Aq2Nut&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=TECHBRIEF4

and labor, knowledge, access to assets, and decision-making power. Herforth provided some promising recommendations for each of the five key components.

Income

Add gender consideration to agricultural crop choices. Do women control decisions and income? Explore processing, preservation, and market outreach via groups.

Gap: how do we prevent or mitigate shifts over control from women to men once profits occur and how is this measured?

Time and Labor

How would a program help beneficiaries avoid income and time trade-offs for nutrition when it comes to income generation? Ag technologies and behavior change communication could be helpful strategies.

Knowledge

Information needs to reach the whole family, not just specific members.² Positive synergies can occur using income empowered by knowledge for nutrition spending. More examples of knowing how to link nutrition and agriculture in extension is needed.

Assets

More work is needed towards improving policies on land rights and educating all on those rights and opportunities.

Decision-making

Ask women and men about their needs. Learn more about decisions around discretionary income. Eliminate assumptions—there may be good reasons behind decisions and we need to learn how to ask.

The evidence gaps identified by Herforth included:

- How can recommendations be successfully and sustainably implemented in specific contexts to empower women?
- How do we know women are more empowered?
- What should we be measuring? The WEAI is a good beginning. We are still learning. Honing the measure of income control is a priority.

Feed the Future can help to fill knowledge gaps. Measuring (using the WEAI and other tools) and qualitative information are key to building evidence.

²The example given was the Grandmother Project: <http://www.grandmotherproject.org/>.

Sylvia Cabus's Response

USAID's activities tie into the approaches and challenges mentioned by Herforth. Some other questions and challenge include:

- Focusing on stages of a woman's life cycle. What does 15-49 mean? What about adolescent girls in food security and agriculture?
- Promoting men's roles as allies! Ask good questions and tailor messaging. (CARE in Bangladesh have used Imams to relay messages on nutrition to men).
- Making choices with limited resources in value chain activities. Let's promote women at higher points just beyond typical processing. Feed the Future has examples of this happening.³

Opportunities ahead include:

- Scaling technologies.^{4,5}
- Cross-training. Health workers and agriculture extension workers coordinate (DAI's work in Malawi).⁶
- Using groups to address deeper issues (farmer field schools to promote agriculture and co-ed groups talking about GBV).
- Building the case for assets.⁷

The Bureau for Food Security's learning agenda targets to fill the knowledge gaps. A global report synthesizing results from all Feed the Future countries is coming soon. Some observations and questions to be answered:

- It is difficult to make mid-course corrections. Herforth mentioned two examples. In Nepal, a child care component was added to livestock trainings to get women to attend. In Ethiopia (Concern) messaging was incorporated into programming to discourage women from doing hard labor in their third trimester and to rest more. **Partners, how have you dealt with this?**
- GBV and other themes such as family planning, climate change, and infrastructure (markets with shade and latrines) are still topics to be further explored and developed. Our global health partners have been exploring these topics. However. . .
- Programming is siloed by sector still. However, should stand alone women's empowerment programming be developed? Should empowerment activities be integrated throughout? There is no single answer.
- What about resilience? Women's assets are the first to be liquidated in a shock. How do we help them protect and rebuild?
- What about safety and security issues?⁸

³ USAID's website on Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises: <http://wlsme.org/>

⁴ <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/access-adoption-and-diffusion-0>

⁵ <http://blog.usaid.gov/2014/03/want-to-empower-women-in-agriculture-use-technology/>

⁶ Possible resource suggested for integration of nutrition into extension services is GFRAS review "The Integration of Nutrition in Extension and Advisory Services: A Synthesis of Experiences" [http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/160-the-integration-of-nutrition-into-extension-and-a](http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/160-the-integration-of-nutrition-into-extension-and-advisory-services.html#http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/160-the-integration-of-nutrition-into-extension-and-a)

⁷ <http://qaap.ifpri.info/>

⁸ <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/48aa82ec0.pdf>

- Policy is really important (CAADP, African Union, FAO have 2014 themes and events we could work with on women's empowerment).
- Returns on inputs and assets. Equal access does not guarantee equal returns for women.⁹
- M&E on social capital (status and prestige). How can we negotiate those dynamics to make sure they are equitable?

Discussion/Question & Answer Session

1) What are the strategies for getting different sectors to work together?

It depends on context but coordination, colocation and convergence still needs to be explored; activities may be synergistic if well-coordinated.

2) We've been trying to do women's empowerment for a number of years. What's new?

Gender is really at 100% of implementation plans for USAID.

Here is a great, inspirational, and aspirational example: at the policy level, the Government of Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture has a Gender Strategy. A historical review project in the nutrition community showed that 30 years ago one wouldn't have seen in every document mention of (a) agriculture and nutrition links and (b) incorporating gender into that mix.

3) Are there examples of where even with asset limitations the needle has moved on women's empowerment?

The FTF newsletter coming out has examples from Mali (a women's savings group was able to scale up for rice processing), but what about this specific group made them successful because many like them exist in W Africa. Additional success stories with photos are welcome!

4) Are there trade-offs on nutrition with export level farming?

Here is a clear gap in evidence!

5) Are there examples on reconciling women's crops versus cash crops?¹⁰

This is applicable in both program and policy area. Incentivizing only certain crops is not gender or nutrition neutral. There is an inherent bias towards men. In Kenya, focus groups with men and women demonstrated that men clearly controlled big ticket items and women would sell fruit, veg, and legume crops.

CRS and Burkina Faso—Sesame—this doesn't compete with cotton (so asset protected) and sesame was a globally growing market.

6) Involving men and fathers as allies for family nutrition: what are some examples?

Our colleagues in the health sector promote "responsible fathers" and have good examples. Some patriarchal roles are reinforced, but it also provides a starting point for discussion on shared decision-making. An example from Mexico: men purchase inappropriate foods to demonstrate they are trying, but with education on how best to help with household nutrition.

⁹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afri/publication/levelling-the-field-improving-opportunities-for-women-farmers-in-africa>

¹⁰ Another series of examples from the Gender GLEE: <http://agrilinks.org/library/gender-gee-2013-%E2%80%93-plenary-3>

Participant noted Dimitria Project's "[Listeners Clubs](#)"

See also discussion on this topic (as well as multisector coordination) at the [FSN Network](#):

Additional questions from the chat box that the webinar did not have time to address:

1) Are there any case studies we could look at that support these strategies?

Excellent question—this is exactly where the literature needs to grow. Not just evaluating projects for if they worked, but what were the contextual and implementation factors that made them work— or perhaps, just as importantly, that prevented them from working. One case study that might be of interest is the [Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project](#) (GAAP), which aims to promote women's ownership and control of productive assets by evaluating how well agricultural development projects improve men's and women's access to assets and identifying ways to reduce gender gaps.

2) Do you have additional resources on the link between gardening and nutritional outcomes?

There is a whole literature on home gardening in general, much of which comes from HKI's Homestead Food Production model (see for example <http://www.hki.org/reducing-malnutrition/homestead-food-production/> and <http://www.ifpri.org/book-741/node/8351>). Gardening interventions have also been covered in agriculture-nutrition literature reviews such as Ruel and Alderman 2013 (*Lancet* series) and Webb-Girard et al. 2012 (*Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology*, 2012, 26 (Suppl. 1), 205–222). The basic story is that these projects have often shown impact on production diversification and the consumption of micronutrient-rich foods, and, where measured, dietary diversification. Some interventions have found impact on vitamin A status. Improved nutritious food access and diet quality is usually the aim of homestead food production projects, and is the level where impact can most likely be expected. Impact on child growth or other nutritional status outcomes should not typically be expected, because these outcomes are affected strongly by other factors, such as water and sanitation, disease, and feeding practices; and, observing impact on nutritional status would often require prohibitively large sample sizes.

The Farm Concern project I mentioned in Kenya (Traditional Foods for Wealth and Health) was a different model because it focused on forming commercial villages and training farmer groups in business skills, and helping to enable contracts between the smallholder farmer commercial villages and supermarkets. Farm Concern is mainly a marketing organization and used "nutrition-focused marketing", as well as strategic product placement and in-store demos in urban supermarkets, to help increase demand for the traditional African vegetables supplied by the farmer groups. The nutrition information was also shared with the farmer groups. The project worked with many women since they were the primary growers/sellers of traditional vegetables.

I would also say here that all of the gardening literature looks at nutrition outcomes within the farmer households. The vegetable marketing approach is concerned with improving access to nutritious foods for both producers and urban consumers—even though the latter has not been measured.

3) There may be cases where women's increased income (and control over it) may lead to domestic violence. To what extent is this a valid risk and how can we minimize this risk?

Like most development efforts, spending time in the community and doing good formative research would be very helpful to try to design interventions that will maximize benefit and minimize harm. I might also

suggest looking at DHS data from "status of women" module to get a very basic sense of how common and accepted domestic violence is in a particular area.

Please see additional resources such as the [Gender-Based Violence and Livelihoods Interventions Guidance Note](#), from the Dimitra Project/FAO, a [blog post](#), and a [report from CARE/Bangladesh](#).

4) What is the impact of small ruminant/poultry interventions on women and nutrition? These assets tend to be the big cash generators for women and are also a means of savings that they control.

See the above references on Homestead Food Production. Another good resource is from ILRI, [Livestock and Women's Livelihoods: A review of recent evidence](#) and IFPRI's [Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project](#). You can also look at Leroy and Frongillo, "Can Interventions to Promote Animal Production Ameliorate Undernutrition?" *Journal of Nutrition*. 137: 2311–2316, 2007—this review looked at women's empowerment just as one piece of a broader question on nutrition, and generally found that data on women's income control and time use was too limited to be able to draw strong conclusions. This points again to the need for more attention to measurement of women's empowerment, particularly income control and women's own perception of whether it is worth it (and why or why not).

Other Resource Mentions

["Traditional Foods for Wealth and Health"](#)

Population, Health, Environment (PHE) Work

“Oysters, Octopus, and Resilience” showcasing two coastal integrated population, health, and environment (PHE) programs. The webinar is available [here](#). The presentations (with many pictures) are available:

- [TRY Oyster Women's Association, The Gambia](#). TRY has been granted exclusive use rights to the cockle and oyster fishery in the Tanbi Wetlands, the only case for a women's group in Africa.
- [From Octopus to Disaster Relief: The Benefits of an Integrated Approach](#) and [Resilience & Women: Fostering holistic social-ecological resilience to climate change](#) share what happens when livelihoods in Madagascar are impacted by a deadly cyclone.

<http://www.k4health.org/search/toolkits/phe>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mHuauYzttc&list=UUaNZ1lj74xkkdl9ZR70zqrw>

The USAID-funded Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) Project, which is implemented by Catholic Relief Services, recently released a publication on [Women in Agribusiness](#) using marketing groups.