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Drivers of Food Production Choices in Farming Households: an Understanding of Food Availability in Tanzania

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Abstract

Farming remains to be the basis of food availability in Tanzania. This is particularly true in rural areas where farming is the source of livelihood for about 70 % of the population. A cross-section study involving caregivers from 663 households was carried out to determine the underlying factors influencing food production choices and their implications on food availability in rural farming households of Tanzania. The findings revealed that cereals and tubers were important staple crops cultivated by nearly 90 % of the population. The major reported driver for production of staples were to obtain household caloric sufficiency. It was further revealed that staples were available throughout the year. This was contrary to other food crops such as legumes (72 %) and nuts (11 %), where the drivers for production were mainly geared by their marketability and profitability. Their availability within the households were limited due to the fact that they were sold in order get income. Out of 663 households 484 reported to produce at least one vegetable, the reported driver was mainly household consumption. However the availability of vegetables were limited due to seasonal variations, fresh vegetables are mainly produced during rainy season, making them unavailable in dry seasons. On other hand nearly 50 % of the population produce livestock, where by small animals like chickens are kept as a copying strategy for immediate household shocks for example paying for medical services. Large animals like goats and pigs are kept mainly for selling to cater for major expenditures and household servings, with exception of cows which were mainly kept for mechanical traction, all these limit their availability for consumption at a household level. In light of these findings, there is a need to further explore beyond farming as an important source of food production in rural areas, much as availability and adequate production of cereals and tubers, there is still a gap on adequate availability of other food crops such as vegetables, legumes, nuts and fruits. It is therefore important to examine influence of market on food production choices, and integrating nutrition sensitive farming programs in order to achieve food and nutrition security.

Keywords: Food availability, food production, rural farming