



**30<sup>TH</sup>  
APRIL  
2021**

# **Women's Empowerment and Nutrition**

## Making the Connections

*Chaired by Dr Barbara Doyle Prestwich, University College Cork*

## KEY MESSAGES

- **Women's nutritional empowerment** is a concept introduced as a method to capture underlining structural factors determining poor nutrition and health of women.
- The determinants of women's nutritional disempowerment are context specific and require detailed analysis to **identify the main barriers to improved nutrition**.
- Both women's empowerment and nutrition are extremely complex issues, and have multi-sector determinants therefore a **multi-sector approach** to address them both simultaneously is needed.
- There are opportunities to use **new approaches** to identify the main barriers to ensure appropriate future planning on women and nutrition.
- The potential negative outcome of **over burdening women** with increased workload should always be considered and closely monitored.
- **Social behavioural change** of relationships within families and communities can off-set the over-burdening of women.

## THE CHALLENGE

The main challenge identified is how to **promote women's empowerment and improved nutrition** and health in such a way that women's individual needs are being met. Often nutrition programmes that focus on better community and childhood nutrition are targeted at women, but their own nutritional status is neglected. Evidence shows that empowering women can lead to increased household diet diversity and food security, however **women's own nutritional status does not correlate to their empowerment status**. Gender-based inequalities

exist within the food system. Women require access to resources, agency, knowledge and institutional support to ensure they are in a position to lead healthy lives as individuals in order to support the promotion of improved nutrition within their households and communities.

This webinar created a platform to discuss the need for a **multi-disciplinary approach to addressing a complex challenge**.

## Sudha Narayanan - Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, New Delhi

### The Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index (WENI)

was developed to contribute to a shift in thinking about empowerment in the context of women's nutrition. The index bridges the missing link between empowerment and individual women's nutrition and health.

The WENI introduces the concept of nutritional empowerment as a method to identify barriers to increased nutrition for women. It encompasses the basis of both empowerment and drivers of nutrition to expand on household nutrition but also examines the causes of female malnutrition. It measures women's knowledge, resources, agency and achievements in food, health, fertility, and institutional support.

Findings from the validation study conducted in India show different applications of the WENI help understand who is disempowered, and which factors matter most.

Figure 1 shows the domains in which WENI women, spouses and mothers in law are most empowered. Certain factors are more limiting for women than for men, such as access to paid work. Some factors differently

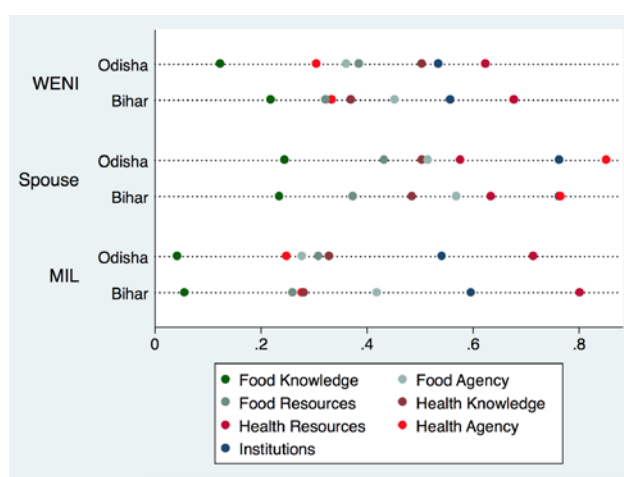


Figure 1 Scorecard for Domain Dimensions

influence the nutritional empowerment of WENI women and their mothers-in-law such as institutional support. There is regional variation, Bihari WENI women have higher food knowledge scores, but lower health knowledge scores than Odisha WENI women. Resources, more than agency and knowledge, seem to be binding constraints to women's nutritional outcomes.

# Solange Cullen - Researcher, Department of Food Business & Development, UCC

The results of UCC's research 'Women's Economic and Nutritional Empowerment: Gergera Watershed Project, Tigray, Ethiopia.' were presented. The study was conducted by applying the commonly used Abbreviated Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (AWEAI) and the WENI along with a series of food security, diet and health metrics. The objective of the research was to illustrate the complexity in measuring women's empowerment and the links to nutrition.

The main findings of the study show that the economic and nutritional empowerment status of women correlated with household food security and diet diversity, however women's individual diet diversity did not. The study found that 41% of women were underweight. The main barrier to both empowerment and food security was lack of access to knowledge and education.

Diversity Scores by HH Gender & Empowerment Status

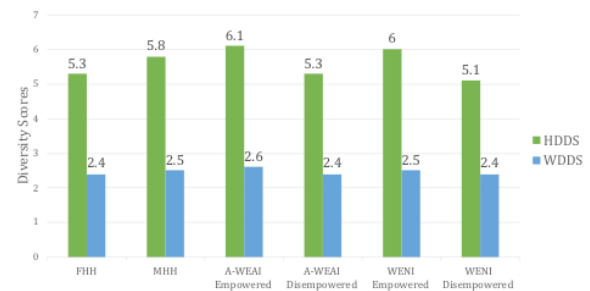


Figure 2 HDDS & WDDS by Gender and Empowerment

Figure 2 shows that the household diet diversity Scores are higher in male headed households and households with women who are empowered according to the AWEAI and WENI. The women's diet diversity score did not follow any patterns, meaning their empowerment status did not affect their own nutrition.

# Marlène Hebie - Nutrition Adviser, Goal Global

Goal Global has created the UNITLIFE project aimed at connecting women's empowerment to undernutrition prevention and treatment in Niger. The current undernutrition situation in Niger is impeding human and economic development. 7% of Niger's GDP is lost due to malnutrition each year. Chronic malnutrition can be found in 49% of children under 5, 14% suffer from acute malnutrition, the rate of childhood anaemia is 73%.

The programme identified the main drivers of malnutrition as; inadequate consumption of diverse and high nutrient foods, high disease burden in children and women's limited decision-making power.

The project aims at sustainably contributing to stunting reduction through agriculture market systems and social behaviour changes. The three main expected outcomes are: improved production and availability of healthy foods, improved women's empowerment for child nutrition and wellbeing and improved health-seeking behaviours, nutritional practices, and community well-being. The project recognises that this area requires taking a multi-disciplinary approach to achieve the outcomes by working within the food, agriculture, health, and social sectors.

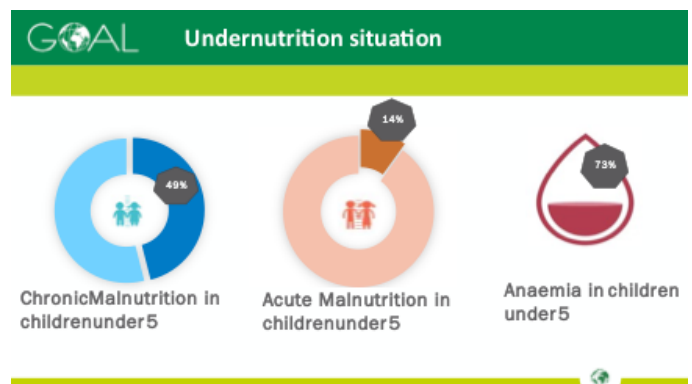


Figure 3 Undernutrition in Niger

## Rosemary Silaa - Executive Director, COUNSENUTH Tanzania

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COUNSENUTH's project 'Lishe Dodoma' is a community-based gender driven nutrition programme in Chemba District, Dodoma Region in Tanzania.

The key programme delivery approaches are stakeholder's engagement, Transformative Reflective Leadership Approach (TRLA) and Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND).

TRLA is an approach which actively engages influential community leaders and whole communities in a participatory way to comprehend existing gender disparities and empowers them to address these for

improved nutrition. Chemba is a strong patriarchal society, empowerment of women without active involvement of men is impossible. Improved access to water was key in reducing women workload and allowing time for more productive engagement

The main conclusions are that mainstreaming gender into nutrition programmes for improved nutrition yields better outcomes. Women's empowerment goes hand in hand with community and men sensitization, hence better outcomes in TRLA villages and tackling health and nutrition issues through community proven approaches ensure results and sustainability.

## Maureen Muketha - Founder of non-profit Tule Vyema, and Member of the Food Systems Summit Action Track 1 Leadership Team

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Maureen contributed her Food System Summit Action Track 1 Leadership Team's 'Game Changer' solution. This entails a need to increase the availability of safe and nutritious food, making food more affordable and reducing inequities in food access. It focuses on promoting women-led enterprises to grow and sell nutritious but neglected crops. It aims to support women currently facing poverty and inequality to create small enterprises, generating economic empowerment and agency in decision-making in producing, eating, and selling nutritious foods. It may also encourage leadership programmes for innovators at the community level.

The benefits of this project may transfer agency to women to be active protagonists in their own development and in food systems rather than being passive recipients of external 'solutions' or doing the work without the decision-making and giving women a voice can also change mindsets about gender roles in food systems.

Note: Recording of the webinar on Access to Nutrition – How can we Make Nutritious Food Affordable for All? Is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbSf2mz-AzU&t=12s>

All presentations are available at <http://www.ifiad.ie/food-systems-and-nutrition/>