

The Critical Relevance of Credit and Debt Data in Household Food Security Analysis: The Risks of Ineffective Response Actions

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Abstract : Problem Statement: Currently, when analyzing household food security, the most commonly studied food access indicators are household income and expenditure. Larger studies do take into account other indices such as credit and employment. But these are baseline studies and by definition are conducted infrequently. Food security analysis for access is usually dedicated to analyzing income and expenditure indicators. And both these indicators are notoriously inconsistent. Yet this data can very often end up being the basis on which household food access is calculated; and by extension, be used for decision making. Objectives: This paper argues that along with income and expenditure, credit and debit information should be collected so that an accurate analysis of household food security (and in particular) food access can be determined. The lack of collection and analysis of this information routinely means that there is often a "masking" of the actual situation; a household's food access and food availability patterns may be adequate mainly as a result of borrowing and may even be due to a long-term dependency (a debt cycle). In other words, such a household is, in reality, worse off than it appears a factor masked by its performance on basic access indicators. Procedures/methodologies/approaches: Existing food security data sets collected in 2005 in Azerbaijan, 2010 across Myanmar and 2014-15 across Uganda were used to support the theory that analyzing income and expenditure of a HHs and analyzing the same in addition to data on credit & borrowing patterns will result in an entirely different scenario of food access of the household. Furthermore, the data analyzed depicts food consumption patterns across groups of households and then relates this to the extent of dependency on credit, i.e. households borrowing money in order to meet food needs. Finally, response options that were based on analyzing only income and expenditure; and response options based on income, expenditure, credit, and borrowing - from the same geographical area of operation are studied and discussed. Results: The purpose of this work was to see if existing methods of household food security analysis could be improved. It is hoped that food security analysts will collect household level information on credit and debit and analyze them against income, expenditure and consumption patterns. This will help determine if a household's food access and availability are dependent on unsustainable strategies such as borrowing money for food or undertaking sustained debts. Conclusions: The results clearly show the amount of relevant information that is missing in Food Access analysis if debit and borrowing of the household is not analyzed along with the typical Food Access indicators that are usually analyzed. And the serious repercussions this has on Programmatic response and interventions.

Keywords : analysis, food security indicators, response, resilience analysis

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