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## Don't Forget about the Children — Latent Food Insecurity in Rural Cambodia

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### Abstract

When measuring food insecurity in rural Cambodia we find that common indicators such as the Food Consumption Score (FSC) or the Coping Strategies Index (CSI) do not reveal great problems with food insecurity. However, anthropometric data for children under five and caloric intake for adults indicates that malnutrition, stunting and nutrition deficiencies are widespread. This finding is somewhat puzzling. This paper therefore aims to measure and compare different food security indicators along with more complex measures including weight-to-height ratios and caloric intake. Further, we analyse food consumption patterns and cultural habits that explain the prevalence of malnutrition in rural Cambodia. The data set consists of 600 randomly sampled households from Stung Treng, located in the North of Cambodia. Our results suggest that households in Stung Treng are indeed able to meet their basic food security needs as indicated by the different food security indicators throughout the year. But while food diversity is relatively large, the quantities consumed are small and caloric intake mainly stems from rice. Given that the majority of the households are engaged in manual labour related to crop and livestock production, caloric intake per person is found to remain at the lower bound of sustaining the individual's strength. Children below five are found to suffer from stunting and malnutrition. Despite the increase of caloric intake in the last decade, rice and fish remain the main source of food. Further, we find that people are not aware of malnutrition and deficiency issues since for them having enough rice means that they are food secure. Thus, due to its cultural dimension it will be difficult to change people's diet and food consumption pattern. In order to improve the situation it is important that policy makers are aware of the latent food insecurity, especially for children, in rural Cambodia.

**Keywords:** Anthropometrics, caloric intake, food security, rural Cambodia