

Eating differently from the same plate?



Gender and intra-household differences in food consumption behavior from Khatlon Province, Tajikistan

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Background

- Gender inequalities in health and socio-economic outcomes are well-documented, and the influence of gender norms within the agrifood system is widely recognized and generally unchallenged (Pyburn et al. 2023)
- The evidence on gender disparities in dietary intake and food security remains scarce for Central Asia, a region increasingly burdened by the interrelated challenges of undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies.
- Aim:

This study aims to quantify and explain gender-based and intrahousehold differences in dietary intake in Tajikistan, with a specific focus on the Khatlon Province.

- These findings can guide nutrition-sensitive interventions and social behavior change campaigns aimed at reducing the negative impact of gender norms on dietary quality.



Participant photo: Son of HoHH, Khuroson

Methods



Individual & household
characteristics

**Dietary recall from
1,681 participants**
(1,156 women, 525 men)

20 individual interviews
(16 women, 4 men)

12 focus group discussions
(8 women, 4 men)

22 photovoice interviews
(14 women, 8 men)



18-65
years
old

Head
Wife

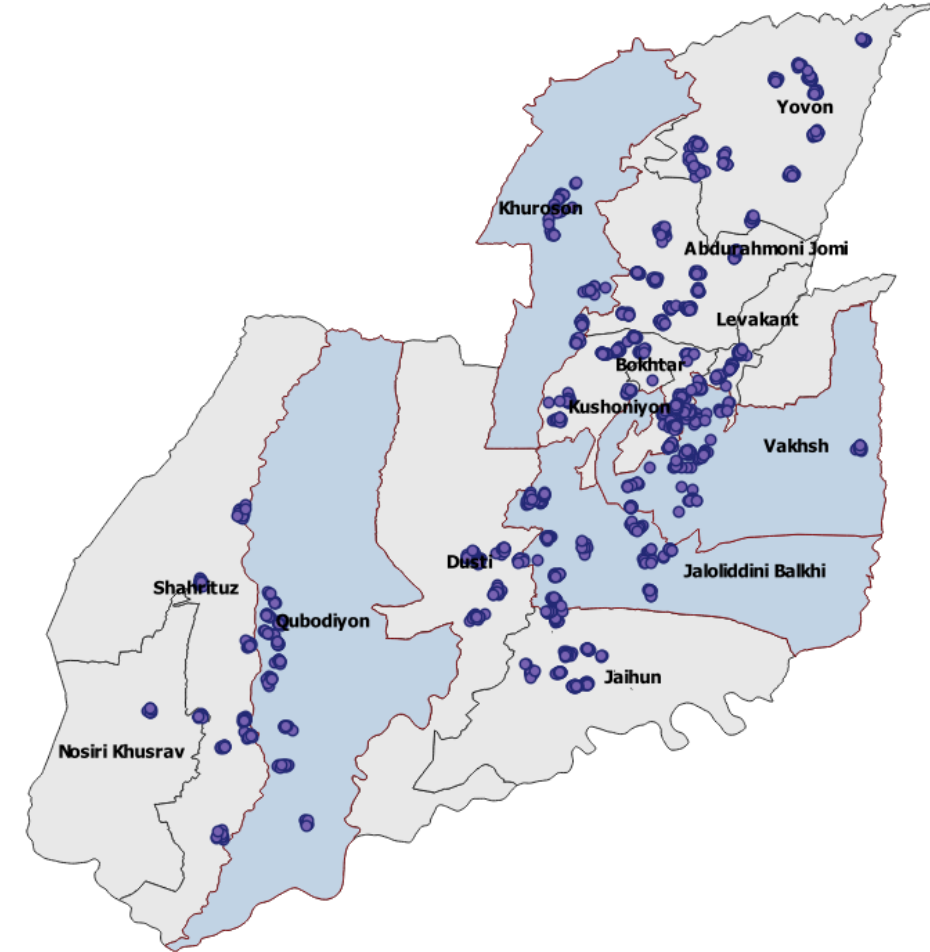
Daughter-in-law
Daughter

Man
(head)

Feb-Mar 2023
12 districts


Feb-Mar 2024
4 districts
(Balkhi, Khuroson,
Vakhsh, Qubodiyon)

Apr-May 2024



Dietary diversity measure

- Dietary diversity is assessed using the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women indicator, based on consumption from 10 specific food groups (FAO, 2021).
- Dietary data was gathered through a **24-hour recall** process in the individual-level section of the survey.
- The MDD-W measure was adapted to the local context, incorporating food items that are commonly consumed in the Tajik diet.
- For women of reproductive age between 14 and 49 years old, consuming **at least 5 out of 10 food** groups indicates adherence to the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women and serves as a proxy for micronutrient adequacy in their diet.

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
|  | Starchy foods |
|  | Pulses |
|  | Nuts & seeds |
|  | Dairy |
|  | Meat, poultry & fish |
|  | Eggs |
|  | Green leafy vegetables |
|  | Vitamin-A-rich fruits & vegetables |
|  | Other vegetables |
|  | Other fruit |

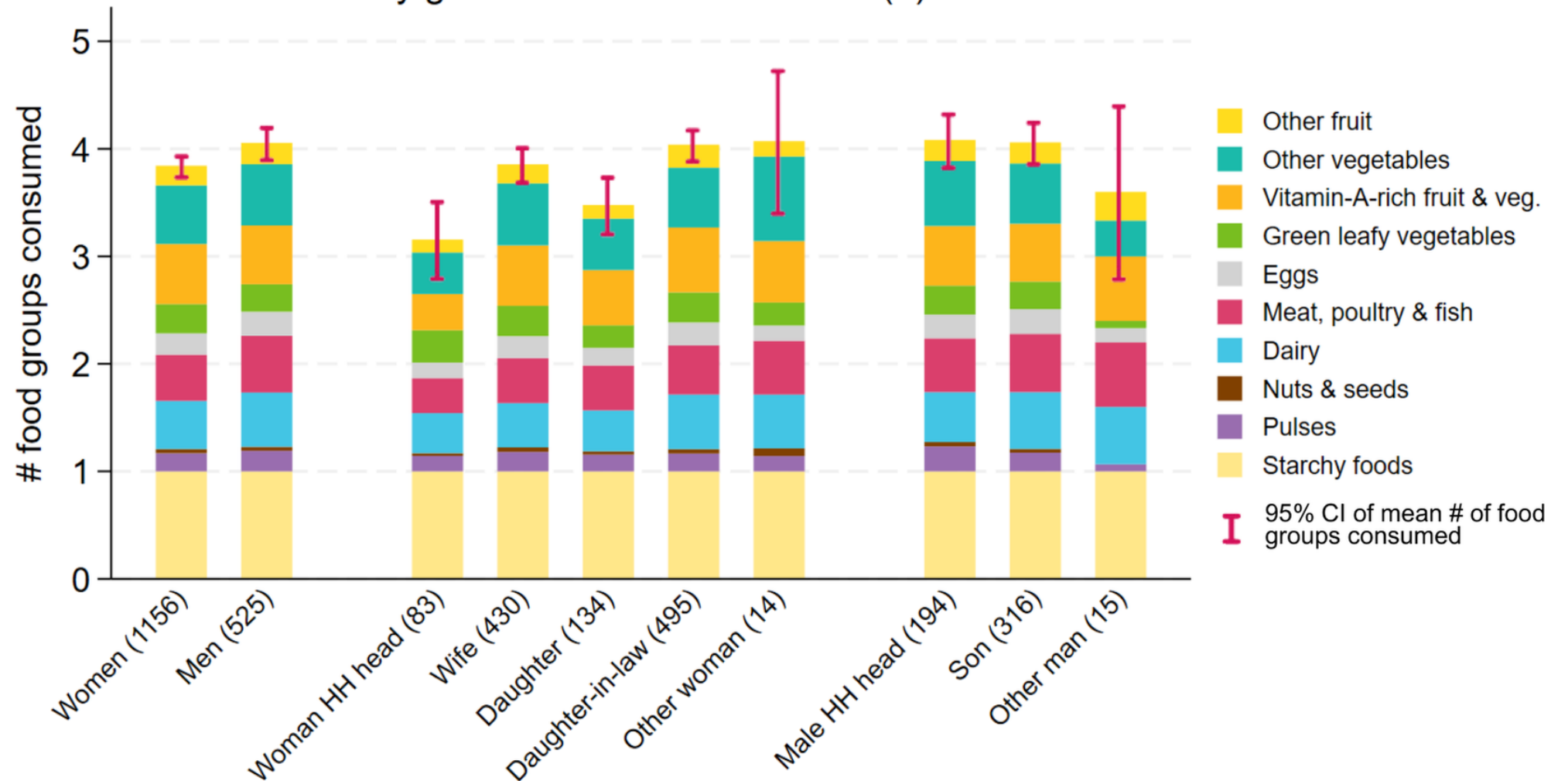




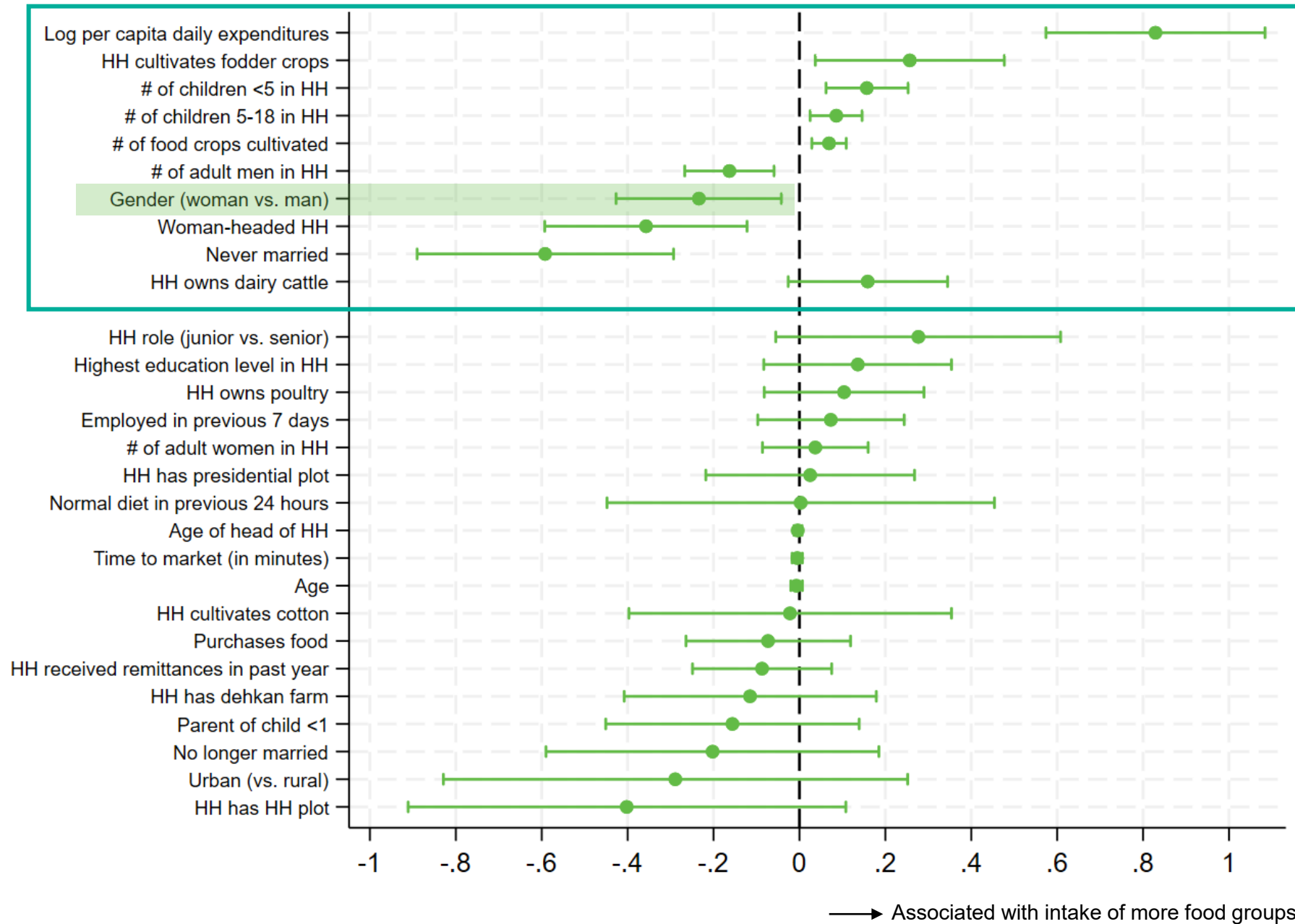
Quantitative results

Results

Average composition of dietary diversity by gender and household role (n)



Associations of respondent's individual and household characteristics with number of food groups consumed (marginal effects, n = 1,681)





Qualitative results

Qualitative results: Themes

Gender and
generational
differences in
responsibilities

Mobility shapes
opportunities for
food intake

Perceptions of
dietary needs and
restrictions

Meals serve as a
medium to
demonstrate
values and
strengthen
interpersonal
relationships



Theme 1: Gender and generational differences in responsibilities

- **Clear Hierarchies and Divisions of Responsibilities**
 - Structured by sociocultural and religious norms
 - Younger generations respect and obey older generations
 - In multi-generational households, the most senior man is typically the main decision-maker
 - The most senior woman also holds decision-making power, though to a lesser extent

“These [photos of meals] are all my daughter-in-law’s skills. Whatever I tell her [to make], she doesn’t say no. I’m proud of that.” – Male HoHH (50), PV V2



“Mother’s blessing”, Daughter of HoHH, Qabodiyon

Theme 1: Gender and generational differences in responsibilities

“Man is the breadwinner and needs to bring food to the house; the rest is woman’s work.” – Male HoHH (52), FGD Q1

“The way men earn money we women cannot. [...] Because there are no jobs for us. We have land and only work in our land.” – Temporary HoHH (35) while her husband is in migration, PV Q4





- The division of tasks directly influences both food preparation practices and opportunities for food intake
 - Women's mealtime is impacted by their responsibility for **meal preparation and serving**.
 - They often eat last **after serving others**, delaying their meals.
- This delay can lead to eating less due to time or reduced food availability.

“When the head of the household—me—is not at home, a woman first feeds the kids and then eats by herself. When I am at home, she first feeds me, then the kids, and then herself. Anyway, she will be the last and eat the rest.” – Men, FGD K1

Women working outside of the household:

- Prepare meals either before work or after returning home
- Few households mentioned men cooking when no adult women are available

Primary Responsibilities and Food Distribution

| Aspect |  |  |
|--|---|---|
| Primary Responsibilities  | Earning income Purchasing food Informing what to cook | Childcare Making grocery list Cooking meals Baking bread |
| Food allocation  | More food Higher-valued food | Less food Lower-valued food |

Theme 2: Mobility shape opportunities for food intake

- Men have greater mobility outside of the household
 - Working outside of the household, earning income
 - Going to the market

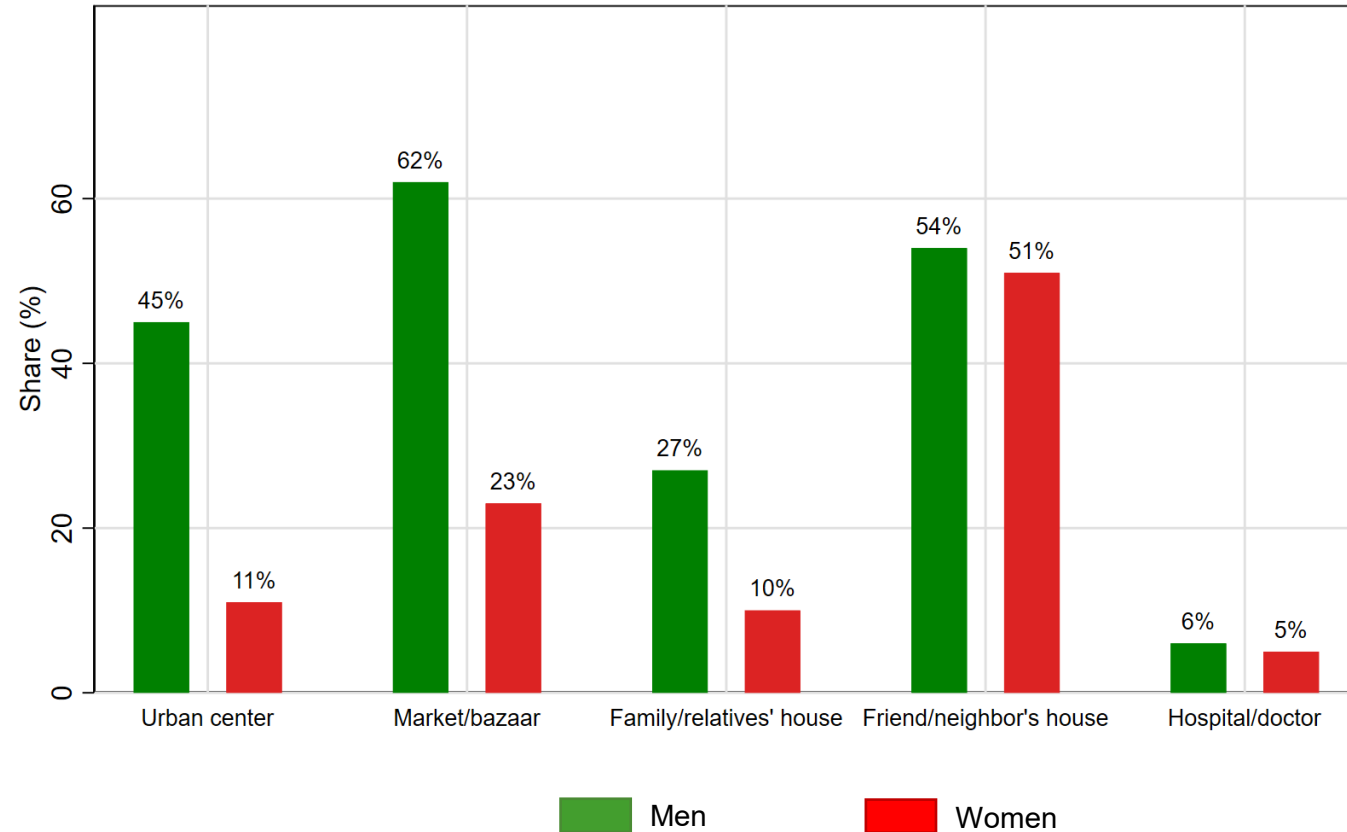
→ Allows men to consume food away from home

- Typically, meat-containing products such as *sambusa* and *shashlik*

“Men also go to restaurants. Women stay at home.” – Wife/temporary head (30), FGD K3

“Men are out of the door [work outside of the house], they go to the market, shop. They buy one thing and eat something and then come home. [...] Whatever is prepared at home, we [men] eat it. But when we [men] go to the market, we can have plov, mantu, sambusa [all typically meat-containing meals].” – Male HoHH (64), FGD B1

SHARE OF MEN AND WOMEN
VISITING THE FOLLOWING PLACES EVERY DAY OR AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK



Theme 3: Perceptions of dietary needs and restrictions

- Typical food for men
 - Meat, meat-containing foods, eggs, foods that provide energy
- Typical food for women
 - “Light food”, traditional foods (*atalla*, *mastova*)
 - No specific foods:

“For women and girls, it should not matter. They can eat whatever is at home. She is a housewife. She is not going anywhere. [...] Whatever she finds, she can eat it. We don’t look for delicious food. We are not like this. Sometimes we even don’t have meat.” – Daughter-in-law (mid-20s), FGD V3



“Household food consumption” Son of HoHH, Khuroson

Theme 3: Perceptions of dietary needs and restrictions

- Both men and women are concerned about halal food
- Food intake restrictions for women are also linked to maintaining a **"good shape."**
- Men frequently emphasize the beauty ideal of a slimmer figure when discussing women's diets.

"Women don't consume a lot of meat; women want to stay in a good shape. [laughter]"

– Men, FGD K1

"Women should eat salad to be in good shape. They need to consume meat but not that much. [Q: What would happen if women ate more meat?] They would gain weight and then no one would like them." - Son of HoHH (26), IdI V5 (not recorded)



Theme 4: Meals serve as a medium to demonstrate values and strengthen interpersonal relationships

- Meals serve as Relationship Builders

“If there is less food that day, I will first give it to my husband because I don’t want a misunderstanding, I don’t want him to shout. Then I give food to my children. I can drink tea with sugar. For me that is enough. [...] We women are not even disappointed. If [our family members] are happy then we are also happy.”– Wife (37), FGD Q2

“[Q: When there is less food in the household, who gets food first?] They [women] respect. I tell them to eat first, but they respect.” – Male HoHH (56), IdI K2

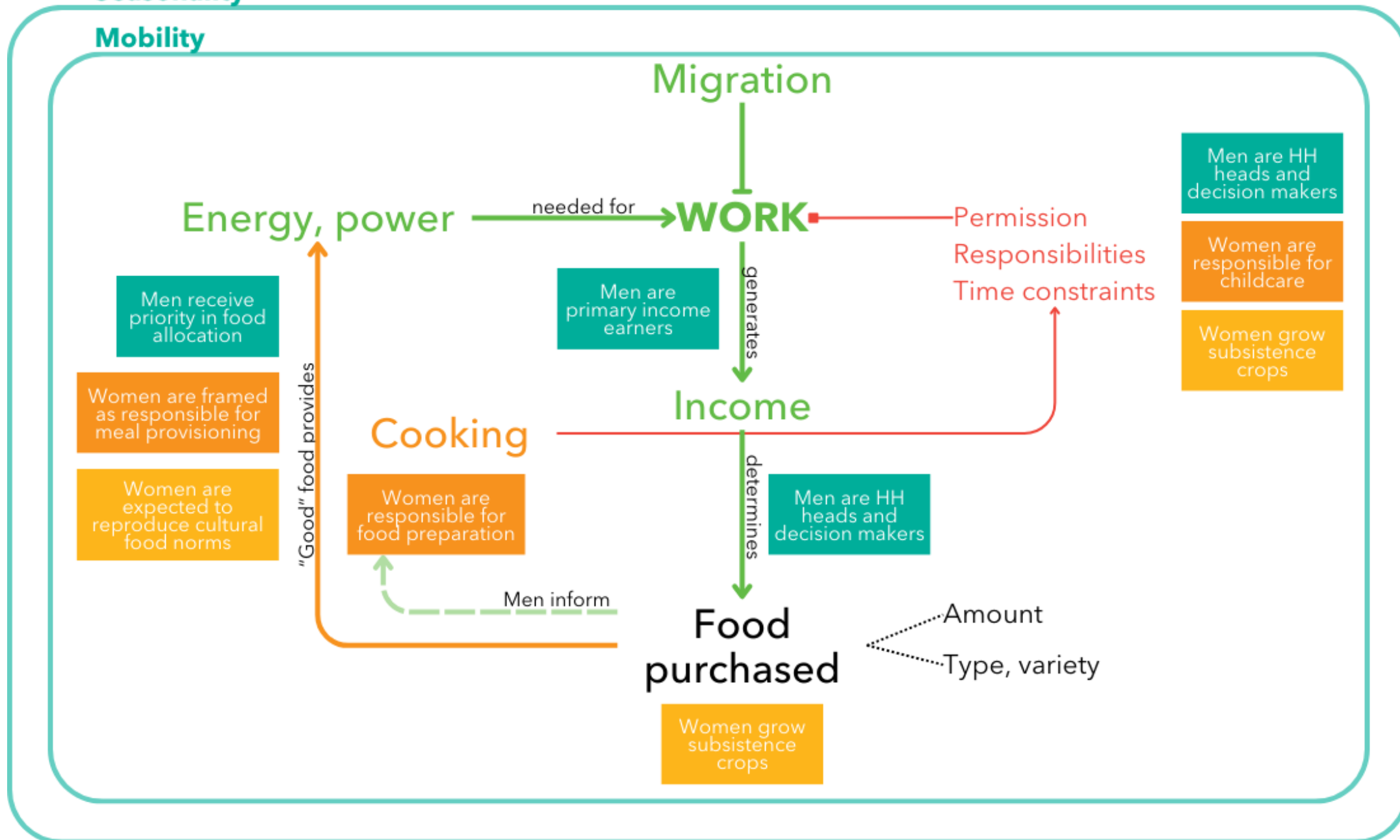
- Serving Order Reflects Respect:

“First, we serve the head of the household. We say that they are the blessing of the household. We give it to the man as he is the head of the household.” – Wife of HoHH (47), FGD K2



Seasonality

Mobility



Conclusion

- Traditional roles reduce women's control over food choices and consumption
 - Responsibilities lead women to serve others first and eat last, often resulting in poor nutrition
 - Reduced mobility limits women's access to a variety of foods, resulting in lower diet diversity.
 - Men's nutritional needs are often prioritized, reinforcing gender disparities in food consumption.
 - Women may give up food to maintain family harmony and strengthen household relationships
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- Efforts to improve nutritional status at the household level need to consider that food may not be distributed equally among household members
 - Social behavior change necessary
 - Recognizing value and contributions of women



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Thank you

Participant photo: Son of HoHH,
Khuroson