The Phenomenon of Seasonal Hunger among Coffee Farmers: A Case-Study on Smallholders in Caranavi, Bolivia

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Abstract

Seasonal hunger is a chronic and persistent condition that significantly affects the most vulnerable in rural society. Infants and children are particularly susceptible to vicious diseases, such as diarrhea and malaria, in addition to growth and cognitive development complications resulting from poor nutrition and weakened immune systems. Additionally, adults confront significant weight-loss and suffer from anemia and diminished immune function, which is especially detrimental to women's fertility. Coffee producing regions universally struggle with many of the consequences of seasonal hunger. However, the basis for seasonal hunger among coffee households is not fully understood. The coffee-producing region of Caranavi, Bolivia is characterised by comparable poverty and hunger related health conditions, offering a compelling case to study this phenomenon. The aim of this thesis project is to raise awareness to this problem by examining the magnitude of seasonal hunger and key contributing livelihood factors among smallholder coffee producers in Caranavi. Principally, it seeks to identify the opportunities that enhance living standards and support livelihood sustainability by:

(1) examining the phenomenon of seasonal hunger, its causal factors, and determining who are the most vulnerable. This objective focuses particularly on intra-household, gender and age related aspects of the phenomenon.

(2) identifying and prioritising coping strategies to help households reduce their vulnerability to seasonal hunger and maximise their resilience.

A case-study approach is employed for this project, in combination with a mixed methods strategy to examine causes and responses to seasonal hunger. Data are gathered through: Participant observation, household survey, seasonal calendar, photovoice focus group and key-informant interviews. Regression models based on livelihood factors to predict seasonal hunger, and to formulate a farm typology analysis for the purpose of farm-targeted intervention are conducted. The results from this research will provide an understanding of the factors and conditions that allow for seasonal hunger to persist, in order to identify viable opportunities that offer relief and strengthen resilience to the cycle of poverty and hunger. This research project seeks to examine and recommend solutions to the problem of food insecurity manifested through seasonal hunger within a rural community inflicted with poverty and limited access to food.

Keywords: Coffee, gender, poverty, seasonal hunger, smallholders