



Hidden hunger in rural Tanzania: what can qualitative research tell us about what to do about chronic food insecurity?

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What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty.

Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation.

This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

Abstract

This paper is part of a series of working papers making use of a qualitative, life history dataset developed by the CPRC in Tanzania. It investigates the experience of hunger, its causes and consequences, the strategies people use to prevent it, and derives a set of policy implications. The most food insecure people depend on wage labour, so controlling food price inflation and improving wages and working conditions for poor casual labourers would be one priority. Buffers against hunger can easily erode for vulnerable older people, separated, divorced or widowed women, and such people need to be protected against the possible loss of their assets or access to resources. Knowledge is also a powerful tool against hunger – people at local level could use more and better information about nutrition, suggesting that a revival of the once successful community nutrition programme would help.

Keywords: Tanzania, hunger, vulnerability, insecurity.

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1 Introduction

Using a qualitative dataset comprising focus group discussions, more than 100 life histories and key informant interviews in six widely dispersed rural communities in Tanzania (Figure 1), this paper investigates the nature of hunger, its causes and consequences and people's preventative strategies, before drawing policy implications for the Tanzanian government.

The informants were a diverse group (Box 1) from three regions (Figure 1), with an average age of 46 in a range of 13-82 years, made up of 69 women and 78 men. In terms of well-being trajectories, 26 said that they had maintained the same well-being status, 18 were upwardly mobile and 21 were downwardly mobile. Most people were involved in farming as the primary occupation, but many were also or exclusively labourers, some were migrants and others have gone into trade or other non-farm occupations. A few had salaried jobs.

Box 1. Approach and method used for the study

Research sites

Research was conducted in six sites in three districts across mainland Tanzania. These sites were drawn from the 447 clusters included in Tanzania's 2007 Household Budget Survey (HBS) (NBS, 2009). The clusters were selected to reflect different regions, agro-ecological zones and agricultural livelihoods. They also had reasonably high levels of poverty.

Research methods

This study built on the tradition of q-squared (quantitative and qualitative) research carried out by the CPRC (see most notably work in Bangladesh by Davis and Baulch, 2009). The starting point for the research was the HBS 2007 and the recently commenced National Panel Survey (NPS). With these surveys as the foundation, the research team designed a package of tools for the collection of qualitative data in the six research sites. These tools comprised focus group discussions, life history interviews and key informant interviews.

- Focus group discussions

In each cluster, the team sought to conduct four focus group discussions. The first was with 'knowledgeable' people, to map a community timeline, identify key institutions in the community, identify and rank major sources of livelihoods and understand the value of key assets, wages and prices.

The second was with women and the third with men (or vice versa). These were labelled 'wellbeing ranking focus group discussions'. Participants were chosen by community leaders: the research team requested that they represented a cross-section of the community. The first step was to develop a wellbeing classification system for the research site. The starting point was a scheme that the research team had developed. This included six well-being classifications, ranging from destitute (1) to rich (6). It sought to take into account assets, income, levels of consumption and vulnerability to risk; work across clusters in Tanzania while retaining local relevance; capture distinctions among the many poor people clustering around the poverty line; and capture the specific characteristics the destitute experienced.

The second step was to rank the well-being of each of the 24 HBS households for 1999 and 2009, and identify reasons for improved, declined or stable well-being. By doing this, we hoped to generate a birds-eye view of socioeconomic mobility in each of the research sites. In the six clusters, eight well-being rankings were conducted: four by women and four by men. In total, 144 households were ranked, though 192 rankings took place (in two clusters, both women and men ranked the households).

The fourth focus group discussion sought to confirm key findings, explore any outstanding issues and provide feedback to the community on our preliminary analysis.

- Life history interviews

We conducted 106 life history interviews to acquire an in-depth understanding of respondents' lives and reasons for upward, downward or stable well-being. Based on the findings of the well-being rankings, the research team selected approximately 10 of the 24 HBS households from each cluster for life history interviews. Households were selected to reflect upward mobility, downward mobility and stability, and to ensure a good distribution of age among the life history sample. Within each household, the male and female household head were targeted for interview. At the end of each interview, respondents' life history trajectories were mapped graphically against the six well-being classifications (y-axis) to reflect changes in well-being over time (x-axis).

- Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted to examine particular research themes in more depth. Respondents were selected opportunistically, based on issues highlighted in focus group discussions and life history interviews. Those targeted for key informant interview included government officials, community leaders, crop traders, creditors, agricultural extension agents, teachers and health workers.

Source: Higgins (2011).

A qualitative analysis provides a useful counterpoint to recent more statistically based publications on food security and malnutrition. Before discussing these qualitative findings, though, we outline broad trends using quantitative research, including the Tanzanian government's report on 'Trends in Food Security in Mainland Tanzania' (NBS, 2010) and the analysis in 'Childhood Poverty in Tanzania: Deprivations and Disparities in Child Well-being' (REPOA et al., 2009). The quantitative evidence shows that average food security (measured by dietary energy consumption (DEC)) improved between 2001 and 2007, but largely on the part of urban, not rural, populations. Improved averages also mask worsening household consumption and hunger in the lowest quintile, with a quarter of the population remaining food-deprived. So there are major persistent food security and malnutrition problems in Tanzania, especially for rural households (URT, 2009).

Child malnutrition depends partly on food security but also very much on maternal education, child health and caring practices, which vary by region. Child malnutrition is more prevalent than food insecurity across the distribution in quintiles 1-4 in rural areas, where maternal education remains low across the quintiles; in urban areas, increasing incomes are correlated with increasing maternal education, and ill-health is also more widespread across the distribution.¹

¹ This is a hypothesis which needs testing out on HBS/Demographic and Household Survey (DHS) data.

1.3 Achieving two meals a day

Sometimes workers and others have to make do with only one meal a day.

Box 2. Jonas, 38²

Jonas worked in Sumbawanga until 1990, when he felt he had acquired enough skills and returned to Makazi. His father was still working in Makazi at the district office. He secured a job as a labourer for the district and helped build the health clinic. While doing this work, he met his future wife, who was working fetching water for the construction workers. He was taking only one meal per day. They were working hard and so there was less time to eat, and he was trying to save money. He remembers his wage at this time was TSh 8,000 per month.

Jonas, Kayumbe, Rukwa³

The more normal pattern is to have two meals a day, although richer people often manage three. Having two meals a day does not necessarily mean hunger, if the meals are nutritious. There is a big difference between meals that include proteins and vegetables as well as staples, and those that include only staples. In this sense, number of meals a day (the question asked in the HBS) may be less important than quality of the meal.⁴ Our interviews revealed that two meals a day is the norm, although three would be preferred. The two meals a day come in many different forms, and clearly social practices mix with availability and affordability in terms of what people eat:

'This was typical village life, that breakfast is either not important or comes after farm work'

Joyce, Wazabanga, Mwanza

'Ugali and vegetables or *dagaa* for lunch and the same for dinner during the hunger season. It is only when they have harvested that they enjoy the morning porridge'

Violet, Wazabanga, Mwanza

'They took two meals as before; the meals consisted of lunch (*ugali* with greens) and dinner (cassava with fish) ... During that time "we did not know about breakfast".'

Abdul, Nchinga, Mtwara

² Age of respondent at time of interview

³ All names of people and villages used in this paper have been changed.

⁴ Food quality is extensively reviewed on the basis of the 2007 HBS in NBS (2010),

Destitute people⁵ might have one meal a day – boiled, with no salt or oil. Even the very poor and sometimes poor households only boil their food: ‘their food doesn’t taste good’ (Women’s focus group participant, Nkangala, Mwaru).

Cooking with minimal resources to buy food and cooking utensils can be very time- and energy-consuming (all ingredients prepared from scratch, fires to build up, water collected). Add to this the heat at midday and preparing several meals a day can be drudgery. What is remarkable in many accounts is the absence of protein, especially fish, despite the proximity of lakes for all communities studied. Either people cannot afford fish or it is not available – or a combination of the two. Only sardines are mentioned. This means people have to eat more staples to make up for the lack of protein.

Hunger has a seasonal pattern, following the rhythms of harvest, seasonal availability decline and food price rises as more and more partly self-provisioning people come on to the market.

Box 3. Ludodagula, 37

Lugodagula regrets not getting the opportunity to go to school. He also remembers the way they were eating two meals rather than the normal three per day. He explained that it was very painful, especially when you are hungry and you know there is no way you can get food. He explained further that, soon after harvest, they enjoyed three meals a day, but some months later they had to reduce and usually they skipped morning porridge.

Ludodagula, Wazabanga, Mwanza

When food is short, the number of meals is reduced, and the dietary range too, until ‘you just pass a day’, said Kurthumu Mbonde, Nkangala, Mtwara of her childhood, when she was reliant on her grandmother. Farmers either do well or badly out of the highs and lows of seasonal prices. Those who can store food till prices are high do well; those who have to buy when prices are high do badly. Being able to produce food for the year and sell some, or to market cash crops, remains a very important indicator of household well-being, as recognised in the well-being rankings. Poverty is defined largely in terms of food security. It is ironic that people who are doing reasonably well – categories 4-6 – are doing so partly off the misery of the ‘food-poor’ – categories 1 and 2.

⁵ Interviewees were categorised into destitute, very poor, poor, vulnerable, resilient and rich.

Table 1. Meals/nutrition by poverty well-being level, from focus group discussions

	Nkangala – Women	Nchinga – women	Nchinga – men	Kayumbe – women	Kayumbe – men	Wazabanga – women	Wazabanga – men	Kalesa – women	Kalesa – men	Ndite - women
1 The destitute	Depend on others for basic needs.	1 meal/day – not sure of next meal. Depend on others for food. Casual labour paid in kind.	Never produce enough food – harvest in April, nothing to eat by August. No regular eating: 1 meal/day or less.	Sometimes 2/3 meals/day, sometimes none. Get food from other people – people offering free food or begging.	1 meal/day, but through begging.	Get at most 1 meal/day. Most are chronically ill.			Beg for food, normally eat 1 meal of poor quality per day, sometimes go to bed hungry.	Live by begging others, not sure of having a meal.
2 The very poor	1 meal/day – other meals not assured. Reliance on casual labour.	1 meal a day. Not enough food for the whole year.	Can get 1 meal/day – sometimes don't eat at all. Many to feed from small harvest.	Meals – 1 or 2.	1 meal/day (during hardship eat maize stem) or local brew.	1 meal/day.	Suffer during hunger and when there is less or no demand for their labour.		Don't beg for food, normally eat 1 meal/day.	Dependent on casual wage labour.
3 The poor	Have to sell assets in a crisis. Production low owing to low levels of input.	1 meal/day – not enough food to sustain them throughout year – get support from relatives to get food.	Assured of meals – 2/day (porridge; <i>ugali</i> with green vegetables or sardines). Sometimes have late breakfast which acts as lunch.	Meals – 1/2 day (<i>ugali</i> with salt or <i>mlenda</i> (mixed wild vegetable), may harvest green maize (before maturity).	1 meal/day – they are assured of this.	2 meals/day. Husbands drink. May not cultivate whole farm. Casual labour.			Normally eat 2 meals/day. Don't own cups since they never take tea at home.	Have 2 meals in a day. Limited productive assets: have to sell them in a crisis.
4 The vulnerable	Usually have 3 meals/day (morning: tea with remains of	2/3 meals/day	Eat meat 2 times a week during agricultural season,	2 meals/day (<i>ugali</i> or potatoes).	2/3 meals/day.	3 meals/day.	3 full meals a day. Either porridge or tea in morning and		Normally eat 3 meals/day – breakfast, lunch, dinner.	Have productive assets to generate food and

	Nkangala – Women	Nchinga – women	Nchinga – men	Kayumbe – women	Kayumbe – men	Wazabanga – women	Wazabanga – men	Kalesa – women	Kalesa – men	Ndite - women
	rice or cookies; lunch: <i>ugali</i> with fish/ beef; dinner: rice with fish or beef).		chickens not eaten – kept for income generation. 2/3 meals/ day. Harvested food generally lasts whole year.				have full lunch that includes <i>ugali</i> or <i>mahindi</i> . Can alternate in evening, eating rice with meat or fish.			income to last the year.
5 The resilient	3 + meals/ day	3 meals/day throughout the year – take rice twice a week.	Assured of 3 meals a day. Also eat factory-made foods such as, milk, fruits, meat.	3/4 meals/day (tea/soup in morning, lunch, supper).	Assured of eating today and tomorrow.	At least 3 meals/day.			Eat more than 3 meals/day of good quality and quantity. Drink various drinks, beer, milk, soft drinks. Sometimes don't eat even if they are given food.	Many assets, not vulnerable to shocks.
6 The rich	Eat very well	3 meals/day throughout the year – take rice twice a week.	Nothing mentioned.	Meals 'he can have as he wants. Even 5 to 10 meals per day'. Someone who has breakfast is rich or has good knowledge about diet.		Eat delicious food and drink soft drinks and alcoholic drinks at any time.			Eat more or less like the resilient.	

2 Causes of hunger

Reducing the number of meals a day and the quality of meals consumed is a widespread response to hardship. There is no one or dominant cause of episodes and experiences of hunger. Focus group participants identified four sets of factors leading to food insecurity: (i) co-variant shocks (weather, disease); (ii) effects of policies ('villageisation', food security policies, e.g. on maize and exports); (iii) structural economic imbalances (e.g. wage/price relationships); and (iv) more idiosyncratic but still widespread factors. Table 2 details the area-specific factors.

Table 2. Food insecurity histories

Region	Cluster	Event/factor(s)	Consequences/notes
Mwanza	Ndite	Villageisation (1974) Livestock disease Crop export bans	Impoverishment, hunger (1983-1984) Mass loss of livestock
	Wazabanga	Drought 1948-1950 Heavy rain 1961-1962 Villageisation (1974) Climate change since 2000	Famine Impoverishment Unpredictable farming seasons
Mtwara	Nkalangala	Recent inflation: Cashew prices and wages not keeping up Land price inflation	Impoverishment Transfer of land to rich
	Nchinga	Youth disconnected from farming	Unwilling/unable to feed themselves or contribute to household food supplies
Rukwa	Kayumbe	Maize market monopolised by government, not functioning well	No easy sale of main crop – hard to get cash when needed
	Kalesa	Low wages Caring for chronically ill Gender conflicts leading to family disruption	Prevents work Loss of general security

*Note: Clusters are anonymised.
Source: Focus group discussions*

Many smallholders despaired about perennial limitations to their agricultural productivity, which impede their escape from food insecurity: poor land quality; unaffordability of improved agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, pesticides, herbicides, improved seeds and mechanisation; endemic livestock and human diseases; and adverse agro-climatic conditions. Shocks are both idiosyncratic and co-variant. We tend to think of the latter in terms of the big droughts or floods that occasionally affect large areas, but these often occur on a small scale – floods knocking out a small irrigation scheme, for example – with sometimes similarly devastating effects.

Very few smallholders have access to insurance against such shocks, yet farming risks are many, including crop failure, hence loss of time and capital spent on agricultural production. Weather, disease, pests and other factors affect both the quantity and the quality of

commodities produced. Price or market uncertainty means that the prices producers receive for commodities may be less than the costs incurred in production.

Box 4. Women's focus group

In 2008/09, he encountered a big loss because the water of Lwamfi River swept away the canals they had made, and the farms of about 20 farmers, including him, were swept away by the floods. He ended up harvesting only 1 bag, compared with the 25 to 30 bags he had expected. The sweeping away of the rice farms owed to the farmers having diverted water using canals that were not technically appropriate and by excessive rains during that season.

Women's focus group, Nkangala, Mtwara

Box 5. Robert, 34

With capital from trade, Robert invested TSh 50,000 in agriculture with the intention of making a profit to invest in trading activities. He used all the money to grow rice on 1 acre hoping to harvest 20 bags but he harvested only 3 bags.

Robert, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Agriculture is clearly a risky business, with many and varied sources of risk. A major problem widely identified by the majority of informants was the unaffordability of important agricultural inputs, such as fertiliser – which are key to resilience and upward mobility. However, as detailed by focus group participants in Kayumbe, Rukwa, few people are using these, given their high cost. In this particular village, government-subsidised fertilisers usually come late and are not sufficient for everyone.

2.1 The importance of access to improved agricultural inputs

Box 6. Mwanaidi, Bintimusa and Haruna, 39-65

'The problem is getting capital', explained Mwanaidi (a 52-year-old woman in Nchinga, Mtwara). 'If I got it I would trade cashew nuts, increase my capital and start another business. Otherwise, I may die poor.' Her livelihood hinges on being able to afford sulphur to spray on her cashew trees so they can produce more cashew nuts. She hopes the government will make sulphur more affordable. Bintimusa (a 39-year-old single mother in Nkangala, Mtwara) similarly identified access to sulphur spray as the only way in which she could move her family out of poverty. Profits from high cashew yields might then be saved and used as a retirement fund, as planned by Haruna (a 65-year-old farmer, living in Nchinga, Mtwara, eating two meals a day).

Mwanaidi, Nchinga, Mtwara; Bintimusa, Nkangala, Mtwara; Haruna, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 7. Ibrahimu, 62

Ibrahimu (62 years old) started farming with a hand hoe, cultivating finger millet and maize. Fuelled by only two meals a day, life was hard – they could not accumulate anything. Harvests were used to buy clothes and to take care of medical costs. They had their first child in Mto Wisa, who died after a few days. The second baby also died. Although Ibrahimu's father has since given him land, on which they now farm, accumulation remains difficult without an ox plough.

Ibrahimu, Kayumbe, Rukwa

Box 8. Rashidi, 52

Rashidi (52 years old) similarly attributes his poor harvest, financial constraints and continued downward mobility to his inability to afford fertiliser. Because they do not produce enough maize to last the whole year, Rashidi and his wife have to work as labourers on other people's farms. This poverty trap threatens not only their food security but also harmonious conjugal relations. Rashidi's wife, in accordance with Makonde tradition, is pushing him to construct his own house so she can feel she is married to a real man. But Rashidi cannot, given his lack of resources.

Rashidi, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 9. Hossam, 67

Contrast these tales of apparent poverty traps with of Hossam (67, Nchinga), who invested in farming with financial support from his brother. Use of fertiliser soon enabled Hossam to increased production. He sold part of the harvest and used the profits to climb out of poverty. Hossam's family were able to afford three meals, finance the education of their children, buy additional farm land for cultivation and build two houses and a well. Hossam explained that his well-being was dependent on fertilisers to secure high yields.

Hossam, Nchinga, Mtwara

The above life histories reflect a much broader trend: only those able to invest in improved inputs have been able to participate in modest agricultural growth. Unable to accumulate assets, families are extremely vulnerable to negative shocks. Arguably, it is not the shocks themselves that cause poverty or hunger, but the absence of 'buffers' or strategies, institutions and safety nets to prevent the shock having an impoverishing effect.

2.2 Land markets

Without the resources to make their smallholdings productive, many have turned to casual wage labour, sometimes following the sale of their land after a crisis. Having sold land, it is difficult for them to re-enter the land market owing to high prices – which result from population growth, income inequality and high demand for land on the part of those with money to invest. This means that having turned to casual wage labour, most poor people cannot afford to re-enter the market and buy fertile or irrigated land. Land prices were not always so high – 10 years ago a casual labourer in Nkangala could save up – but now are beyond most people's reach.

Table 3. Cost of land (per acre) in 1999 and 2009

	Cost of fertile land 1999	Cost of fertile land 2009	Cost of rental in 2009
Cashew (with trees on it)	TSh 100,000	TSh 300,000	TSh 170,000 (more than half the price of buying land)
Maize	TSh 20,000-30,000	TSh 80,000-120,000	TSh 15-20,000 per acre (a fifth the price of buying it)

Source: Focus group discussion Nkangala, Mtwara

If buying land is expensive, renting could be an affordable alternative. However, supply again is low. People are reluctant to rent out their land owing to concerns that renters will subsequently claim the land as their own or damage the soil's fertility. Such fears reduce the supply of land available for rent. As Novath, who had cause to regret renting out his land in Kalesa village, Rukwa, explained, 'I no longer lend land to anybody. If I am unable to cultivate it in a certain year, I just leave it fallow.'

There were a few exceptions. Angelina (25, Kalesa, Rukwa) thought she might be able to rent half an acre of paddy by entering into a tenancy contract with the owner – where she would pay rent by giving half the harvest over to the landowners, since she cannot afford to prepay rent. Generally, though, little renting was going on in our small sample of households.

2.3 Casual labour

Together, these dynamics ensure that those who have sold their assets and turned to casual wage labour are often trapped there. Some casual workers have their own smallholdings but turn to wage labour when short of cash. Many smallholders do not produce enough food to feed themselves for the whole year, so this exchange of labour (between smallholders who are at other times labourers) is very common. Frequently, such employment occurs in the context of a long-established relationship which can be called on in various ways – to request seed at planting time or food in times of shortage. In Kalesa, Rukwa, households also loan seed and other inputs against payment after harvest.

Working for others can also be an important way of building social capital. Loans are often requested from employers, and having several employers to turn to for cash or food can be advantageous. It is common even for public sector workers to work on the farms of second employers. These relationships can develop into trusting and reliable links, which can be called on in times of food shortage. In Wazabanga, Mwanza, some people have formed an association by means of which they work collectively on each other's farms on a rotational basis. This facilitates the quick completion of large tasks even where tractors are lacking.

Not all employment relationships are quite so egalitarian or mutually beneficial. With supply of casual workers outstripping demand, they are often adversely incorporated into the rural economy. Without an alternative economic option, labourers have little bargaining power with landlords, such as if the latter refuse to pay them. Vulnerability may also result from the lack of legally recognised contracts. (In this regard, it may be beneficial to educate labourers about their rights and how to enter legally credible arrangements.)

Working hours are long (12-hour days) and pay is low and often on credit – when it suits the farmer rather than when the work is done. Wages vary from TSh 1,000 to TSh 3,000 per day depending on both performance and the nature of the work: ploughing, weeding, planting, harvesting, transporting produce to the owner's house, etc. Fetching or selling firewood,

water and charcoal is also common. Notwithstanding the onerous nature of the work, the high supply of labourers, together with relatively minimal demand (particularly during the dry season), pushes down remuneration. Sometimes workers are paid not in money but in food.

Our life histories show that, having turned to casual labour, many people remain trapped in food insecurity, as low wages are insufficient for daily food let alone for asset accumulation.

Box 10. Hawa, 47

If Hawa (47 years old) does not fall sick, she can earn up to TSh 60,000 per season – but she generally averages less than this. Feeding her children remains a challenge. Hawa sobbed throughout the interview. If she could have more energy or modern agricultural implements, she plans to work on her own small paddy farm in the wetlands.

Hawa, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 11. Asna, 32

Asna, who relies on heavily casual labouring to supplement her farm income, complains that her income is no longer sufficient to purchase beef, sugar, cooking oil, chicken, eggs and milk. When she first married 14 years ago she could afford all of these items to accompany maize/cassava *ugali* and now can afford only vegetables, occasionally with some nuts from her farm.

Asna, Nkangala, Mtwara

Box 12. Sabrina, 33

Sabrina's husband Hassan gets some money by working as a labourer on other people's farms. However, this is only a seasonal job as during the dry season there is less agricultural work. Hassan is also working on a construction site but again this is also not a regular job. He is also supporting his family by making and selling charcoal.

Sabrina, Nkangala, Mtwara

Box 13. Dafrosa, 53

Dafrosa (53 years old) provides for the family all by herself by working on other people's farms (agricultural labouring): 'The only way we can afford fish, meat and vegetables to accompany the cassava/maize from our farms is to work as labourers.'

Dafrosa, Kalesa, Rukwa

Box 14. Juma, 36

Juma (36 years old) works on farms on credit and gets paid after the harvest. If yields are poor he is not paid all he is owed – a common complaint in Nchinga. Only able to afford two meals a day for himself, he currently considers himself too poor to marry.

Juma, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 15. Zulfa and Hawa, 34 & 47

With the fortune of good health, two people working hard can sometimes manage to save and make small investments. Zulfa and her husband accumulated sufficient money to buy a 0.5 acre plot and build a home. Hawa similarly purchased a 0.75 acre plot through casual wage labour, but remains unable to feed her children and has not yet accumulated the assets to act as buffers against potential future crises.

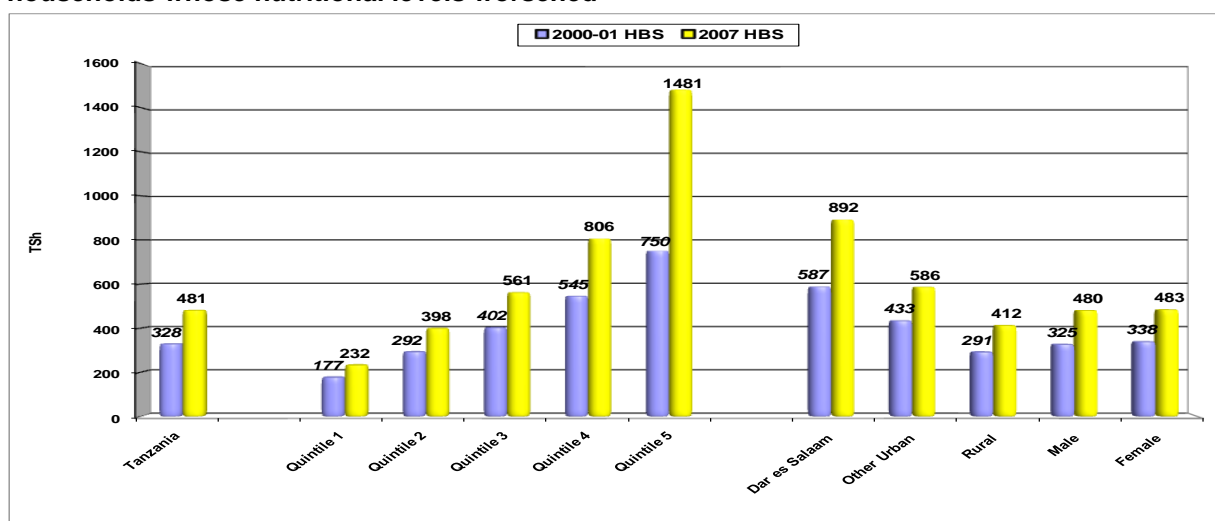
Zulfa, Nchinga, Mtwara; Hawa, Nchinga, Mtwara

Given that many farms do not produce enough food or income to live on, the functioning of the rural wage labour market is very important for minimum food security. However, as these narratives show, low-paid, insecure casual labour is scarcely sufficient for any more than two meals a day.

2.4 Food price inflation

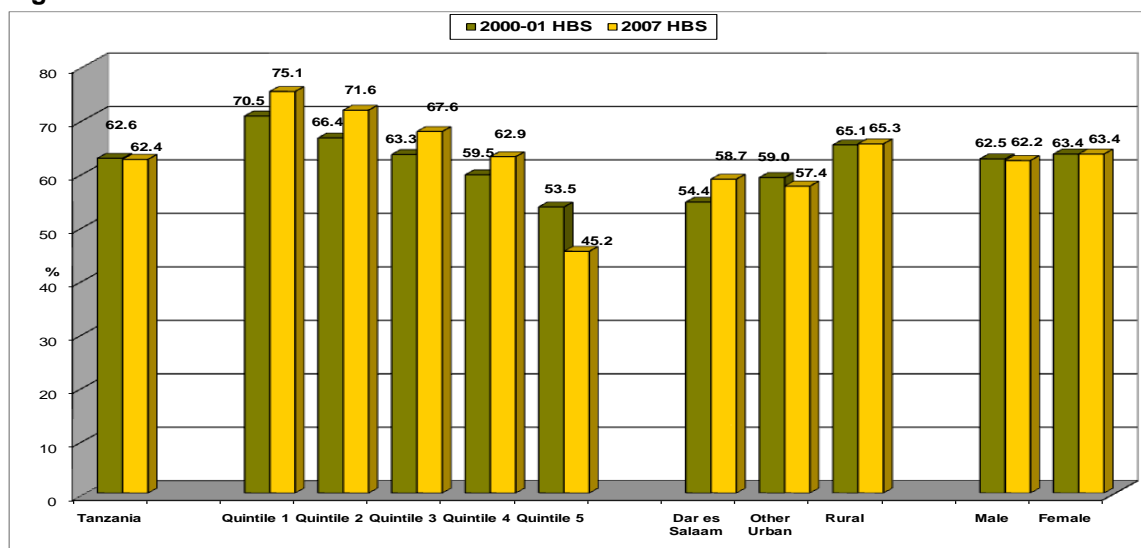
Food insecurity owes partly to food price inflation, which has eaten into household budgets. Figures 2 and 3 indicate the extent of this even before the food price shocks. For the poorest, this has meant lower nutritional levels. In a recent poll, 52 percent of respondents identified high food and other commodity prices as a major economic problem (Synovate, 2009).

Figure 2: Expenditure on food increased 2000/01-2006/07 (constant 2007 prices) even in poor households whose nutritional levels worsened



Source: NBS (2010)

Figure 3: Shares of budgets on food (2007 constant prices) increased for all groups, except high-income households and in urban areas



Source: NBS (2010)

2.5 Life cycle risks

The reasons for hunger are not being able to access (produce, buy) food of the right amount and quality; such food not being available from own production or to buy or both; and the social norms dictating how food is distributed within a household. People who may not be poor or hungry at other times are especially prone to hunger at two stages of the life cycle: childhood and old age.

Children rely on parents to feed them, so child nutrition is dependent on getting a good level of care from parents or other relatives. While most families prioritise the needs of children and older people when there is not enough to eat, sometimes children can lose out as a result of a poor level of care. Children are particularly vulnerable to hunger on the loss of a parent or caregiver.

Box 16. Prisca, 17

When Prisca lost her mother at the age of five, the family lost its main provider. She explained, 'Look, all of us really benefited and always received what we asked for in her lifetime. She always found a solution, even if it was a difficult decision she had to make. We missed her and the family, as I told you, has disintegrated and father is married to another wife and walked out of the village.'

When the mother fell sick, they sometimes went the whole day without food. When their mother died, they went to stay with their uncles, who had their own families to support. Prisca and her siblings were not prioritised, although they did at least receive food until they were old enough to go to the farm and start working.

Prisca, Wazabanga, Mwanza

In some cases, food insecurity is caused by old age and exacerbated by lack of support from spouses, children or other relatives.

Box 17. Nelson, 71

Nelson (71 years old, living alone), is very food-insecure. He attributes his poor status to his old age, which has constrained his ability to produce food, and lack of a wife to help him produce food. His wife passed away in 2008 and his efforts to remarry did not succeed: women declined his proposals since he was not farming. He and his former wife used to produce cassava on a half-acre farm for themselves. Since they were not producing maize or rice, their food status was not very good, but the situation worsened after the death of his wife. Hence, he became almost entirely dependent for food on his daughter, Catherine, who is married and lives nearby.

Nelson Nelson, Kalesa, Rukwa

Having many dependents also threatens well-being.

Box 18. Jamal, 37

Jamal supports three of his sister's children, who are in primary education and live with him. This, he says, has been too much to cope with, and he has no option but to 'let things go the way they want'. With two children it was not that difficult, as he would struggle to do the *vibarua* just before the schools closed and make sure that before they went back he had enough for their school requirements. The demand intensified when he had three and then four children in school, and became unbearable when his sister came bringing children who also needed education.

Jamal, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Box 19. Violet, 34

Violet identified having too many children as a factor dragging people into poverty. She explained that giving birth to many children was demanding in terms of both time and resources. It means you never have time to concentrate on activities or help your partner. Furthermore, because children eat up your few resources, you never make a step forward. They need health services, school fees, uniforms, clothes, food, etc. Violet gave an example of their family: life was never the same after her husband's sister came to live with them. She said that meeting the children's requirements had become a nightmare. Violet's husband also finds the demands unbearable. Violet regrettably foresees that the children will stop school and end up like themselves.

Violet, Wazabanga, Mwanza

2.6 Disinvestment and disinheritance on divorce and bereavement

There are also gender-specific risks. Women interviewees commonly identified divorce as the cause of their impoverishment (Higgins, 2011). Bereavement is likewise disadvantageous. In both cases, women and their dependants are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity in the event of the dispossession of assets: land, livestock, house, furniture, utensils and clothing (da Corta and Magongo, 2011).

Box 20. Kened, 29

Kened and his siblings suffered from the loss of their father but also of some of their assets, particularly the 2 acres of farm they relied on. He lamented that, 'my uncles took away the farm that we used to grow rice on and this meant we had to look for another *shamba* and we are now hiring it. They simply sold the farm and shared the money among themselves.'

Kened, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Box 21. James, 19

James's (19 years old) father deserted his mother in 1993. They have lost income and fish from his father's fishing activities since he stopped supporting them materially and financially. Food has become scarce: they are eating one to two times a day, when before it was two to three times.

James, Kalesa, Rukwa

Box 22. Alice, 53

When Alice (53 years old) instigated divorce in fury at her husband's infidelity, she lost all the assets they had accumulated together: the house, savings, land and fishing businesses. She said, 'the divorce made me poor because I lost everything I worked for over 10 years. Since then, I have not been able to reach the level that I was at.'

Alice, Ndite, Mwanza

Box 23. Melina, 35

Melina's (35 years old) husband did not permit her to take anything when she left after he threatened violence. With the money she had on her person she rented a single room. Her living standard declined to Level 2. She slept on the floor, ate very little food and received minimal support from her neighbours.

Melina, Ndite, Mwanza

3 The consequences of hunger and malnutrition

Those suffering from food insecurity and consequent malnutrition are at acute risk of detrimental short- and long-term consequences: missing out on school or becoming less productive, unwell and also depressed.

3.1 Child labour

3.1.1 *Missing out on school to scavenge for food*

Malnutrition in children impedes their physical and cognitive development (Bird, 2007). Hunger pushes some children to miss and scavenge instead or to start employment to support their families (Hassan, Nkangala, Mtwara). These responses to food insecurity undermine their prospects of escape.

Box 24. Sabrina, 33

Sabrina thinks life isn't easy with her family. The family is starving and the children are failing to attend school. It has become very normal to have porridge at 12pm and something very light for dinner. During the interview the children were crying that they were hungry, and Sabrina was trying to appease them that they would have lunch soon. When the lunch was brought it was maize porridge without sugar. Each child got a tiny portion, just enough to put something in the stomach. As Sabrina went inside during the interview, I asked one child if he was going to school, and his response was very clear: 'I left school as I always went with an empty stomach in the morning and when I came home for lunch there would be nothing, and sometimes we would have no dinner and would just sleep. After a year of being hungry, I decided to roam and scavenge, and some days I get TSh 100, which is enough to buy a buy a biscuit or a bite to ease the pain of hunger.' When Sabrina's husband came back during the interview, she quickly asked if he had managed to bring any money; he said no, then she just put down her head.

Sabrina, Nkangala, Mtwara

Box 25. Samweli, 35

Samweli (now 35 years old) stopped school to become a herder – a job that assured him of daily food but nevertheless made him feel exploited, like a slave. As a child, he was paid monthly only TSh 2,000-3000 (the equivalent of two days' casual labouring). Furthermore, when he became ill through untreated tetanus, his employers refused to help. His father was forced to sell half of his 2-acre farm in order to pay for a series of operations necessary to save his leg – which jeopardised household mobility out of poverty.

Samweli, Kalesa, Rukwa

Box 26. Hamida, Alice, Sirila and Rafaeli, 16-53

Some who miss out on school, such as 27-year-old Hamida, reported the haunting pain and frustration of seeing their friends go to school on a daily basis while they laboured on the farm, suffering from hunger. The family remains trapped in poverty; still often eating just one meal a day. Hamida seems to have lost hope in life and simply prays to God that some miracle will happen. Alice (53 years old) likewise explained that, because her parents could not produce enough for them to eat, she spent more time farming than studying. Without an education, all she could rely on later in life were her physical assets, but she lost these on divorce and her daughter's ill-health.

Others do go to school but are unable to concentrate on an empty stomach. For this reason, Sirila failed her primary school exams and was unable to continue with secondary education. She now does casual labour. Rafaeli (16 years old) similarly cannot afford to progress to secondary school and has already taken a long time to finish primary school – he had to repeat grades which he had studied for while also doing casual labour.

Hamida, Nkangala, Mtwara; Alice, Ndite, Mwanza; Sirila, Wazabanga, Mwanza; Rafaeli, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Box 27. Violet and Selemani, 34 & 50

By contrast, many of their educated peers now have government jobs that finance income diversification, investment and asset accumulation. As Violet (aged 34) observed, 'I know there are a lot of opportunities for those who have gone to school. I have seen those who continued with secondary education have made it while those of us who did not proceed are roaming around in the villages.' She may be talking about people like Selemani, a 50-year-old agricultural extension officer, and his wife, an assistant nurse. Their salaried government jobs facilitate their upward mobility through income diversification and investments, including in their own children's education, which ensures the intergenerational transmission of resilience.

Violet, Wazabanga, Mwanza; Selemani, Nkangala, Mtwara

3.2 Lack of strength

3.2.1 Low productivity of labour

Those unable to afford food often lack the strength to work themselves out of poverty. Malnutrition impedes labour productivity and thereby reinforces food insecurity – since payment for casual waged labour is often at a piece rate. In Koletha and Kalesa villages, for example, slower workers earn TSh 1,000 per day, whereas their faster, more energised counterparts earn double this. The importance of malnutrition to productivity is also recognised in the Tanzanian Agricultural Sectoral Development Programme.

Box 28. Paula, 65

Emaciated Paula (65 years old) grows maize and cassava on her 1 acre of farmland, in addition to brewing beer and carrying out casual labour, in an effort to have more than one meal a day. But sometimes she is unable to work because of ill health. She despaired, 'I will be declining in terms of well-being until I die since I am becoming weaker and weaker physically hence am unable to produce, and I do not have well-off children who could support me materially.'

Paula, Kalesa, Rukwa

Box 29. Kurthumu, 54

Kurthumu (54 years old) is in a similar situation. When asked when the family had last had a meal, she replied, 'yesterday at around 5pm'. She was clearly exhausted and was suffering from persistent stomach pain. She explained that, 'for the past three months I have not been able to work [yet] if I had money I could use it to maintain the farm and my family. I would then be able to pay for the school fees of my children and cultivate enough land in the hope of better harvest.' Kurthumu dreams of getting capital from the government so she can trade rice. Such work would enable her to support her family without being so physically demanding and injurious to her health.

Kurthumu, Nkangala, Mtwara

Box 30. Hawa, 47

Hawa has a small paddy farm in the wetlands but cannot farm it because of her health. This kind of farm needs a lot of energy. She inherited it from her parents and asked her siblings to give her some more cashew trees instead of the farm in the wetlands but they refused. They told her to sell the land if she could not till it. Nevertheless, she does not intend to sell it because she already has two grandchildren who will inherit it in the future. Currently, one of her aunts is tilling the farm.

Hawa, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 31. Kintu, 69

Kintu (69 years old) and her husband cultivate only 2 acres of their 5-acre farm owing to limited strength and energy.

Kintu, Nchinga, Mtwara

3.3 Ill-health

Exhausting toil drains hungry bodies, making them vulnerable to ill-health. For example, Violet (Wazabanga, Mwanza) sometimes fetches water for those who make and sell local brews. For this she is paid she about Tsh 200 per 20 litres. Violet said that she could carry only 100 litres a day and sometimes the next day she felt fatigued.

Many families referred to child deaths – in which malnutrition may be a contributory factor. Ill-health death is not only immensely distressing but also extremely costly. Assets are sold to pay for health expenses and income-generating work is disrupted to make time to care for sick family members. Death of a breadwinner further compounds household food insecurity, both through the loss of future earnings and if the household has its assets taken away.

3.4 Despair

Feeling unable to work one's way out of food insecurity sometimes leads to feelings of hopelessness and depression. Lugodagula (a 35-year-old cotton farmer and casual labourer in Wazabanga, Mwanza) despaired, 'I have given up ... as I don't see a bright future anymore'. He feels there is little return for his efforts. Similarly, Rahman (68 years old in Nkangala, Mtwara) said bitterly that, although he had had great hopes of cashew production as a way out of poverty, he had been let down: 'it does not pay'. Rahman thinks it is waste of time and resources to continue investing in his cashew farm. Unable to see alternative pathways to well-being, many find respite in alcohol abuse, such as Samweli (35, Kalesa, Rukwa), who, we may recall, was pulled out of school to cut charcoal to provide food for his family. As an unfocused youth he drank away meagre earnings. However, when he inherited livestock and land he started to think increasingly like a commercial farmer: renting paddy land and seeking to store crops so as to avoid forced sales at harvest and rather sell at a higher price. Nevertheless, without fortunate social connections or equivalent support from the government, the poorest may be tempted to give up hope. This may adversely affect

agricultural production. In the focus group discussion in Kalesa (Rukwa), despair was identified as a hindrance to agricultural production, as weary people are said to be less inclined to work hard for little reward.

4 The social consequences of hunger and despair

Despair, financial frustration, drink and conjugal conflicts over scarce resources often culminate in divorce. Migration may result in marital breakup, as men move away in the hope of betterment elsewhere. Not all families receive remittances: many are abandoned (TGNP, nd) and women are left alone with their children. These dynamics, together with widowhood on HIV/AIDS-related deaths, have created an increase in the number of female-headed households. However, although Tanzanian women have become increasingly responsible for the management of household poverty (Da Corta and Magongo, 2011), traditional norms severely constrain their capabilities in this, especially as they are stripped of their productive assets on divorce and widowhood. Meanwhile, widespread insecurity has strained informal social protection. Many women are thus left with sole responsibility but little else.

Box 32. Edith, 40

Edith (40 years old) tries to support her children by waitressing in town, casual farm labour and tending her parents' farm. She separated from her husband as she worried about the health risks of his affairs. Edith described marriage as 'mental possession and disruption of plans ... I have been frustrated by men and it has caused my life to become miserable. They are not committed to the family well-being.' She nevertheless encounters difficulties struggling alone: 'it's difficult to acquire any assets with my current salary. Sometimes I have to ask for an advance.'

Edith, Ndite, Mwanza

So far, we have illustrated how individuals suffer from their own food insecurity (i.e. missing out on school, becoming unwell, depressed and frustrated), but there are also broader effects. Some people's desperation as a result of hunger and other hardships in their lives (such as theft) can jeopardise other (less vulnerable) people's chances of moving out of poverty, through theft and witchcraft, the latter perhaps prompted by jealousy and anger at not being able to progress. Anna (47 years old, living in Kayumbe, Rukwa) explained that witchcraft always followed someone getting a good job or harvest. She further maintained that some people residing in the town never visited their relatives in the village because they feared being bewitched. Witchcraft often results in ill-health, with assets then sold to cover costs and households then descending into poverty.

Witchcraft beliefs also contribute to food insecurity as people do not produce enough crops for fear that their neighbours will move the crops to their own farms.

"Things of this place are very difficult to comprehend. Sometimes when you grow rice and you see that at least you will harvest 20 bags of rice, you end up harvesting 5 bags only. This is caused by the very common tendency in the area where people apply witchcraft to make crops thrive well in their own farms at the expense of your own crops in the farm. I believe that at least 70% of the farms are not spared with this practice. This has made some people to despair and stop working hard in the farms for fear of producing too little because of witchcraft"

Albert, Kalesa, Rukwa

Theft is as an equally large problem. Abdulrahman (44 years old, Nchinga, Mtwara) explained that thieves invaded farms at night and collected all the fallen cashew nuts. This community-wide issue pushes households downward because people have to guard the farms instead of participating in productive activities. Even if one stays awake all night, it is impossible to keep an eye on the whole farm. Further, households are deprived of the long-awaited cashew nut harvest. Joanita (60 years old, Kayumbe, Rukwa) recalled that thieves came at night and stole all her 150 goats and 70 cows. This incident meant her family suddenly went from very rich to extremely poor, and she and her siblings had to work as labourers. Fellow villagers might be less inclined to steal if they were more confident in their own means of making a living. Increasing income equality through social protection might then reduce everyone's vulnerability, including that of otherwise rich families like Joanita's.

5 Buffers and strategies against hunger

Buffers – resources, processes, relationships which enable resilience in the face of threats to food security – respondents identified include famine crops, diversification, savings, wage labour and urban migration. People respond to crisis and hunger, or the threat of hunger, in a number of ways. Common strategies include eating less, working more and taking children out of school, but no common patterns or sequences emerged from the interviews.

One classic buffer is a famine crop, planted because its success is nearly guaranteed. Cassava is a prime example, and very widely grown, contributing 17 percent of Tanzania's consumed calories. It is likely that the research and extension going into cassava is minimal compared with maize (26 percent of calories). Institutions concerned about protecting people against hunger should do much more work on cassava.

Diversification is also important. There are cases where agriculture supplies the capital for meaningful diversification into the non-farm economy and vice versa.

Box 33. Hossam, 67

Hossam cultivates cash crops: paddy, *simsim* and cashew, as well as maize and cassava. He raised funds for this venture by working in his brother's hotel and then slowly building up his capital through other agri-business ventures: selling sardines and butchering *halal* meat.

Hossam, Nchinga, Mtwara

Box 34. Peter, 75

Soon after Peter married, his father gave him and his wife a 1-acre farm on which they used to grow maize, cassava and cotton. Thinking he would be unable to rely on farming alone, Peter sought a tailoring job, which enabled him to make TSh 60 per month. Peter divulged that the only opportunity he enjoyed in his young adulthood was the tailoring job. With this money he was able to take care of his family, ensuring there was enough for decent food and clothing as well as his children's education. With money from tailoring he also opened a shop, where he sold clothes and other consumables, and sold dry fish in the market.

Peter reflected, 'I enjoyed life, I used to see everything as possible, I used to get a lot of money from tailoring, I also used to get money by selling fresh fish from the lake. My life was full of hope.'

Peter, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Box 35. James, 19

James (19 years old) has three main livelihoods: crop production, casual labour and selling consumer goods in his own kiosk. Having sold 19 bags of rice harvested from his 1-acre piece of land, James established a kiosk trading rice, maize flour, biscuits, sweets, kerosene, soap, cooking oil and body lotion.

James, Kalesa, Rukwa

Erick (a key informant in Wazabanga, Mwanza) explained that women's diversification into non-farm work has enabled significant improvements in household well-being. While men are

not interested in these small businesses with minimal daily profit, Erick detailed that women's trading had ensured their families ate three meals a day, including tea in the morning, unlike most others. Further, these women, despite being labelled negatively by society, are able to support their children's education, including providing books and uniforms. However, profits from small-scale trading are dependent on incomes from agriculture. Given limited village incomes and demand, the market for trading is saturated.

Box 36. Aziza, 50

Aziza's snack business has risen and fallen with farmers' fluctuating incomes. In 2005, the cashew nut crisis not only arrested demand but also increased supply – as more women came to sell donuts in an effort to compensate for falling incomes from cashews. Aziza decided to renew her efforts in farming cassava instead, selling any surplus to Kenyan traders.

Aziza, Nkangala, Mtwala

5.1 Microfinance

If investment is accepted as critical to household mobility out of poverty, it may then be argued that, rather than receiving subsidies or cash transfers, poor people should have access to microfinance as a means of accumulating assets. In Kalesa, for example, some women agricultural labourers make small monthly deposits to burial societies, which they later withdraw in order to finance the costs arising from ill-health and funerals.

However, our research suggests two limitations to microfinance. First, while the loans that rural women currently access may prevent downward mobility by acting as buffers, they are not sufficiently large to finance the investments that would enable them to exit poverty.

Second, while lenders – savings and credit cooperative societies (SACCOs) – are willing to provide bigger loans in the case of group borrowing, with such capital often used for paddy farming or off-farm diversification, such loans may not be desirable. Borrowing funds for agricultural production or for trading agricultural products is risky, since the borrower may suffer a loss and have property confiscated. In this case, the borrower may become poorer. The reasons for such a loss may be the high interest rate on the loan or calamities experienced in the course of the agricultural cycle or while trading agricultural products. For these reasons, many of our informants saw credit as an altogether too risky a strategy.

Box 37. Magreth, 45

Although Magreth (45 years old) wishes she had the capital to start a shop, and her husband would like a tractor, they have never sought microcredit because they are afraid that they would not be able to repay the loan and therefore would be unable to send their children to school. The interest rate is very high and they cannot afford to lose their livestock. Many people in the village have had to sell their house, farm or cattle when they could not repay their loans. This makes them fearful. They have decided to remain patient and work with what they have.

Magreth, Kayumbe, Rukwa

Box 38. Alice, 53

Others, like Alice (53 years old), do not have any assets to risk: 'I cannot take loans from financial institutions because I do not have assets for them to take when I will not be able to repay.'

Alice, Ndite, Mwanza

5.2 Sale of assets

Assets, particularly livestock, act as savings. People try to keep them even through hard times. They can be hard to hang on to though, especially if income is not coming in to replenish them. Chickens are a source of income and are rarely eaten. People without even a chicken are seen as quite desperate.

Box 39. Mohammed, key informant

Mohamed has had a good life and has been able to accumulate assets. However, now in old age and without many sons to protect him, he has had to resort to selling goats. He had 20; now there are four. Cassava has acted as a fallback crop since his rice field was destroyed in 1993, so he is not worried about destitution.

Mohamed, Nkangala, Mtwara

5.3 Labouring

Borrowing money in exchange for labour, or simply going out to find work, is a common strategy. The existence of a wage labour market is a buffer in itself.

Box 40. Jamal, 37

Jamal explained that his family was in good health, although 'minor diseases such as coughing and malaria are inevitable, particularly for the young ones'. When a family member is sick, they have to pull the resources together, with him, his wife and his sister all trying to sort out the best thing to do. In many cases, they ask a rich person for money that they will later repay in cash or by offering their labour (if it is during agricultural season).

'In 2008, my wife was sick. She had severe malaria and the medication cost us Tsh. 40,000 – money we never had. After a quick discussion among ourselves we decided to ask Mr. Traifon and he offered us the money, which we used to take her to Magu for a thorough check-up as well as treatment. Soon after she came back I asked Mr. Traifon if I could offer my labour rather than money, since I also had children who had to go back to school. He agreed and I worked, weeding his cotton farm. It took me 15 days to complete the 2 acres we agreed on and I was glad the debt was settled in this way. [However], the sickness and the fact that I had to offer my labour to Mr. Traifon brought a new challenge, as the children failed to go back to school and as we speak they are here with us.' Jamal lamented that the fate of his children and those of his sister was unknown.

Jamal, Wazabanga, Mwanza

Box 41. Peter, 75

Peter relayed that, 'at times you could see that the family had nothing to eat, my wife had nothing to put on the fire for the family. This forced me to opt for quick money, that is, doing casual labour on other people's farms, where I was paid Tsh.1,500 depending on the nature of the work.'

Peter, Wazabanga, Mwanza

5.4 Urban networks and migration

Having relatives in town is useful for poorer families: children are sent to richer relatives in urban areas to work as housegirls/boys. But this can be risky – urban livelihoods can wax and wane, and when children are born in town it can become significantly more difficult to make ends meet. With food price inflation in recent years, meeting basic needs has become more difficult in town. Some continually struggle to find a way forward, and may resort to labour migration, with varied outcomes. Hamida's story illustrates some of the pitfalls.

Box 42. Hamida, 27

Hamida is a 27-year-old single woman with two children by different fathers. She currently collects and sells firewood and engages in casual labour during the growing season, seeing this as the only way for her to advance her well-being. She first migrated when she left school to live with an uncle in Mozambique, but he then died. She later became a housemaid, first in Morogoro, then in Dar es Salaam, where she became pregnant and returned to the village, leaving the child's father in town. She migrated to Arusha as a housemaid, became pregnant again and came home. At home, she lives very modestly with her widowed mother and other family members, including her own children. Hamida aspires to work as a housemaid again – it gives three meals a day and a small salary from which some saving is possible. If she was able to save enough she would invest in a business.

Hamida, Nkangala, Mtwara

6 Policy implications

The policy implications of this analysis require further investigation and analysis. However, one thing is clear: many poor people rely on wage labour, whether local and mostly casual and insecure or migrant and sometimes more secure, to achieve food security. Food-secure rural households are no longer the rule.

Controlling food price inflation is therefore a top priority, since most poor and food-insecure people in Tanzania rely on purchased food. But the controversial question is how? Food stocks and market interventions are part of the story, as is enabling the modernisation of smallholder farming. The latter implies measures to enable land markets, including rental markets, as well as a focus on mechanisation and agricultural input markets.

Government is seen as having important roles to play in agriculture: structuring markets (e.g. cashew, maize) and protecting livestock against disease, but not always with good consequences. It would appear that aspects of food security policies themselves (control of the maize market, export bans) may have negative consequences for some. This needs a much more thorough investigation than is possible based on the limited data we have. Certainly, sorting out crop payment systems so farmers know what they are going to get, and then get it, would be advantageous.

The number of meals a day may not be as important in determining food insecurity as the quality of those meals, when distinguishing between two and three meals a day. Nevertheless, consuming only one meal a day is a clear indication of distress in almost all cases. Knowledge of food was identified by one focus group (Kayumbe women) as significant to intake. Awareness of good child feeding practices is known to have a positive impact – community feeding posts were a successful programme in the 1980s which lost momentum in the 1990s (Leach and Kilama, 2009). Finding new ways, perhaps using modern media, of spreading knowledge about nutrition would contribute significantly to better nutrition outcomes, especially for children and infants.

Buffers against hunger can reduce rapidly for the old or infirm and for separated, divorced or widowed women, especially those without sons. Protection of these categories of people from asset loss and from having to work at the lowest wages in insecure, physically demanding jobs would make a significant contribution to food security. Poor households with large numbers of dependants are also very vulnerable and would benefit from protection.

Reducing food insecurity would give people more time and energy to try new ideas (e.g. crops), save and invest in enterprises, houses and water supplies. There is great willingness to do so, but the time, energy and above all cash to hire labour or buy inputs are all scarce.

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