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Photovoice as a research method for exploring nutrition and diet quality at a household level: The case of the Mau Narok-Cheragany complex in Kenya

NDUNGU S. NYOKABI¹, LISETTE PHELAN², HENRIETTA L. MOORE¹

¹ *University College London (UCL) and University of Edinburgh Business School, Inst. for Global Prosperity, University College London (UCL), United Kingdom*

² *Wageningen University & Research, Environmental Economics and Natural Resources (ENR), The Netherlands*

Abstract

Household dietary choices play an important role in health and nutrition quality, particularly for children and other members of the household. Household dietary quality and choice are influenced by access to food, cost, and preparation time among other factors. Although dietary quality is known to influence health outcomes, there is a paucity of studies in Kenya focusing on household nutrition, particularly in small-scale farming households.

This study employed a modified photovoice methodology. A team of citizen scientists working in the Prosperity Co-learning Laboratory programme (PROCOL-Africa) identified 70 households to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria included the possession of a mobile phone and willingness to participate in the research. The recruited households took pictures of their meals including breakfast, lunch, dinner, fruits and snacks and shared that with the research team via WhatsApp. Discussions were held to discuss the pictures taken and drivers of dietary choice. Pictorial data were analysed for frequency of meals consumptions. Thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse the recorded discussions.

The research collected pictures of meals that explain the household's dietary quality. There was an over-representation of carbohydrates and vegetables, and a low representation of proteins and fruits in household diets. Discussions with household members during the photovoice debrief discussions revealed that some foods particularly traditional ones were disappearing. The dietary choice was influenced by concerns about nutrition, age food availability, food preparation time, and income among other factors.

The research approach empowers participants to participate and contribute to the research process. Additionally, it addresses the challenge associated with the recall approach to collecting dietary data. There were challenges associated with the photovoice research approach such as fatigue and the low inclusion of poor households without access to mobile phones and/or internet access.

Keywords: Dietary quality, household nutrition, visual research methods