

# Title: Adopting a gender transformative approach (GTA) to increase dietary diversity and decision-making of women: Evidence form a nutrition-sensitive intervention in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Given the high levels of malnutrition in Bangladesh and the importance of fish in providing micronutrients, we sought to understand the dietary diversity, level of nutrition knowledge, awareness, and attitude towards fish consumption among fisheries communities in Cox's Bazar area.

The study aims to assess the effects of gender transformative approaches (Recognizing the importance of targeting both husbands (men) and wives (women), as well as other influential members within the households to improve the food, and nutrition, and build skills in communication and problem-solving to discuss nutrition and gender-related problems) that were implemented in the technical training portfolio for agriculture, aquaculture, nutrition, and market development interventions targeting female beneficiaries and their husbands to challenge gendered barriers related to agriculture, health, and nutrition behaviors.

Data were collected using mixed methods; we carried out a quantitative survey (structured questionnaires) from 322 artisanal fisher households that were project beneficiaries covering Teknaf, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar Sadar, and Maheshkhali Upazilas of Cox's Bazar district. Furthermore, we collected qualitative datasets (semi-structured interviews), from a total of 16 focus group discussions and 16 key informant interviews with women beneficiaries have been conducted.

The result shows that in the proportion of women who are consuming an inadequate diet 55% of households have a lower dietary diversity score; while 45% have an acceptable dietary diversity score after the intervention. Whereas 82% of the households had lower, dietary diversity scores, and only 18% of households had acceptable dietary diversity, scores at the baseline with increased participation in the critical household decision-making process. Most of the basic nutrition awareness-training participants (92%) understood the nutrition, hygiene, balanced diet exclusive breastfeeding, and IYCF topics. Basic food and nutrition (92%) and caring for pregnant mothers (84%) are the key learning points from the training and women's knowledge contributing to women's dietary diversity. The majority of participants (92%) had been able to understand the joint decision-making on assets management, intra-household food distribution, and workload sharing topics of the gender sensitization training. Workload sharing (94%), joint decision-making (66%), and trust building (64%) were key learning points from the gender sensitization. After the training sessions, most of them practiced workload sharing (91%), joint decision-making (70%) and trust building (61%).

Overall, the gender transformative approach is effective in addressing gender inequality and its adaptation to enable household members to work together for better nutrition outcomes for women in this program.

## Introduction

The coastal fishing communities in Bangladesh are some of the most vulnerable groups of people in the country, with limited resources and livelihood opportunities. The JICA funded Technical Assistance Services for the implementation of a pilot project for Fisheries Development Advisor (TASFDA), which WorldFish has been implementing since September 2021 in close collaboration with the Department of Fisheries. Given the high levels of malnutrition in Bangladesh and the importance of fish in providing micronutrients, we sought to understand the dietary diversity, level of nutrition knowledge, awareness, and attitude towards fish consumption among fisheries communities in Cox's Bazar area.



The main objective of this quick study was to collect information on the level of knowledge, awareness, and attitude changes among the project beneficiaries due to the implementation of project activities on gender, nutrition-sensitive technology practices, and nutrition and livelihood improvement for fisheries communities in Cox's Bazar areas. Objectives are as follows:

- Understand key applied elements of "transformative approaches".
- Learn in detail the adaptation process and implementation
- Provide recommendations from WF's experience in Bangladesh

A social-ecological system (SES), small-scale coastal fisheries are evolutionary, integrated, and dynamic adaptive structures of social and ecological dimensions (Ostrom, 2009; Salgueiro-Otero and Ojea, 2020). The conceptual framework (Figure 1) used in this study attempts to capture multilevel resilience under the shocks and stresses posed by the challenges faced by small-scale coastal fishermen. The TASFDA project adopted an action research approach to systematically identifying gender and nutrition-related problems and their intersections at multiple levels (e.g., individual, household, community, and structural) and helping to develop potential solutions in order to improve nutrition and optimal health of specified coastal communities.

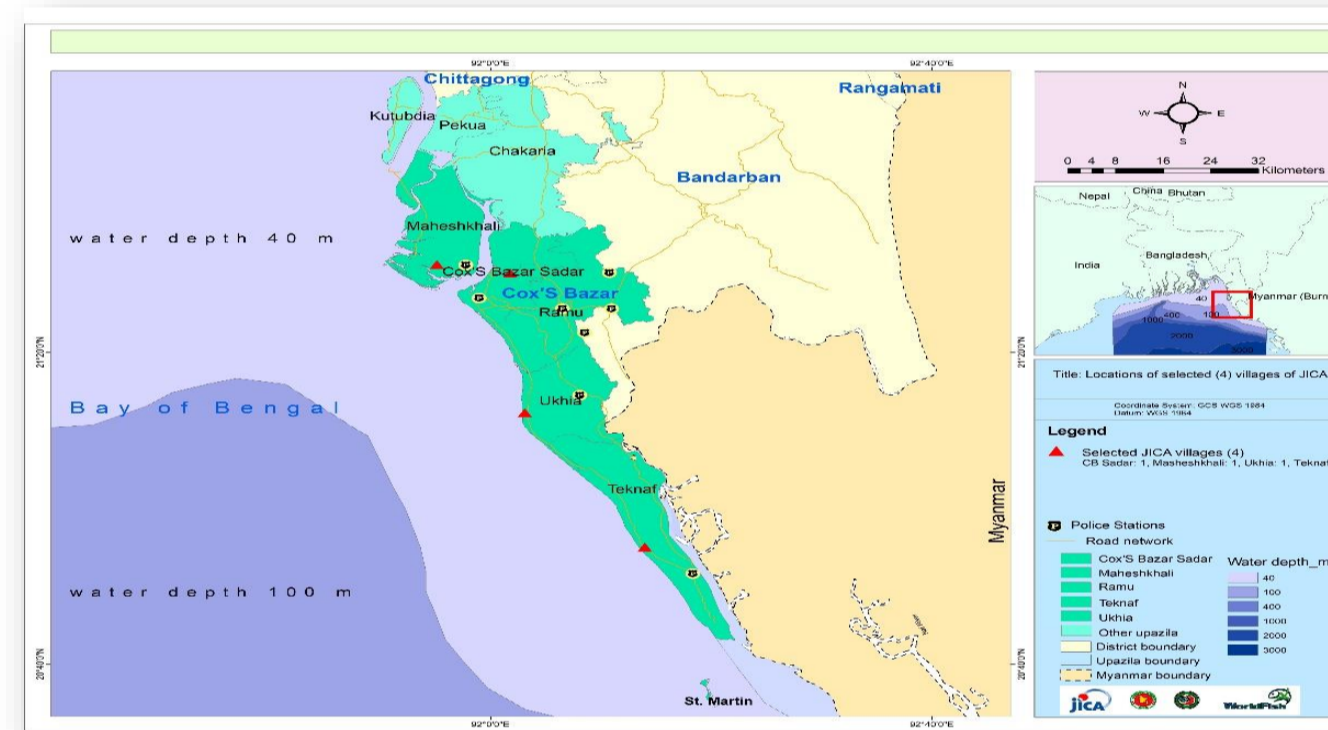


Figure 1: Theatre of Operation (ToO)



Figure 3: Action Research Process (Royal Education Council, 2018, p.5, in Dorji, 2021)

## Methodology

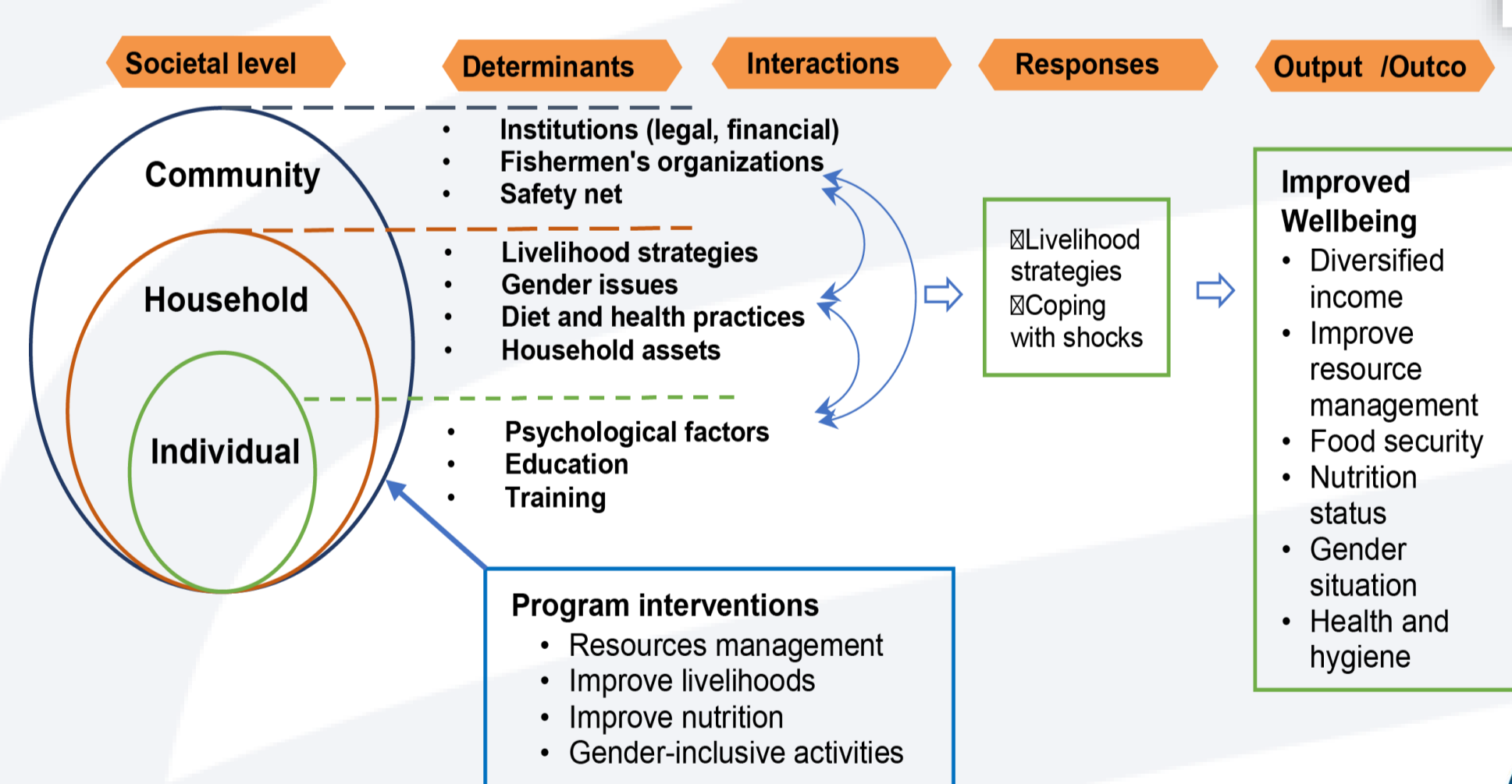


Figure 2: Social-Ecological System (SES) of Small-Scale Fisheries. Adapted from Sultana et al., 2021 and based on Berkes and Ross (2016) and Leite et al. (2019)

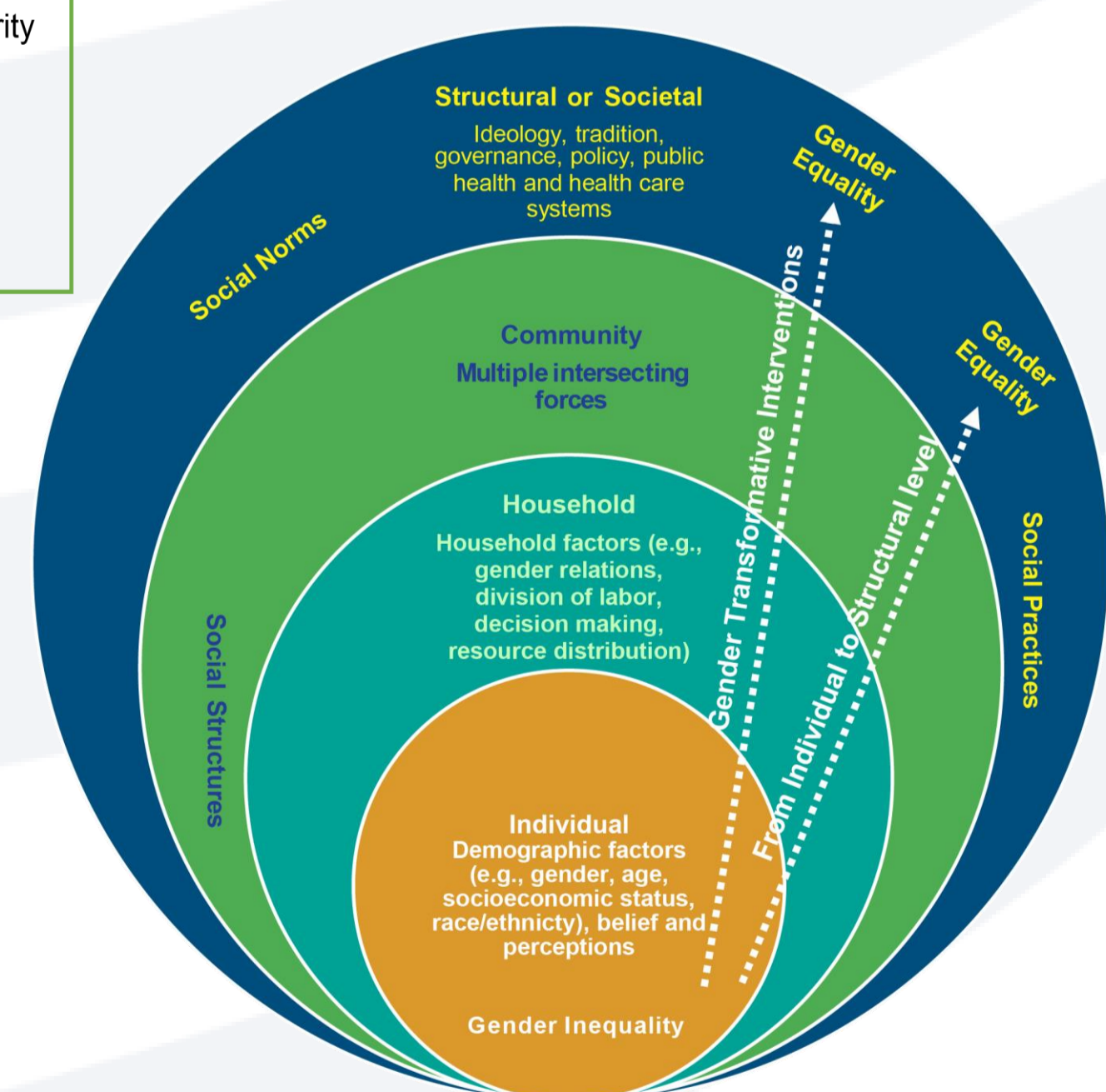
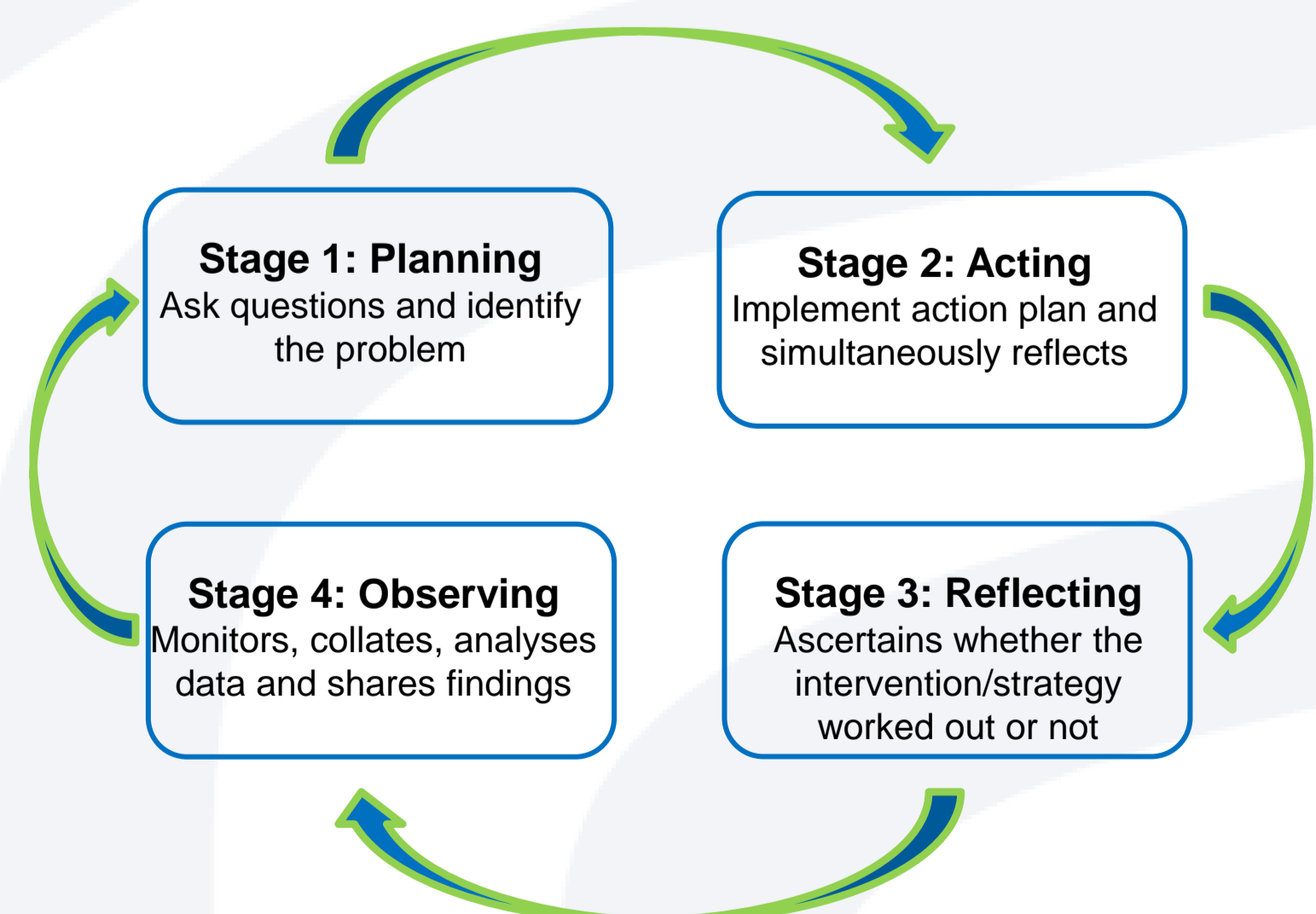
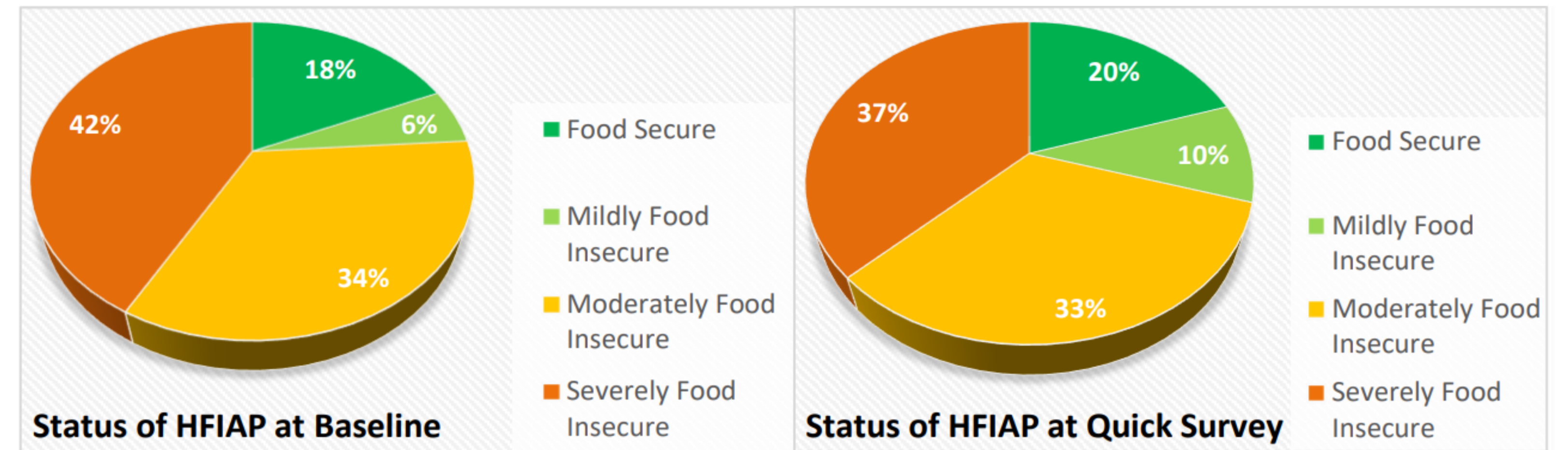


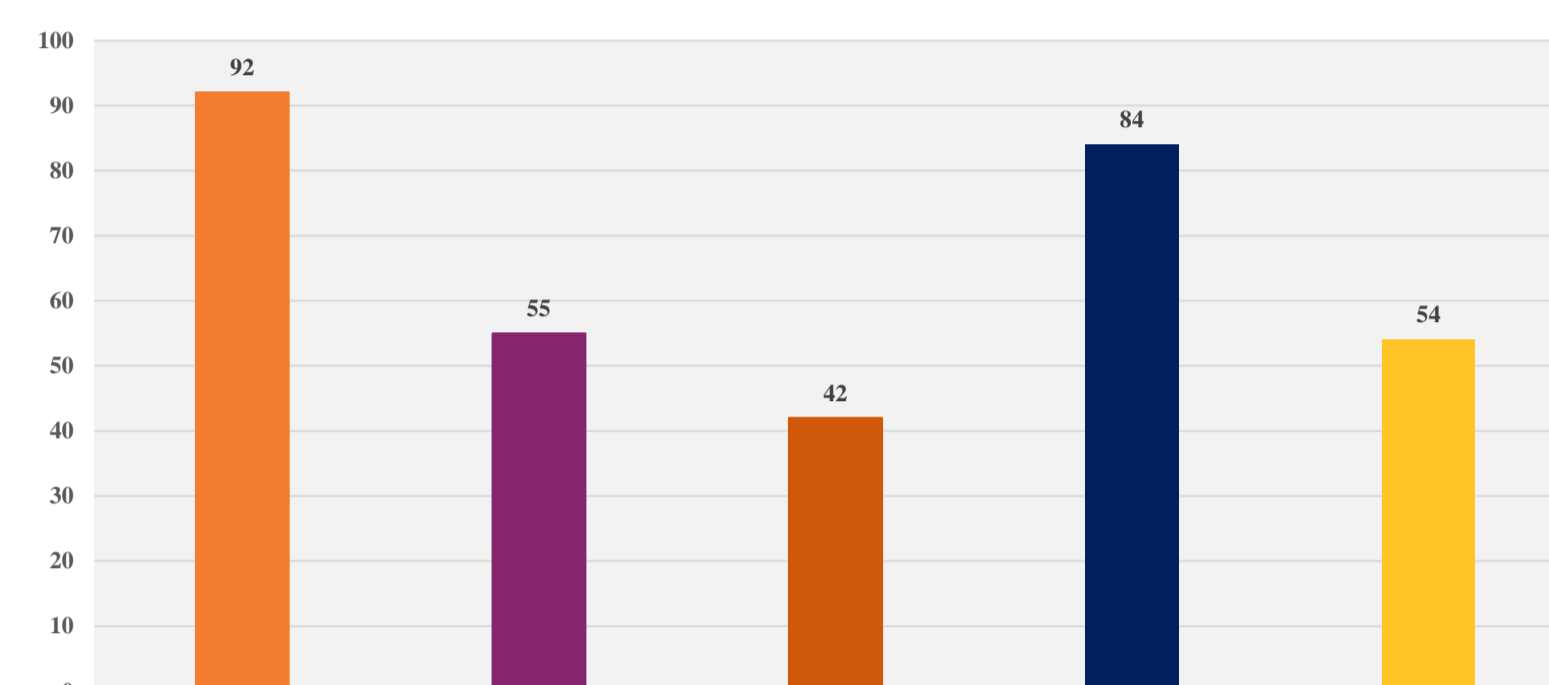
Figure 4: Gender Transformative Socio-Ecological Adaptation Model



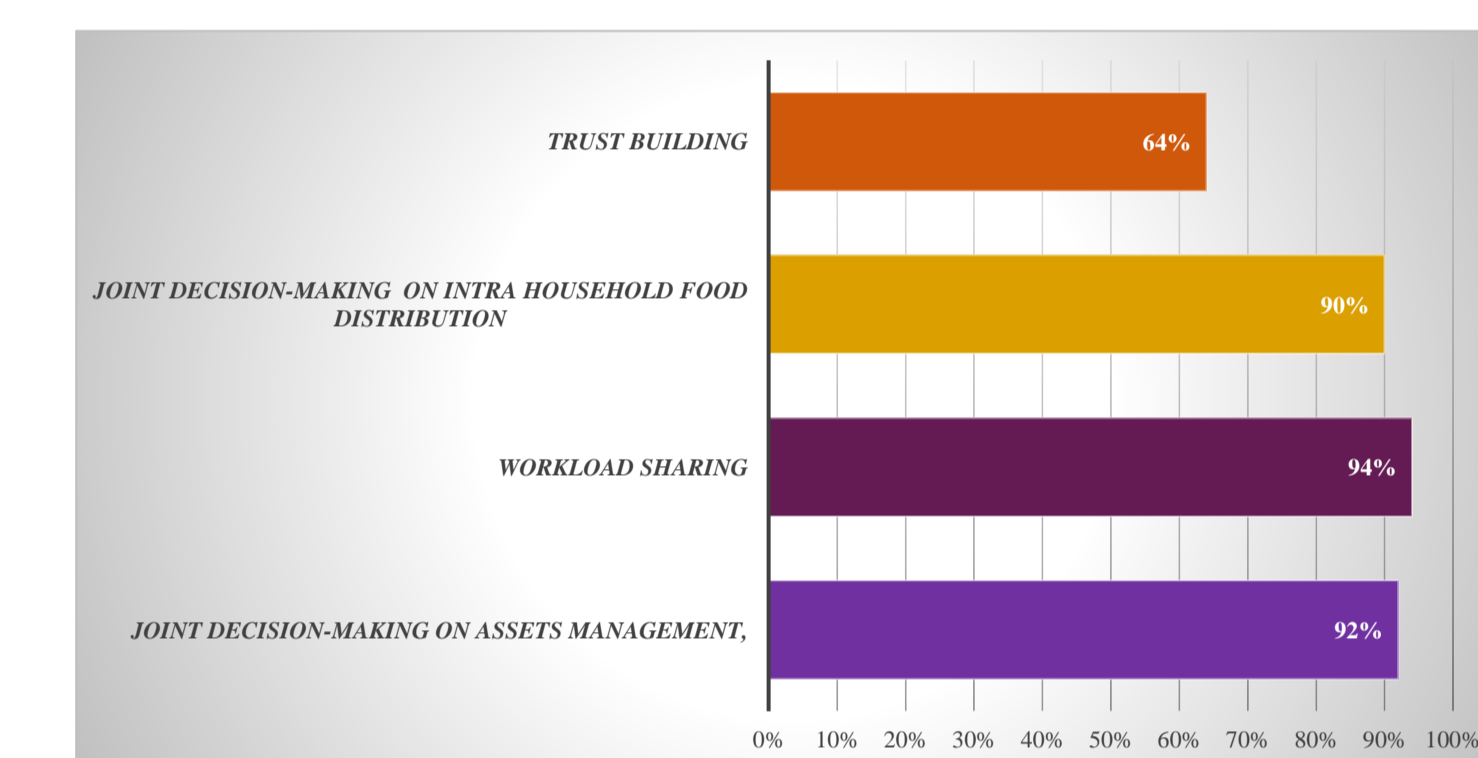
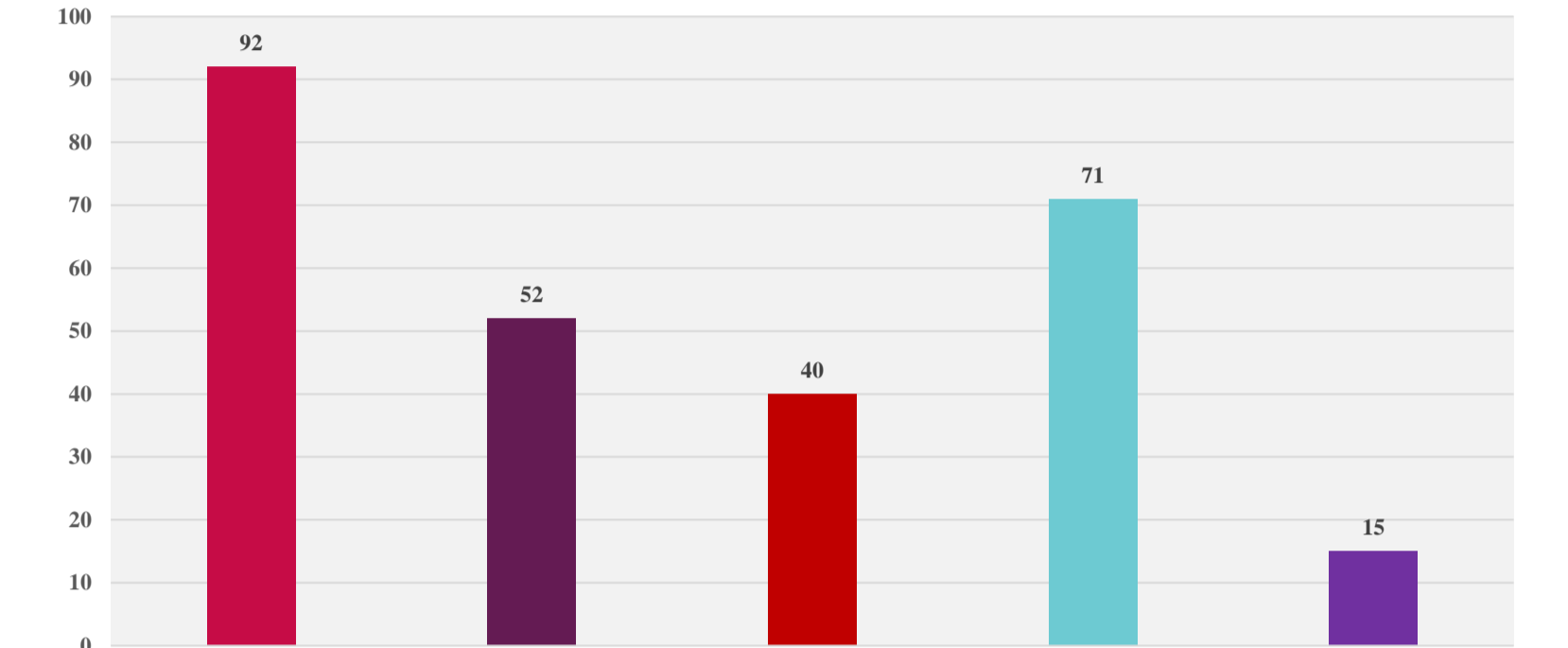
## Results/Findings



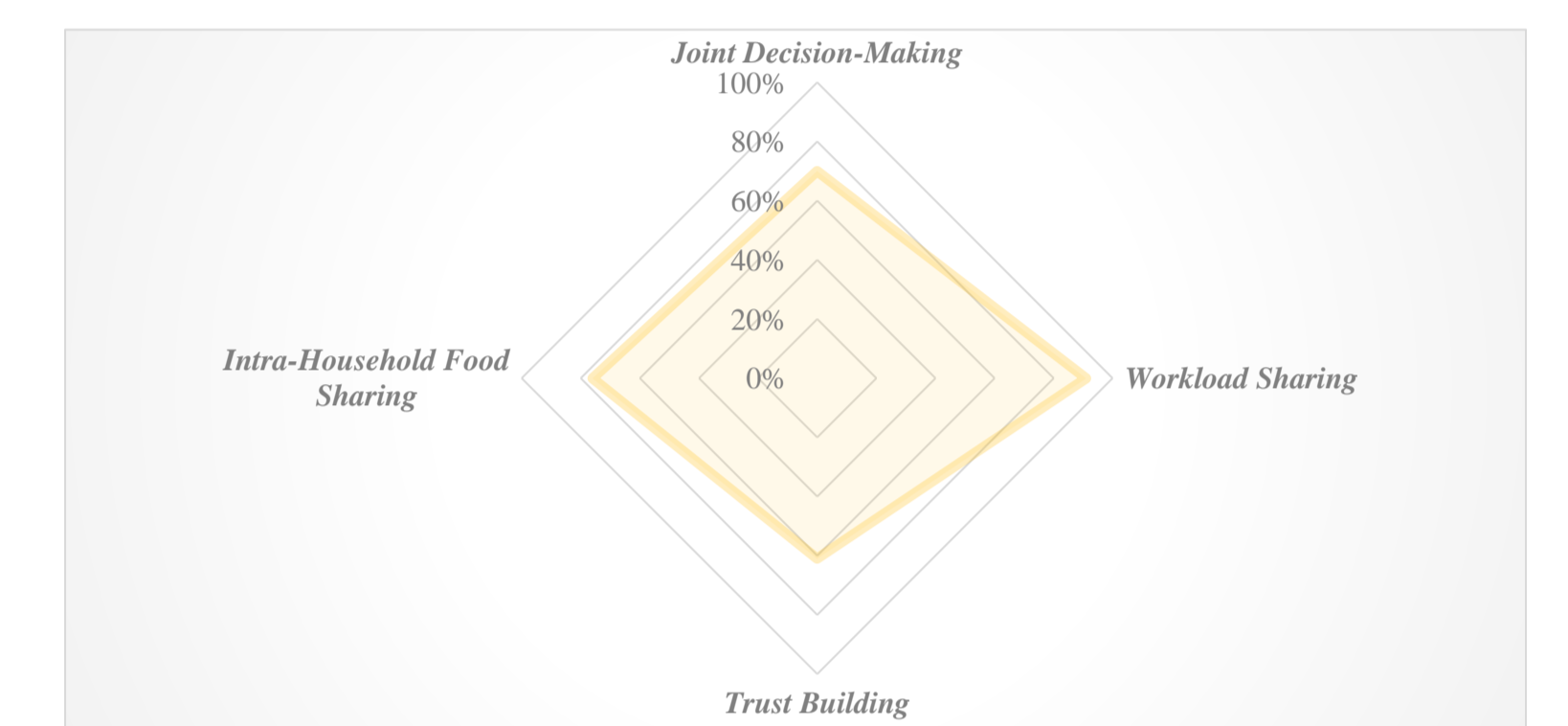
### Key learning points from the nutrition awareness training



### Supporting family members from the nutrition awareness training



Percentage of Participants understood the topics in relation to Household Support and Food Distribution



Percentage of Participants Practice to support household and food distribution after training

## Success Stories

**Jobeda Sakera Saju (TASFDA Household ID: 22)**  
Village: Tajiakata  
Moheshkhali, Cox's Bazar

"Now Sahed is fully aware of not only the child's health but also his wife's health during pregnancy and after childbirth. They are now more concerned about living a healthy and nutritious life, as they learned about nutrition. Saju said, "I did not know how to prepare nutritious diets, which I learned from cooking and feeding demonstrations and also got to know about the nutritious food for fulfilling the nutrient requirements for the family members. Now I always prepare a proper meal every day, which I learned from the nutrition training sessions of the project."



Figure 1: Jobeda Sakera Saju's husband (Mohammad Sahed) helping her in household work by playing and feeding their child



Figure 2: Shafu Akter with husband at their nutrition garden

**Shafu Akter (TASFDA Household ID: 46)**  
Village: Tajiakata  
Moheshkhali, Cox's Bazar

"Now I am very much happy and peace has also come in our family." This story is based on a woman who changed her life through the nutrition garden training and peace has come in her family because her husband is now more concerned about his responsibility and helps her in every possible way. The ultimate dream for Shafu and Shirajul is to grow vegetables in a Xlarger area than before.

## Conclusions

The gender transformative approach proved effective in addressing gender inequality and enhancing household members' collaboration for improved nutrition outcomes for women. By increasing dietary diversity and empowering women with nutrition knowledge

As a bigger picture, our key learning are as follows:

- ✓ Addressing inequitable processes (bottom-up approach).
- ✓ Skilled field facilitators.
- ✓ Peer groups vs. mixed groups.
- ✓ Context-related tool.
- ✓ Sustainability: wider community engagement.

## Acknowledgment

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