



Using vignettes to explore gender dimensions of household food security and nutrition

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Vignettes:

Fictional scenarios presented to participants or “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond” (Finch, 1987: 105).

- Offer a less personal, and thus less threatening, way to elicit perceptions on sensitive topics.

[Read:] I would like to ask you about how dietary decisions are usually made in your community, focusing on food preparation and eating habits. I would also like to ask you about who is generally responsible for certain food-related tasks.

To do this, let's take the example of a typical couple that is busy with agricultural activities in this village. Let's call them Ana and Adam.

Ana and Adam live with Adam's parents and their children, who include a nine-year-old girl and an eleven year old boy. In this table, I've listed all of the household members who could be involved in food-related activities or decisions.

Who does what?/Who decides what?	Ana	Adam	Daughter	Son	Adam's mother	Adam's father

(Please add the row headings step-by-step after asking the relevant questions below.)

- Q1** Imagine that it's time to prepare a meal for the family. Who decides what ingredients to prepare? (Pause for response. Place an 'X' in the table cell that refers to those involved)
- Q2** And who decides how to prepare them?
- Q3** What do you think is running through [their/his/her] mind when they decide what to prepare and how?

(Pause for response. A rich discussion should be conducted of the factors the group deems to be important. With a literate group, a flipchart may be used to capture key points).

- a.** Which three factors are most important for choosing what to prepare and why?
(The top three factors can be identified on the flipchart and numbers can be added next to them to identify their rank.)
- b.** Does/how does this change depending on the time of year or season?

The factors below can be posted on a separate flipchart. At the end of the discussion, the facilitator enquires specifically about any points listed and not yet mentioned by the focus group, and the individual FGD members are asked to select the factors they believe most affect their own decisions about what kind of food is prepared on a typical evening in their own home.

- i) the time it takes to prepare the food;*
- ii) how difficult (physically demanding) it is to prepare the food;*
- iii) the quantity of food available at the homestead;*

- Q4** Coming back to those who decide what to prepare: Would the same person(s) be the one(s) to decide on the quantity of food to prepare, or would anyone else be involved?
- Q5** Still thinking of our typical family, who is involved in actually preparing the meal?
- Q6** Who would make decisions on the budget for food? (Facilitator may probe about how this is done, if necessary: How would Ana and Adam discuss the food budget? What would their conversation be like? Does this budget vary? How and why?)
- Q7** Still thinking of our typical family: Who within the household decides who has to contribute money for food expenses? (Pause for response) And whose responsibility would it generally be to provide money for food-related expenses? (Pause for response) Would that depend on the type of food expense (e.g. buying grain vs meat)?
- Q8** Who would go to the market to buy the food: Ana or Adam or another household member? Why?
- Q9** Do Ana and Adam produce any of their own food from crops or animals? What do they produce?
- Q9a** How are decisions made about which and how much of this production is consumed or sold for cash? Does Ana decide? Adam? Do they decide jointly or with other household members?
- Q10** Now imagine that it is mealtime and a meal has been prepared. Who from this typical family would decide how to distribute food among household members?

Table 1: Fictional household members' activities and roles in making decisions related to food purchase, preparation, and consumption according to two women's and two men's focus groups from two villages in Son La, Vietnam

Who does what?/ Who decides what?	Ms Anh	Mr. Ban	9-year-old daughter	11-year-old son	Ban's mother	Ban's father
Deciding what to prepare	XX	X			X	
Deciding how to cook/process	XX	XX				
Deciding quantity	X	X				
Cooking	XXX	X	XX		X	
Deciding on budget	XX	XX				
Providing money	X	XXX				
Going to market	XXX	XXX				
Harvesting from household reserves	XX	XXX				
Deciding how to distribute food	XXX	X			X	X
Prioritized with healthy or tasty food			XX	XX	XXX	XXX
Deciding what to preserve	XXX	XXX				
Preserving	XXX	XXX				
Trying new foods or practices	X	XXX				

X-Poor women, village 1

X - Poor men, village 1

X-Poor women, village 2

X-Poor men, village 2



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HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Introduction

Eliminating malnutrition is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Poor quality diet is a principal cause of malnutrition and a top risk factor of morbidity and mortality globally (Fitzgibbon et al., 2017). Nutrition programs and projects abroad typically target children, mothers, and other women of childbearing age, who are particularly vulnerable to nutrient deficiencies and often discriminated against when it comes to intra-household decisions shaping access to and allocation of nutritious foods. The close association between women, particularly young and middle-aged, and food processing and preparation has further encouraged

nutrition-sensitive initiatives to target this demographic group (Kobrin, 2017; FAO, 2017). Yet, the influence of other family members – especially fathers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, and other extended family relations in the household – over maternal and child health and nutrition is increasingly being acknowledged (Swanson et al., 2019; FAO, 2017). Assuming that young and middle-aged women alone are responsible for this domain of activity thus under-recognizes the ways different household members and local social norms associated with household roles and relations shape dietary decisions among family members

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Thank you

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