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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Food Insecurity and Coping Strategies Along the Urban-Rural Continuum in Tamale

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Abstract

Food insecurity is a worrying challenge all over the world, with sub-Saharan Africa most affected. Literature reveals that in developing countries food insecurity is largely a “managed process”, meaning people are not passive victims of sudden events but are active participants in responding to the risks they face in their daily lives. Our research focuses on food insecurity and coping strategies and seeks to understand the role of urban and periurban agriculture in food security, how households cope with food shortages and how these coping strategies change along the urban - rural continuum. A transect approach was used to guide data collection along the North - South and East - West transects along the urban - rural continuum. A total of 20 focus group discussions, with each eight participants (four women, four men), has been conducted. Additionally, three qualitative interviews were conducted, one in each spatial dimension (urban, periurban and rural). Preliminary results reveal that majority of households experienced a poor harvest in the last season and they were consequently expecting to experience food insecurity this year. All interviewees explained, that the most difficult time in terms of food insecurity is June and July. This is the period when rain season has already started and people engaged in farming, but crops not yet mature. Most common coping strategies include reliance on cheaper and less preferred food, limiting portion size and reducing the number of meals a day. In periurban and rural areas, hunting and gathering of wild food is widely practised. In urban areas, people tend to be in a better position to cope with food insecurity, as they can always turn to occasional jobs to generate some monetary income, for example, carpentry or trading. While in some places borrowing and taking credit is very common, it is a social taboo in other communities. This study will further produce an index on frequency and severity of the different coping strategies used in each of the locations along the urban - rural continuum and produce a map to visualise in which parts of Tamale certain challenges and coping strategies are located.

Keywords: Food coping strategies, food insecurity, transect approach, urban and periurban agriculture