Identifying farm-level pathways to household food security in West Africa: a qualitative case study in Côte d’Ivoire

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**Background**

- Linkages between agriculture and food security are widely recognized. However, little research analyses these relationships at farm-level.
- A more systemic understanding of how small-scale farming systems and household-level food security interact will help identify policy levers that reduce malnutrition in rural areas of West Africa.

**Methods**

**Data collection**

- The Sustainable Livelihood (SL) Framework was used to develop qualitative data collection tools.
- Data was collected in four villages in south-central Côte d’Ivoire.
- Data was obtained using participatory rural appraisal tools in:
  - 14 semi-structured interviews with farmers,
  - 4 focus group discussions,
  - 4 key informant interviews with health and rural development agents.

**Data analysis**

- Interviews were recorded, transcribed and later coded using the SL categories as coding system, pathways were coded in a second step.

**Results**

Four farm-level pathways to food security were identified: (1) source of food, (2) food crop marketed, (3) cash crops, and (4) women’s empowerment.

- **Source of Food – Food availability**
  - Staple crops and vegetables are primarily cultivated for household’s own consumption. Food crops are under women responsibility.
- **Food crop marketed – Food access**
  - Women sell field surplus on the weekly market. This income is primarily used to buy fish and additional foods.
- **Cash crops – Food utilization**
  - Cocoa is an important source of income, which is under men’s responsibility. This income is used to cover non-food expenditure.
- **Women’s empowerment – all dimensions**
  - Women play a central role across pathways bearing the main burden for producing (availability), procuring (access), and preparing food (utilization).

**Policy implications**

- Agricultural policies targeting food security should pay special attention to gender roles, intra-household dynamics and mental accounting.
- Policy support for subsistence farming lead by women shall improve food availability, access and stability.
- Improved access to health and education for women shall improve food utilization.
- Women’s responsibilities and constraints must be carefully considered to achieve food security which calls for more gender-sensitive food and health systems interventions.
- Combining livelihoods approaches with the pathway’s perspectives enables identifying and prioritizing relevant policies for improved nutrition.

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**Zimbabwean Sisal, a traditional dish, at Zougoussi**

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