

A Review: Women Empowerment and Food Security

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Abstract: Gender equality is essential to achieve food security and nutrition. Women empowerment in rural areas improves the calorie availability and dietary diversity. Women participating in decision making improve the overall wellbeing of children which in turn contributes to the development of the society.

Key words: Food Security, Nutrition, Women Empowerment, Agricultures

Food security refers to the physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food at all times, to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (world food summit 1996). Food security is necessary (but not sufficient) to achieve individual nutrition security (FAO and FHI 360, 2016). Along with individual nutrition, good sanitary environment, adequate health services are also necessary.

Women produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world food production yet their key role as food producers and providers and their critical contribution to household food security is only recently becoming recognised.

Women are denied basic nutrition and good health. A mother who is stunted or underweight due to an inadequate diet often give birth to preterm babies and low birth weight child.

Role of women in food security

Women comprise in average 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries (FAO, 2013). Hence, securing women's human rights is a key strategy in assuring food security for all. Women are involved in a variety of agricultural operations such as crops, livestock and fish farming.

Women's empowerment is more strongly associated with the quality of infant and young child feeding practices and only weakly associated with child nutrition status (Malapit and Quisumbing 2015). Women empowerment in agriculture is positively associated with calorie availability and dietary diversity at household level (Sraboni et al., 2014). It is

found that women empowerment in agricultural reduces household vulnerability to food insecurity in a cross sectional study at Kwa Zulu- natal province (Sharaunga et al., 2015). It was also found that empowering women in socio cultural aspects that creates hindrance in agriculture reduces the probability of their household being vulnerable to food insecurity. The rural woman plays an essential role in the four pillars related to food security: availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability. However, women in rural areas of developing countries are at a disadvantage due to the fact that they do not have access to the same opportunities or resources as men owing to stereotype issues based on gender. There is a gender gap as regard to access certain resources such as: land, energy, technology, loans, pesticides, and fertilisers. Furthermore, women have more limited access to training, information, public services, social protection and markets. Women in rural areas play a crucial role for the subsistence of their communities, though this role is not always acknowledged. They take care of domestic chores, such as collecting water and firewood, they do agricultural and livestock tasks and also sell any surplus from their harvests at local markets. What is more, they look after the care and education of their families. Women also play a key role in animal husbandry, fishing and forestry, although their work receives less acknowledgment and their activities in these sectors generally prove less profitable than for men. The wide differences in women's nutrition among countries that have similar income levels indicate that something other than income affects women's nutrition. Research indicates that cultural norms about eating and women's low social status often affect women's diets. In 2003.

India and Bolivia had similar gross national incomes, but 36 percent of Indian Women were underweight, compared with only 1 percent of Bolivian women. (FAO 2012)

A study in Ghana showed that women participating in decision making regarding household purchases was significantly associated with higher dietary diversity compare to those who do not have a say (Amugsi et al., 2016). The role of women in agriculture and their situation in rural areas depends on their geographic region, social class, age and ethnicity. Skill development is considered as essential strategy to empower rural women to escape poverty. Women empowerment contributes not only to reducing the gender gap in agricultural productivity but also to improve food security and reduce poverty (Gracious M. Diiro., 2018).

Women with higher education are likely to provide verities of food there by increasing the household food security (MF Olumakaiye & A O Ajayi ., 2006).

Conclusion: Improving women's social and economic status with in their house and community has a direct impact on food security and nutrition. If women are given opportunity in decision making they tend to spend more income on food and education for children. So gender equality is therefore necessary in achieving food security and nutrition.

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