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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Characterisation of the rural food environment in Lindi-Tanzania and its influence on nutritional security

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Abstract

There have been increased cases of triple burden of malnutrition which has heightened the food security situation in many developing countries, especially, in sub-Saharan Africa. This is partly, attributed to changing food environment in low-income countries. The food environment is the availability, affordability, convenience, and desirability of various foods.

Our aim is to, determine how the food environment can be transformed to promote the uptake of nutrient-dense diets in rural households using a case study of the Lindi Region of Tanzania. We begin by characterising the rural food environment, we then analyse the relationship between the food environment elements and household dietary patterns to inform possible interventions that enhance nutrient-dense dietary consumption.

We use qualitative methods, to define the food environment based on food accessibility and availability measures. We conducted 7 focus group discussions made of 10 participants each, randomly selected from each of the villages. Additionally, we did 5 expert interviews with the District Nutritional and Agricultural officers. The data were transcribed, coded, and analysed through framework analysis using the MAXQDA[®] qualitative data analysis tool.

The results indicate that the main source of food in the community is from own production that, employs traditional farming methods. The yields are, therefore, not sufficient to sustain adequate dietary requirements till the next harvest season. Additionally, because of poverty, occasioned by financial illiteracy, and distance to the nearest market there is difficulty in accessing food from the informal and formal markets of the built food environment. Resultantly, there exists a continuous “hungry gap” between harvests. The government policies are mainly towards the production and marketing of cashew nuts which is the main cash crop at the expense of food crops. Interestingly, the wild food environment is still pronounced and is a major source of proteins, leafy vegetables, and fruits, especially during the lean seasons.

The government needs to step up interventions to encourage the intercropping of cash crops with locally adopted legumes like pigeon peas, traditional vegetables, and fruits. Equally, important intervention would be financial literacy to enable economic access to food.

Keywords: Food accessibility, food availability, food environment, hungry gap, nutrient-dense