Exploring a Pathway to Women's Empowerment Through a Homestead Agriculture Program in Rural Bangladesh

**Background**

- **Women** in rural Bangladesh face interrelated challenges including undernutrition and low levels of empowerment.
- **Homestead** food production (HFP) interventions aim to address these issues by providing sustainable access to nutrition and education, which can increasing agency and status.
- **While** these interventions are ongoing and frequent, the pathway between intervention participation and its impact on empowerment is unclear, leading to varied approaches and inconsistent results.

**Research Question:** How did participating in the HFP intervention FAARM (Food and Agriculture Approaches to Reducing Malnutrition) impact women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh?

**Where:** Sylhet district, Bangladesh

**Data Collection method:** 44 qualitative interviews and 12 focus group discussions with women enrolled in the HFP intervention FAARM and their husbands.

**Analysis:** A grounded theory approach was utilized. Analysis was completed using MAXQDA.

**Participants Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-depth interviews (married couples)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Intervention (6 settlements)</th>
<th>Control (5 settlements)</th>
<th>Total transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions (enrolled community members)</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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Women were married, had a self-reported age over 30 and were enrolled in HFP FAARM. Focus groups involved 6-9 participants, and each focus group was exclusive to members of a shared community.

**Pathway to Empowerment Through Food Production**

1. Receiving training and materials Received from FAARM
2. Establishing home gardens and poultry rearing
3. Experiencing initial success with food production
4. Generating social and financial resources
5. Expanding agency in household decision-making
6. Producing renewable, sustainable resources
7. Sustaining empowerment

**Results**

- **Spousal Support** played a key role in long-term garden productivity, but often was not earned until an initial harvest had been reaped.
- **Self-Efficacy** as a key ingredient towards agency was learned through trainings, but built through success and a sense of control over outcomes.
- **Social Support Networks** were built through teaching skills and sharing surplus, which ultimately contributed to increased overall food security within communities rather than just households.
- **Decision Making Status** was heavily influenced by household contribution. Women who leveraged skillsets, knowledge, social networks, and garden produce gained the most respect from their husbands and were able to participate in a greater amount of high impact decision-making processes.

**Conclusion**

- The most meaningful improvements in empowerment occurred among participants who were able to produce beyond their household consumption and successfully leverage surplus resources to gain higher utility and therefore bargaining power in their household.
- Social networks and community collaboration was shown to produce the most consistent results in food security, and therefore had the largest impact on food poverty.

"Women’s opinions were not considered seriously four years back. But now their opinions are considered seriously. We see that women’s opinions are taken in every family nowadays. I think, this is a significant change... The women are now participating in some productive and income generating works. Therefore, they have the courage to give their opinions to their husbands." - (Male, FGD)