



What is the role of social relations and networks in household food security and nutrition?

Collection of contributions received

Discussion No. 93 from 9 to 30 October 2013

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Introduction to the topic

My ability to access and consume nutritious food is to some extent an outcome of my membership and relationships with other members of society: as a daughter, a sister, a mother, a daughter-in-law, aunt, cousin, grandchild, development sociologist, employee, land owner, student, and citizen. I am able to access nutritious foods from any of my relations, networks and market through gifting, exchange, loaning or purchase. My case is similar and dissimilar to that of many others. What has changed so that individuals and households are no longer able to rely on their membership in society for assistance in times of need? To identify and discuss success stories, challenges and way forward to achieving food and nutritional security, this discussion focuses on social relations and networks for food security and nutrition.

My name is Eileen Omosa, a graduate student at the University of Alberta, currently writing a dissertation on 'influential factors in household decision-making on choice of land tenure, Kenya'. I also work as a Research Analyst on a study project on food choices in the perinatal period. Before going back for further studies, I spent over ten years working and learning with rural communities in Kenya and in the Eastern and Southern Africa region on the thematic areas of land tenure, forestry and food security, gender relations, cross border collaborative networks, and the management of natural resources-based conflicts. One of the important lessons I have learned from my working with rural land users is that an individual's level of attachment to their community to an extent determines their level of social-economic wellbeing, and that individuals and households with less attachment to community tend to rely more on intensified agricultural production, or resort to the market to fulfil their food security and nutritional requirements. Does it have to be one or the other way, i.e. strong social relations or the market?

As a young girl growing up in rural Kenya, my family had access to land on which we cultivated a variety of food crops including maize and bananas, vegetables and fruits, and reared cows and goats. However, our family still lacked foods such as fish, millet, potatoes, cassava, and ground nuts, which we sourced from relatives (gifted, loaned, exchanged) or from neighbouring tribes through barter trade or purchase (<http://www.eileenomosa.com/myths-on-my-food1/2013/7/28/toothless-yet-the-community-feeds-them-on-fish-beans-nuts>). Our other sources of food transcended blood relations and friendships to include groups traditionally considered to be 'enemy' tribes. Relations with such groups were made possible through marriage and peace pacts for the sake of accessing required foods that were limited to such communities. The most practical relational and friendship-based practice I witnessed is that of loaning and gifting livestock to households who cannot afford to purchase a cow or milk yet they have infants and young children who require milk for good nutrition. In such a case, households endowed with more livestock (my parents give out cows to needy families to date) give a milk cow to a family in need (*gosagara*, no equivalent English term) on condition that the receiving family takes good care of the cow (feeds, medical, physical living conditions) and in return benefit by consuming milk from the cow. The agreement is that the cow and any resulting offspring remain the property of the cow giver, to be returned after an agreed upon period of time or on demand. To continue keeping the cow, the receiving family works on maintaining good relations with the giving family. Similarly, the giving family treats the receiving family with respect because as relatives, friends or neighbours, the receiving family too could have a rare product such as vegetables or a skill to give, and such good deeds are believed to bring blessings in the form of good health or wealth to the giving family.

Subsequently, our further discussions will relate to the influential role of social relations and networks (formal and informal) in the achievement of food security and nutrition at the household level. Further input to the discussions to be guided by the following issues:

1. What is your understanding of social relations and networks in food and nutritional security, and do you have examples of the role they play in the attainment of food and nutritional security?

2. What are some of the challenges facing social relations and networks in food and nutritional security?
3. Success stories of examples of social relations and networks that have adapted to our changing environments.
4. What roles can civil society, private sector and governments play to strengthen the application of social relations and networks for food security and nutrition?

Eileen Omosa

Contributions received

1. George Kent, University of Hawai'i, USA

Greetings –

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Eileen Omosa for opening this discussion of the role of social relations in establishing food security. I think the quality of the community in which individuals and families are embedded can have a big impact on food security, especially for people with low incomes.

Historically, there was a long period when cash income was of little importance. People lived close to the earth, and close to their communities. As Karl Polanyi pointed out, in what we sometimes describe as “primitive” communities, no one went hungry unless everyone was going hungry. That pattern continues today, in what some describe as “pre-modern” communities.

In recent work on this issue (current draft available at <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/EndingHungerLocally.docx>) I highlight the importance of caring and social support systems not only in reducing hunger where it exists, but also in preventing it from ever happening. My observations are summarized in three major points:

- Hunger is less likely to occur where people care about one another's well being.
- Caring behavior is strengthened when people work and play together in pursuing values they share.
- Therefore, hunger in any community is likely to be reduced by encouraging its people to work and play together, especially in food-related activities.

There is little likelihood that the hunger problem can be solved through market activities based on narrow self-interest. Caring is essential. It must be recognized and nurtured.

Aloha, George Kent

2. Pamela Pozarny, FAO, Italy

This is an important topic and regrettably undervalued to date, in understanding actual socioeconomic dynamics at community level and how these can promote and foster improved household resilience, food security and nutrition, and overall livelihoods. Social scientists among the range of experts working in rural development-food security sectors have typically appreciated the power and vitality of social relations in rural communities (I am particularly thinking about Africa based on my own experiences), including how they are often (overlooked) determining factors in reaching (and also inhibiting) targeted, envisaged outcomes and impacts of supporting policies/programmes/projects. Building on those positive existing social, usually customary and traditional-based practices to contribute to and reinforce development objectives is advised and we should advocate for greater analysis, understanding and incorporation of these sometimes complex inter-relations into our policy and programme design and implementation work. This analysis is particularly relevant to promoting inclusion and equitable access to resources and assets provided to households/communities, for example through government programmes, as it provides greater understanding of "how" households actually use, allocate, share or retain benefits.

I wish to provide as one example among others which we are working on in FAO under the Protection to Production (PtoP) project, which is an impact evaluation using a mixed methods

approach to understanding impacts, and economic impacts more specifically, of cash transfer programmes in SSA at the household, community levels, and on social networks in particular. I believe our qualitative findings from analysis of the Ghana Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer demonstrate best the role of social networks in rural communities (italics my own):

"Despite high poverty levels and livelihood insecurity, the fieldwork confirmed a reasonably high level of contribution-based social networking in poor rural areas. These networks were often fragile, however. A lack of trust to pay fees and the necessary dues for these groups was one reason why groups might dissolve and then reform. *For the potentially vulnerable in general, and for the LEAP beneficiaries in particular, it was very important to spread risk by trying to maintain links with social networks, with the most important risk-sharing network being the extended family. Beyond its impact on beneficiary self esteem and hope, the LEAP transfer enabled beneficiaries to enter, or 're-enter', existing contribution-based social and socio-economic networks.*"and further,

"Crucially, the introduction of LEAP had enabled many beneficiary households to 're-enter' their extended family network, helping them to move from isolation and vulnerability to inclusion and risk sharing. In some instances beneficiaries had even been able to turn provider, loaning to other family members in trouble. In the Fante society of the Central Region, the LEAP transfer enabled beneficiaries to contribute to extended family networks through the 'family levy' (*abusua to*). This contribution is mainly for risk sharing around burial and funeral party costs. This is an ad hoc contribution so the LEAP transfer enabled beneficiaries to keep money aside for this expenditure. One beneficiary in Agona Abrim, Central Region, explained how even before LEAP she would still pay her family levy using family remittances. If you stopped contributing then, 'if you die you will be buried without a coffin'. The importance of a decent burial in Fante society cannot be overstated: 'People pay more respect to your coffin than when you are alive'. Extended family members, knowing that the LEAP contribution eases the burden of their support, were now more likely to provide support to beneficiaries. Beneficiaries in Agona Abrim ironically noted this change of position that financial contribution brings: 'Now when someone dies, they say "come come"!"

As demonstrated, social networks in rural communities in Ghana serve as a safety net in themselves (e.g. food, cash) and an avenue towards increasing inclusion, participation, voice and engagements among all members of the community, including the most vulnerable. Ghana and other completed studies from countries covered under the project can be found on the PtoP website:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/PtoP/en/>.

Please find a link to the [Ghana research brief](#) and to the [full report](#).

3. Bronwen Powell, Canada

If you are not already familiar with Foods of Association: Biocultural Perspectives on Foods and Beverages that Mediate Sociability by Nina Etkin I encourage you to read it, you may find her work in West Africa interesting as a comparison to your work in Kenya. Others interested in this topic may find it of interest as well, and it is easy to read.

Kazi njema,

Bronwen

4. Subhash Mehta, Devarao Shivaram Trust, India

'Make agriculture truly sustainable now for food security in a changing climate'

UN agencies have taken the initiative over the last 5 years to support holistic solutions for the long term sustainability of over 2 billion hungry, malnourished, poor, deep in debt rural producer communities, with UNCTAD's TER of September 18, 2013, taking the ARES, World Bank, etc., head on, urging for a 'Paradigm shift in agriculture' IAR4D needs attached and for us to 'Wake up before it is too late', read TER at:

<http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=666>,

HISTORY:

Communities followed integrated agriculture system of their area to produce nutritious food for their own needs and at little or no cost, before the arrival of their colonial rulers, For serving their political and commercial interests, farms were converted to produce mono crops importing high cost agro chemical inputs, converting more and more land for commercial crops like cotton, tea, coffee, jute, rubber, sugarcane, etc., reducing the land for production of nutritious food by the smallholder producer communities for their own/ country needs. Policies, rules and regulations focused on commercial mono crops,, resulting in the decrease of purchasing power, taxing rural producers, increasing cost of production, resulting in the decrease of farm produce prices and or producers' net incomes. The resulting decrease in smallholder farm production and availability of nutritious food, lead to hunger, malnutrition, debt, poverty, scarcity and famine like conditions from time to time especially during the world wars and after independence (early 1960 in India).

After many countries became independent from colonial rule, large sums of money were made available as aid for development of agriculture by the erstwhile colonial powers as well as the USA, with subtle conditions attached, eg., USAID made provisions to give grants for scientists' advance studies in the land grant universities of the USA, where the curricula focused on mechanized industrial green revolution (GR) technologies (most farms being over 100 hectares), training them as specialists, with little or no knowledge about the integrated low cost agriculture of different areas in their country and sustainable in the long term for the smallholder producers. Most on return, made the agriculture policies of their country, continued to serve the commercial interest of the North (Europe/ USA/ Canada/ Australia), implemented their industrial agriculture models, using AID funds, ensuring continuation of their commercial interests (mono crops), primarily to keep down the world prices of agricultural commodities, like rice, wheat, maize, cotton, rubber, tea, coffee, etc, loosing focus on producing nutritious food, following the low cost integrated agriculture and management practices (GAP), etc., essential for meeting their own safe and nutritious food needs and the long term sustainability of the producer communities and markets in the vicinity.

The continuing focus on commercial crops lead to shortages, scarcity and famine like conditions in the sixties, creating a panic among policy makers [mostly scientists staffing agriculture research & education systems (ARES), most Central and State Government covering agriculture departments, mostly specialists, opening the flood gates for GR technologies being forced on all farmers, as part of official extension programmes and schemes (subsidies) of the Government, especially in the irrigated areas of the country. The use of agro chemicals on rich soils built over centuries, did increase productivity for a while, temporarily solving the immediate problem of shortages by meeting supply side but ignoring the demand side of producers' access to required knowledge and management to produce nutritious food needs of the rural producer communities/ country.

However, in about ten years there was enough evidence documented that the GR productivity had plateau and decreasing in most areas, requiring increasing quantities and higher prices for fertilizer, seed and water each year. Added to this was the global oil crisis since the 70's, resulting in the huge increase in the costs of fossil fuel imports, transportation, production of agro chemicals, etc., making conventional farming unviable and forcing governments to subsidies production of external inputs. In spite of subsidies, the purchasing power (mono crops) and net incomes of farmers, especially smallholder producer communities reduced each year (often below cost of production) resulting in rural hunger, malnutrition, poverty, suicides and climate change.

5. University of Guyana Agriculture Economics Research Group 1, University of Guyana, Guyana

Greetings to all readers and the moderator.

This is an interesting topic to observe as, it is one in which at the micro level, shifts in behavioural patterns can alter the brute reality of poverty and hunger.

The issue for examination (and probably the success of such a concept) however necessarily hinges upon the area in society with which we are making the observation.

It can largely be agreed upon that there are three general categories of society with respect to geographical composition- **urban, sub-urban and rural** provinces. As the adage indicates, 'The poor will always be with us' and therein, we premise that in each of these categories of society, there will exist some poverty and its consequential implications (honing in on hunger in this case.) It can also generally be assumed, to a large degree of certainty, that the lifestyles of each of these provinces will be different. We will observe their lifestyles in relation to time available, population density, stress levels, health and community relations.

Generally the succeeding are the overview of each province and their corresponding lifestyle:

1. Urban Province
Extremely Busy Lifestyle, High Population Density, High Stress Levels, Poor/Ailing Health, Minimal Relations with Neighbours
2. Sub-Urban Province
Average Lifestyle, Moderate Population Density, Average Stress Levels, Moderate to Very Healthy, Good Relations with Neighbours
3. Rural Province
Sedentary to Relaxed Lifestyle, Low Population Density, Low to Average Stress Levels, Moderate to Very Healthy, Strong Relations with Neighbours

Herein, we find it necessary to observe the effect/anticipated outcome of the concept relative to each province given their lifestyle differences.

Rural Province

Dependence upon a concept of this nature, in our opinion, would be successful in a rural province, given the nature of the lifestyle. In the preamble that was given, it was even mentioned that this act of gratitude occurred in **rural Kenya**. (*Contention with this example will be expounded on in subsequent posts*) Given the strong relations with neighbours and deeper sense of community bonding, the rural provinces would stand the best chance of success.

Sub-Urban Province

Given the nature of the 'Suburb' area, poverty levels are usually low. With the good community relations that exist in these areas, once a group/organization comprising of community members is established, it is anticipated that an alleviation of hunger should occur.

Urban Province

This is where the drawback of this concept would exhibit itself the most and it is the area that should cause the largest degree of worry given the very nature of the lifestyle. Inflating that fact is the antagonizing phenomenon of 'Poverty Urbanization', where more than 50M persons have internally migrated to urban areas and the rate of poverty urbanization exceeds the rate of urbanization. (Finance & Development Magazine September 2007, Volume 44, Number 3- Released by IMF)

It is therefore not to be taken for granted when dealing with the concept that success and implementation would result in alleviation in every province. We will detail each province and its specific implications relative to questions posited, in subsequent posts. We ardently anticipate fruitful discussions.

6. Claudio Schuftan, PHM, Viet Nam

1. When we talk about HH FS, we too often forget HH fuel security and the issues of its physical and economic access and an issue of tremendous environmental consequences (firewood, charcoal).

2. More related to social relations and networks is what all online discussions so far have omitted. I refer to the 'care' element in the causality of malnutrition. It cannot be overemphasized that MN is an outcome of a pyramid of causation (UNICEF 1990). Three are the underlying causes, namely HH FS, care and access to health and sanitation. Addressing FS is necessary but not sufficient to influence the outcome!. Well, care relates to the the mother's wellbeing during pregnancy and lactation, as well as to the mother/child binomium; and breastfeeding (the first food) is at the very center with much more than its nutritional importance including all aspects of bonding: and that is related to social networks [family support (husband and extended family), lactation legislation (maternity leave and creches)]. Networks are also involved, especially existing networks of women promoting breastfeeding (WABA, La Leche League, etc). Issues of alleviating the mother's chores during pregnancy and lactation should also be kept in mind; the role of the husband being crucial.

Bottom line, these issues are key to HH FS and are clearly some of its important determinants.

Best

Claudio

7. Pia Pacheco, Argentina

Gracias Eileen por empezar este interesante debate. Estoy de acuerdo en que las relaciones sociales, las redes que un individuo, familia o comunidad pueden crear y sostener son fundamentales para garantizar su seguridad alimentaria. Yo quiero hablar de las relaciones extracomunitarias y distantes de la localidad que influyen en las redes locales.

Vivo en la capital de mi país pero he recorrido y trabajado con muchas comunidades indígenas distantes y aisladas. Muchas de estas comunidades viven en situaciones de extrema pobreza y son víctimas de discriminación. En los últimos años la frontera agrícola y petrolera ha avanzado sobre los territorios de uso de las comunidades indígenas (territorios de marisca, caza, pesca, recolección), afectando brutalmente sus medios de vida.

Algunos referentes de estas comunidades lograron salir de sus provincias y hacer contacto directo con instituciones a nivel nacional, logrando que algunos agentes/funcionarios visiten sus comunidades, se enteren de su realidad y logrando de algun modo un compromiso de gestión.

En momentos de crisis estas relaciones cumplen un rol importante. La mayoría de los referentes tienen un teléfono celular y es a través de mensajes tales como: "llamame" , "nos desalojan", hay "desmonte", etc. que consiguen llamar la atención a nivel central del gobierno federal y evitar la discriminación o invisibilización que sufren en las localidades. De esta manera están luchando para conservar sus territorios de uso y consiguiendo ayuda para garantizar su seguridad alimentaria a través de proyectos con instituciones estatales y también con donaciones particulares de semillas, herramientas de labranza y mercaderías.

8. Raymond Enoch, NAAHM Nigeria and Chair West Africa, Nigeria

Dear All

the discussion on the role of social relations and networks in household food security and nutrition is critical if we are to move forward.

The social relations and networks are no doubt elements and instrument of education, information sharing of best practices and vehicle to drive policy options. It is in this context that I join the discussion.

I will be making a more in-depth contributions on this

Raymond Enoch
NAAHM Nigeria and Chair West Africa

9. UGAgri Group7, University of Guyana, Guyana

The role that social relations and networks play in achieving food and nutritional security has to do with a number of things, the least of which is trust. You could say that trust is the overriding value that stands constant when this role is by turns, added to and diminished by factors such as the preservation of food in traditions and cultures on one hand, and increasing urbanization on the other.

The moderator asked, "What has changed so that individuals and households are no longer able to rely on their membership in society for assistance in times of need?" It's almost reflexive to say urbanization. But not urbanization exactly, more like what urbanization represents: Less reliance on local markets supplied by family-based farmers who you probably would've known if you were living in a rural area. Much smaller families so there's less of an extended family effect in the sharing of household tasks and the passing down of traditions. And then there's the economic situation: living in a city is wholly different from the rural scene of farms and kitchen gardens. Supermarket and town markets are substituted for homegrown because the (opportunity) cost of self-sufficiency in the city is way too high. The million dollar question is: does this mean that, as an urban dweller, you cannot rely on family and community networks to provide or supplement your food needs anymore? Here's what our group member, Liza, says about moving from a rural island to the city, and what she has experienced in the transition that's affected her ability to access food.

"Wakenaam is a rural island in Guyana with a population of approximately 10,000. In Wakenaam, almost every other house has a kitchen garden which is enough to feed the entire island. There are social relations and networking among Wakenaam villagers which sustains the island food-wise. Families with their produces will either sell some of their produce, barter with others who have different produces or give to poor persons of society, thus no one is left to starve or hungry. Also if someone doesn't have the money to purchase the vegetable, the family farmers will give them credit until they can pay for it. Everyone will have access to fresh vegetables that are nutritious.

"However, in the urban, almost city area where I moved to, I don't even know who my neighbors are. Everything I consume comes from supermarkets, where foods stuffs are already clean and packaged. If I don't have the money to purchase food stuffs, I will surely starve. No credit is given to you in the city. It's been my observation that there are far more hungry people in the city. Though I visit my family in Wakenaam only every few months, maybe twice in 3 months, I always bring back food, mostly fruits which are very expensive at local markets where I live in the city. I cook most of

what I eat and share with my sister and roommate; we don't share food with friends in the city, and we don't have any family close by so any immediate secondary source of food is not an option."

In another post, another group member will describe her experiences in travelling weekly between her apartment nearby the university and her home some 65 miles and two hours away. Liza's statement, however, show clearly how trust, or the lack of it, colours the social interactions between people. People in rural areas take it for granted until it can't be easily shared in an urban setting.

10. Max Blanck, FAO, Italy

Dear all,

This [article](#) on FAO's page introduces an initiative aiming at **improving access of villagers** in isolated communities across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Niger **to information** through a powerful **participatory communication approach**.

Collaborating with rural radio stations that feed and broadcast their discussions, the **project helps villagers become agents of change in agriculture** and in other aspects of society such as HIV/AIDS, early marriage and the rights of women to inherit land.

http://www.fao.org/in-action/community-listeners-clubs-empower-rural-women-and-men/en/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social+media&utm_campaign=faoknowledge

Best regards,

Max

11. Agri Group7, University of Guyana, Guyana

On the eroding social interactions between members of society and the impact of this on food security, we had a group member, Liza, who is a migrant to the city from the rural island of Wakenaam speak about her experience. Here's what our born and bred city dweller, Tonnica, says about her experiences living in a city with relatives not so close by, as they relate to food security. **She claims her family's food security comes out of the frozen food aisles of the nearby supermarket and the two big markets in town.**

"In Georgetown, the capital city of Guyana where I reside it's 'every man on his own.' The relations generally doesn't go beyond mere associates where no particular tangible benefits are reaped especially where food security and nutrition is concerned. With very minimal to no amount of farming done in this city, everything consumed is purchased from the supermarket mostly and to a lesser extent from the public markets (Stabroek, Bourda). Since food is purchased across the board in Georgetown, there's hardly any excess food that can be afforded to another individual or family in need."

Finally, our group member, Shermain talks about the links between her and her community, which is part of a town, Linden. These relations sustain despite the quasi-urban feel of Linden, perhaps because of the tradition of maintaining these relationships between families and friends in the community. Or maybe, it's become necessary to upkeep them in the face of the looming threat to the food security of the region. This is what she says:

"I'm from Linden, where everybody knows each other and has established a close relation with one another. I'm able to share the eddo-leaf and coconut that are found in my backyard with my family,

friends and neighbours, and they are able to share what is grown in their yard so as to ensure that a daily meal is provided. Nearly all the homes in Linden have some type of crop or fruit growing in the yard. These crops and fruits are grown with organic manure and prepared in order to give us a well-balanced diet. Some days I can afford not to cook, since I can call on someone for a plate of food and on some days we all come together and make what is known as a "bush cook". On anyone of my family member's birthday, the household would usually cook, package and send food around to individuals. In doing this, we are able to maintain food security and nutrition within the community. This relation that we share is also extended to individuals who migrate from Linden to Georgetown for various reasons such as education. In my family scenario, when I'm leaving Linden to head to Georgetown for classes, my mom would usually prepare meals for me to walk with and sometimes even send groceries for the week. **Despite changes in Linden with respect to growth in population, our social relations and networks have remained the same which is the most important aspect of our survival."**

12. Concern 3, University of Guyana, Guyana

Concern: concern embodies the sentiments of an assembly of students of the University of Guyana committed to sharing ideas on how we can improve food security across time horizons for our peoples. The dynamism of this topic (**Food Security**) will see us drawing lessons from many sources and fields of taught. Emphasis of our contributions will focus on developing countries as the core of our ideas. Food Security is an important subject!

"**Concern**" contributions will reflect the views of each student as far as possible.

The question of how food can be secure across time horizons in developing countries is full of challenges to leaders. Nothing is static in real terms. The dynamics of change demand actions to improve nutrition to all people especially the poor. The identification of social relationships by Ms E. Omosa in the rural setting recognizes what sociologists refer to as "community spirit" which was most forceful in earlier times.

As an urban dweller evidence of how the market system has eroded social relationships is everywhere. Everything has a market price. Attitudes and behavior of urban residents reflect self interest and aggression toward those in need. Shift from community spirit to a competitive posture has taken hold. Waibel and Schmidt^[1] (2000) argued for a more active role for cities in securing food. However, this is through the market. Given the commercialization of food production much of the social relations of "old times" are continuously neutralized or squeeze. However, this outcome provides for new types of relationships.

Urban setting is dominated by numerous types of groups. Community food clubs can be a vibrant mechanism used to disseminate food and information on the accessibility of cheap and free food. This sort of information can be valuable particularly to the urban poor. Arrangements of this nature need to be flexible and effective in getting across information in a timely manner. How information is collected can take many forms; to illustrate; an established member in the community or someone with connections to farmers' associations or cooperatives could be used. State intervention can be used to provision of information and the setting up of sites where the same can be obtained. The fact that in urban settings people are bonded together by other factors than kinship is an opportunity. In Guyana, many new schemes and enclosed communities are popping up around it main city. Events such as community days or village days are ripe with potential for food sharing.

In conclusion, clubs, societies, village days are among potential avenues through which social relationships can be used to secure food. In a sense, these mediums are free of the barriers that would other exist. They also work as effective mediums to partially neutralize the impact of the

market system. Hence, we can secure food in urban areas by forming new settings to accommodate for changing social relationships.

[\[1\] Feeding Asian Cities: Food Production and Processing Issues Abstract](#)

By Hermann Waibel and Erich Schmidt

13. Eileen Omosa, facilitator of the discussion

Dear participants,

There are six more days before the end of our discussions on the topic of social relations and networks in food security and nutrition. You have done well so far by sharing your knowledge and experiences, thus brought out the many and different roles of social relations and networks as detailed below.

Emerging Issues:

To date, your contributions have focused on the following issues in relation to the role of social relations and networks in food security and nutrition:

- Helps define the quality of our communities.
- Provides caring social support systems.
- A channel through which to better understand social-economic dynamics at the household and community levels.
- A critical determinant of outcomes/success of development projects.
- Enables members to spread risk, and move from a situation of isolation and vulnerability to inclusion and risk sharing.
- An important vehicle for education and information sharing of best practices.
- Defines the different types/levels of trust that in turn help build quality and caring communities.
- The best way to understand a people is by knowing their food habits.
- A very important but undervalued topic to date.

Summary of issues covered so far:

Many of you have made contributions in relation to the need and role of quality communities, best achieved through the establishment and maintenance of strong social relations and networks. The quality of community and its core element of care have an influential role on food security, especially the food security of people with low incomes (Kent George and Claudio Schuftan). Kent, in his draft paper on 'ending hunger locally' introduces the concepts of caring communities and strong social support systems, achieved if we establish strong relations through which to protect the vulnerable in society from outside exploitation, establish local food systems that are sensitive to the nutritional needs of members, therefore an effective way to reduce hunger in the larger community/world (<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/EndingHungerLocally.docx>). The quality of community, partly measured through its social relations and networks plays an influential role in the outcome of development objectives. Pamela Pozarny draws from her experience on the FAO supported PtoP project, evaluating the LEAP programme in Ghana (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty) to illustrate on the need to understand and incorporate existing social relations and practices into our policy and programme design and implementation strategies. The reason being that an understanding of social relations and networks helps in the promotion of inclusiveness and equitable access to assets and resources by providing an understanding of how decisions are made, resources are allocated and how benefits are shared within households and communities. To quote the words of Pamela, "social networks in rural communities in Ghana serve

as a safety net in themselves and an avenue towards increasing inclusion, participation, voice and engagements among all members of the community, including the most vulnerable.”

(http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/p2p/Publications/Ghana_qualitative.pdf)

The need to focus on social relations and networks within any community is further provided in the writings of Etkin Nina in Foods of Association. Drawing on field experiences from West Africa, Etkin provides an illustration of existing linkages in food, culture and society; especially on the different ways in which foods contribute to our well-being (physiologically and socially) by defining one’s personal and cultural identity, and how people ‘make’ themselves by eating food. To eat food, one must have access to food, and one way of having nutritious food by supporting integrated agricultural production which will in turn result in sustainability of food production and nutrition (Subhash Mehta). Sustainability in food production implies sustainable communities that are linked through strong social relations and networks and in turn are better equipped to identify the food and nutritional needs of their members, and subsequently a better focus on agricultural production that will meet the needs of the people i.e. cyclical interactions where strong social relations and networks help identify people’s food and nutritional needs, and in turn helps create a market for targeted agricultural production, whose consumers forge more relations and networks in the social and market space:



Diagram conceptualized by Eileen Omosa

Therefore, linked communities through social networks will result in better identification of people’s food and nutritional needs.

Is the concept of social relations and networks limited to particular areas; more to rural than to urban societies? The UGAgri Group 1 notes that social relations and networks should be considered important in both rural and urban areas. The nature of majority of our societies is that a slight shift in social relations can alter one’s level of hunger and poverty. To Group 1, social relations increase as we move from urban to sub-urban and are at their strongest in rural areas. That social relations and networks decrease as distances between rural and urban areas increase, situations elaborated on by examples of lived experiences from Liza and Tonnica (urban) and Shermain (sub-urban).

Social relations and networks are an important instrument for education, the sharing of information and best practices among people and over generations, thus creating and maintaining trust over time (UGAgric Group 7). Group 7 elaborates on the issue of trust, which is abundant in

rural areas where it results in more acts of caring for one another, demonstrated through gifting or loaning of food and other products and services to those in need. On the other hand, urban settings are made up of people from different communities, classes, ethnicities and professions resulting in fewer interactions, less trust leaving 'every man on his own'. The result is less sharing and caring among urban dwellers resulting in higher levels of vulnerabilities of individuals and groups that do not have the cash to purchase food from the market. In such situations, anyone in need of food is forced to spend time and resources traveling to their rural homes to receive food as gifts from family and other networks in rural areas. Either way, rural or urban based, people still need strong social relations and networks for their survival.

What else we can talk about in the remaining days:

Social relations and networks are alive in both rural and urban areas, where they play an influential role of enabling people (rich and poor) lead a satisfying life.

1. How do people who already have access to food security and nutrition utilize social relations and networks?
2. What role do social relations and networks play in education, information sharing and policy formulation and implementation?
3. To what extent have social relations and networks been considered/incorporated in the design of development projects, and what role do you see relations and networks play in future development endeavours?

14. Olivia Muza, Zimbabwe

Many thanks for this important discussion.

I see social networks and relations as an evolving agenda. The quality of social networks is the major determinant of whether they ever help in ensuring food security: in the primitive era when work was group/community oriented, these support systems were reliant.

Also the quality of these support systems tends to also be location specific. It has been observed that the rural environment facilitates quality family life which, in turn, promotes a quality community and society (Refer to Buttel, F.H., & Flinn, W.L. Sources and consequences of agrarian values in American society. *Rural Sociology*, 1975,40, 134-151) and (Miller, M.K., & Crader, K.W. Rural-urban differences in two dimensions of community satisfaction. *Rural Sociology*, 1979, 44, Fall, 489-504).

Of course within rural and urban communities there are also marked differences in terms of the quality of social networks.

In conclusion, social support systems are critical in food security but their quality is an important factor. The extent to which one invest in them determines the extent to which one can harvest from them. In Zimbabwe, it's often said 'kandiro kanoenda kunobva kamwe'

loosely translated to say 'when you give, you also get'

Thanks

Olivia Muza

15. Group 4, University of Guyana, Guyana

A view from one of them members in Group 4.

I once heard a statement by a lecturer of mine that goes something like this “change is inevitable; everything changes, the only thing that doesn’t change is change itself”. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, also said it brilliantly: “change alone is unchanging”.

Social relations as one of the most important contributors in obtaining nutritional food types is and has been pervasive mostly, if not only, in the rural areas. It dates back to the era of bartering where economic animals survived from what was and still is known as subsistence farming and bartering. Obtaining nutritional foods through social relations differs, however, from bartering. It is a cultural act that has the main trait, generosity, imbedded in it. Generosity in the sense that one does not contribute to ones nutritional diet with expecting a likely return as would be the case of bartering but by gaining self satisfaction from the act. This way of living, however, has been altered by the introduction of money and the likelihood of one being able to profit from selling a good at a higher value than its cost. As a result of profit seeking, the pervasiveness of this cultural and generous act has depleted.

One of the main factors in Guyana that has been observed that is responsible for this change in behavior with regards to social relations as mentioned above is that of profit seeking. Often times it is the extra units beyond ones need that is ‘given’ to others through whatever social relations that may exist among the parties, but with the increase of information of the markets these surplus have been shifted from being ‘given’ to sold at a profit. The demand for the surpluses is mostly attributed to the urban areas. As we move from a rural setting to a more urban setting, social relations tend to decrease and in order for one to survive and have a nutritional diet one must purchase those foods from supermarkets and the like as would have been brought out in the examples given by Group 7. The increase in urban settlers therefore increases the demand for agricultural produce and other nutritional foods produced in rural areas resulting in a decrease in the surplus that was once shared through social relations. Farmers in rural areas have now up their production in an effort to capitalize on the increase demand for their produce in urban cities.

Living in a community (Strathavon, Cane Grove; located in Region 4, Guyana) where social relations have been altered by those that are now seeking profits it still does not have a significant impact on the community as a whole. One still benefits at harvest time from receiving fruits and vegetables from neighbors. Even meats such as fish and even live chickens are shared among residents. It is a community where the social relations is so strong that at any point a neighbor or even a resident from a street away can send and request and obtain any required seasoning for their meal, fruits and the like from other residents at no cost to the recipient. The generosity has been present for years and is still present today primarily because it is a small community and everyone interacts on a regular basis. Rural areas are more likely to have high social relations among its members due to their small numbers and ever so often interactions. In contrast, urban areas are known to have large amount of settlers who have little time to interact with their surrounding people. Their social relations with others in close proximity tend to be less and thus produce a burden on them in regards to obtaining nutritional foods at low costs.

Likely solutions will follow

16. UG Agricultural Economics Focus 2014, University of Guyana, Guyana

Greetings from Georgetown, Guyana!

Ms. Omosa makes a lively point that social relations facilitate access to food through loans, bartering and gifting among families and tribes. As our colleagues in University of Guyana

Agricultural Economics Research Group 1 hinted, however, the degree of altruism upon which the food trade, the type of which the Graduate Research student experienced during her childhood in Kenya, is predicated exists in very few places.

This is not to say that social relations have no role in facilitating food security, though. Food security is not obtained solely by making food directly accessible and available but, as we indicated in the discussion thread preceding this one, by promoting income growth and strengthening economic security. A community-oriented construct that facilitates economic empowerment and that is more driven by mutualism, trust and a sense of business purpose than altruism is the cooperative.

As much of the bastions of the developed world, Europe and North America (yes, inclusive of the United States of America), have demonstrated over the past two hundred years or so, cooperatives were formed: to strengthen bargaining power; maintain access to competitive markets; capitalize on new market opportunities; obtain needed products and services on a competitive basis; improve income opportunities; reduce costs; and manage risk. Perhaps surprising for a stalwart of capitalism, so significant are agricultural cooperatives in the United States that in 2002, they were estimated to control US\$ 111,553 million in gross business. (Ortmann and King)

Our group's thesis is premised on the notion that food security could be strengthened through fostering linkages between farmers and value-added processors. Cooperatives, made up of communities of farmers, can and do play a role in fostering this linkage, either by seeking out processors to buy farmers' produce or by processing it themselves.

When dealing with processors (buyers), farmers often face high transaction costs – which encapsulate the costs involved in searching for and obtaining information on these buyers; bargaining and decision costs as they (farmers) may have to hire lawyers and advisors, and policing and enforcement costs which, for instance, are incurred when farmers have to take to court buyers who default on their payments. These transaction expenses are susceptible to economies of scale so, for instance, if a group of, say, cocoa farmers hire a lawyer to bargain with a processor on their behalf, they will incur lower legal costs on average than if they were to each retain counsel separately.

However, even when farmers do find buyers to purchase and process their produce, these processors often leverage their quasi-monopsonistic position to obtain rents by paying unfairly low prices to farmers for their produce. To ensure fairer returns on their produce, farmers can form themselves into cooperatives and move up the value chain themselves, as is done in the United States where dairy farmers form themselves into dairy cooperatives that engage in milk bottling, drying and cheese manufacturing.

Our country, Guyana, has had a lengthy ideological love affair with cooperatives, which perhaps peaked in the 1970s when the country was officially renamed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and an ambitious economic development model of cooperative socialism was embraced. The experience with cooperatives has been mixed, to say the least. Alongside a few notable successes, there have been many failures. However, it would be disingenuous for the country to take the instances of weaknesses as justification for not re-embarking on a drive to revive cooperatives in the rural agriculture sector.

Rather than toss the baby out with the bath water, we should look to countries that have successfully deployed this uniquely democratic and community based way of organizing business and take their experiences as lessons which we may inculcate in our own bid to revive cooperatives.

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17. Emilia Venetsanou, Italy

I am a sociologist, working since 1983 in African countries on food security as well as on participatory rural development. So, a big thanks for this public debate and the really interesting views exposed. Let me bring some “critical” points.

Poverty is related to inequalities and inequality does not stop at rural communities’ gates. In poor rural communities relying on subsistence agriculture not all poor are equally poor.

Social relations, inequality and growth are in a strict relation of inter-dependency.

Inequalities taking place within rural communities lead the most vulnerable to starvation through complex practices of access to labour, land and food stocks; (assets and endowments). Remember; e.g. A. Sen and “food entitlements” or Devereux and the analysis on “food security as a social and political construct”.

Social differentiation is underpinned by institutional constructs and social relations.

Policy-makers and development practitioners should not turn a blind eye to the dynamics of social differentiation and their consequences to food security.

If the reasons for the human shame of one billion hungry are several, interconnected and mutually reinforced, so have to be all the attempts of interpretation and remedy.

Concerning inequalities within communities, for instance in Mozambique, “the largest part of the variation in per capita farm sizes and poverty levels in rural Mozambique is found within villages rather than between them” (Analysis of Adult Mortality within Rural Households in Mozambique and Implications for Policy; Research Paper No.58E, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; Directorate of Economics; 2004).

Inequalities taking place within rural communities lead the most vulnerable to starvation through complex practices of access to labour, land and food stocks; generally assets and endowments. This is about social and power relations within the traditional system / community.

Social relations have much to do with labour, enter alia. Labour access is a major determinant of structural hunger in rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Labour inequalities in rural communities lead the two lowest quintiles to trans-generational poverty and actual hunger. Labour control is much related to land control even when land apparently is “accessible” to all members of the community, even the foreigners. Much of the traditional institutions aim at regulating and controlling man-power / labour.

To give an example from Mozambique. In the Macua society, Northern Mozambique, a coping strategy through traditional social relations, called “o'lola”, takes place. This practice of “exchanging labour for food” enables considerable accumulation to those who benefit from the work of others. Suffice it to say that one day's work under "o'lola" can be paid with 3-4 kg. of cassava or sometimes with just a plate of beans, while the average flour production per workday corresponds to 7-9 Kg for cassava. Under these circumstances, a process of land concentration on the hands of few within the rural communities is taking place. For instance, in 1993, in Nampula Province, about 40-50% of the total land was held by only 25% of the subsistence producers that farmed between 4 and 5 times more land per household than the smallest 25%. The land accumulation has to be understood not in terms of property rights on land (in Mozambique the State is the only owner) but in terms of farming capacity, i.e. the capacity of a farmer to have access to labour during the peak season.

I disagree with any analysis that does not seriously rely on inter-disciplinarity and that takes a naïve approach to the traditional societies’ internal dynamics, picturing out a kind of Christmas-

card image of an ideal world of perfectly functioning solidarity. This is risky when policies have to be designed and strategies implemented. Let's take the case of the Social Safety Nets / SSN and schemes of social protection promoted in rural areas. Turn a blind-eye to social differentiation and internal inequalities, assuming, e.g. that traditional leaders are immune from any risk of power abuse, can be fatal to the most in need.

18. UG Agricultural Economics Focus 2014, University of Guyana, Guyana

The role of social networks and social relationships do play key role in ensuring food nutrition and security. Many studies have proven that social interaction and relations is absolutely necessary for us to live healthy lives. The issue that is being raised by the moderator is one we fail pay attention to and I'm so happy that we have the opportunity to look at how it impacts food nutrition and security. There are many issues that hinder the development of productive social relationships among farmers ranging from racism to government efficiencies that force us to pick sides and battle it out to show who is superior and we all end up losing because there is no real victor other than poverty its self, which, is not only limited to material lack, but it is also a state of mind that is an infectious disease.

The essence of social relations and networks is that it creates linkage that are necessary for cheap and quality produce that would promote better and more reliable food sources that would benefit the nation and abroad. It has been proven time and time again that only as a unite force can we tackle the issues of food nutrition and security for all - as my colleague made mention of cooperative and how necessary they are in to create linkages to better the farming community.

An example to these linkages being formed is Shigam Inc which commenced its operations is 2008 on the Linden highway in Guyana. Shigam Inc produces fruits and vegetables using a technique called drip irrigation which was not used in Guyana at the time. Using this system they were able to produce vegetables that would far superior than anything else been produced at the time. Since then they have team up with different Government agencies to encourage local farms to use this technique and have taken up a project of build a larger farm and package plant to export their produce. They are also providing training and information for other farmers to learn this technique to produce up to international standards. This would lead to improved produce that is available on the local markets and would allow local farmers access to the packaging plants leading to them being able to export more of their produce around the world. Through this example we can see that we must work together and network to move our agriculture sector to place were we have effectively address the issue of proper food nutrition and security for all.

Information taken from: Shigam.com

19. UG Agricultural Economics Focus 2014, University of Guyana, Guyana

This post answers the question "What are some of the Challenges facing Social Relations and Networks in food and Nutritional Security" from a realistic perspective out of Guyana.

Social Relations and networks were once an important aspect in food security in Guyana, especially rural communities. Today, communities located in the the hinterland regions still rely heavily on subsistence farming and hence social relations and networks prove to be necessary in garnering essential food security. The indigenous farmers each farm a staple crop; either cassava or peanuts, while others hunt and fish. It is in their best interest therefore to maintain good relations within their small communities so that they can trade and supply each other with the needed food items.

However, out upon the Coastal plains of Guyana, urbanization has been rampant. This has posed some challenges to the general social relations and networks in food security. Two challenges have

been identified that reduced the once admirable level of social relations that Guyanese once displayed.

Firstly, the growing urban population has led to a decrease in the rural population. It should be noted at this point that almost all of the agriculture based produce are farmed in rural areas. Hence a growing urban population has led to the increase in demand of all agriculture products including cash crops, poultry, and fish. Farmers in the rural communities now focus on maximizing profits from their farming. Hence the competition that has arisen from market prices has led farmers to be more focused on their own well being than that of their communities. For example, farmers in the Mahaicony area have experienced an increase for “Hassa”, a sweet water fish, which carries an expensive price. Prior to the great increase in demand families and friends would fish together and share the catch among each other, trading what they had for what they didn’t have and even sell fellow farmers at relatively low prices. However, today, fishing is now more of a job than a hobby. Individuals are very careful to mark their area of fishing, keeping the area where “Hassa” is abundant a secret from other fishers. From this it is clear that a rise in market prices, leads to a competitive industry which gravely affects the social relations and networks in food security that were once present. Group 4 of the University of Guyana rightfully identified such activity as profit seeking which drastically reduces the social relation and networking with specific relation to food security.

Secondly, it was found that as urbanization has increased the number of extended families has decreased. Children are no longer staying at home to work on farms but are going to school, heading to the University and are starting small nuclear families in urban and sub-urban areas. Unfortunately, such families do little to no farming. All produce consumed are bought from markets (where sellers come from rural areas) or from supermarkets. This often leads more than not to generations of children being brought up who are not capable of planting a kitchen garden. A personal example can testify to this. My father grew up in Mahaicony where his family planted, fished and caught birds for their home needs and for marketing purposes. He later moved to a sub-urban village where I was brought up. Due to the nature of his current work he no longer farms nor fishes, so no knowledge of those have been passed on to me or his other three children. How can families in urban communities support each other in food security through social relations and networks if the “know how” hasn’t been passed on or isn’t being passed on to current and future generations?

Even though social relations and networks haven’t been completely wiped out it should be a concern that it has been decreasing. It is in the view of the members of this group that measures can be taken to restore some levels of social relation and networking in both urban and rural areas to increase food security and nutrition. One such way is to have workshops and peer education training that would encourage locals to farm small kitchen gardens from which they can get fresh, organic produce. In 2008 a “Grow more food” campaign was launched which was successful in allowing families to plant one crop in their own yard. A variety of seeds were given to each home and farmers in every community which aided in their production of cash crops. A more intensive approach in this same regard with similar input policies on a community basis should encourage a revival in social relations and networking in food security.

20. UG2014 Group 8, University of Guyana, Guyana

“It occurs to me that our survival may depend upon our talking to one another.”
— Dan Simmons, Hyperion

Our relations with one another are likely to go a long way in our success or failures. In terms of household food security and nutrition, our social relations and networks can assist greatly for those who are in need or lacking food and nutrition. In this comment we intend to address the first question outlined by the moderator, in relation to our country, Guyana.

· What is your understanding of social relations and networks in food and nutritional security, and do you have examples of the role they play in the attainment of food and nutritional security?

Food security is defined as having the physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences of an active and healthy life at all times.[1] In the context of this comment we are assuming that social relations in society come from a citizen's association with family, neighbours and the community. We believe networks are somewhat correlated with one's social relationships as networks stems from one's association in various circles in society e.g. work, community and education.

Social issues that can have a negative impact on families are single parent homes (mother and her children), poverty stricken families, extended families (only few persons work). The impact of such can cause families to be food insecure. However, good social relationships with the community can assist with food shortages. For example religious institutions and charities usually assist by way of feeding programs and dry goods hampers. The Government also has various school feeding programs, in this way the school children benefit from a hot meal due to their educational network.

We are of the view that rural societies can deal with social ills and food insecurity better than those of urban societies. In rural communities, where there are single parent homes or extended families, there are kitchen gardens and/or farms that ensure the family has food. These families are well connected with other families and tend to share their produce among the community. That way each family would have a wider variety of food.

Our country, The Co-operative Republic of Guyana, has a history of many co-operative societies. This has added to the inherent nature of Guyanese to socialise and share with one another in their respective networks. This improved the food security situation in our country. Guyana has halved its proportion of population that's suffering from hunger and is thus making great strides towards achieving MDG: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger.

Sources:

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[1] (Lemke, et al. 2003)

21. Group 4, University of Guyana, Guyana

In this industrialized era that we now live, there is an obvious dwindling in social co-operation toward matters of food and nutrition. However negative that may sound, it seems almost natural. Consider when social relations and networks for food security and nutrition was at its most prevalent: in times and areas where subsistence farming was a way of life, and in times of disaster.

As it relates to subsistence farming, we should realise that no single household is going to be able to provide a full-course meal for themselves. it makes far more sense for families to specialise. Therefore, in a given community, perhaps one household specialised in rearing of livestock for meats and milk, and another household took charge in the growing of fruits and vegetables. It makes perfect sense for these two households to trade in such a manner that both families are

adequately provided with nutritional foods. However, with most regions of the world tending toward an industrialised, urbanised lifestyle, it is clear why social relations/networks is now a less potent factor in determining one's food security. Most farmers conduct their activities with intentions to sell their produce on the market, and while social relations could still land you being gifted with fruits, vegetables, and even meats, it is to a lesser extent and cannot be expected to provide sustainable food security.

As an example, I have close family members who own a farm. My relation with them earns me perhaps two handfuls of peppers, and a basket of fruit. These gifts, while appreciated, could hardly be considered "food security". It is simply a display of generosity, and without a farm of my own, I am in no position to reciprocate. This in itself is a challenge: What happens when a household has little or nothing to offer? Would it be acceptable in the networking of food to allow freeriders?

On the second point, let me begin by saying that there is no greater catalyst for human co-operation than disaster and tragedy. For example, in the event of a natural disaster, it seems an automatic reaction for immediate neighbours, neighbouring towns, and neighbouring countries to extend their hands to the victims of that tragedy. However, it is usually only to the point where those affected can get back onto their own feet and once again provide for themselves.

To recap, it is evident that social relations/networks in food security and nutrition are at their most important in two situations:

1. Necessity of trade/barter;
2. In times of dire need.

Bearing that in mind, and also an ever-growing urban lifestyle, the causes for the deterioration of social relations/networking in food security is plain to see. Will the remedy, however, be so blatantly apparent?

22. L. W. Gichaga, United States of America

Excited to find this intriguing topic on #FoodSecurity and #SocialRelations:

First, reading through the intro, I notice that just as food has been important to all generations, the means to acquire food may not have fundamentally changed but instead, there has been replacement of the means of exchange and acquisition of food by individuals and families.

On social relations and networks in food and nutritional security, I'll throw the gender factor that is quite apparent! There has been a lot of talk of women being the main producers of food as small scale farmers but there is more to that. I can argue that a household's food security and nutrition is managed by the one who controls food acquisition, food storage, food portions (think nutrition, obesity ...), recycling, and controlling wastage. For example, I recall that there used to be local training for mothers about food security and nutrition and it literally changed our diet at home and the nature of our kitchen garden. My recollection of first learning about food groups and nutrition began then when my mom got involved with such a local group. Food wastage habits that we had earlier - say eating an entire banana bunch of 20 at one occasion, ceased with education that we could stretch them to provide [[new term then!]] fruit/vitamin for an entire week. This applies to many other areas like meat portions, storage ideas, recycling.

Point: Since the lady of the house is the most influential figure in decisions about food usage, strong social relations supported by education in general and specifically by what I call 'food-literacy' has an impact on household food security and by extension a nation's.

Stability in social relations is crucial to strengthen the roles in the household for attaining and maintaining food security and nutrition. The male and female contributions are daily synchronized roles that are both crucial. The reverse will reveal the depth of this idea. Instability in social relations through external (read political) and internal conflict (read family) will stifle food availability, and nutritional planning for a healthy life, or introduce wastage, wrong choices, then depreciate to higher vulnerability, the story goes on ...

Challenges facing social relations and networks in food and nutritional security are all related to poverty. Land ownership, literacy, purchasing power ... Lowering a household vulnerability through elevating the family's' lifestyle is a regional and national mandate, as well as individual household mandate through seeking self-improvement avenues. The civil society and private sector must be sensitized to the issue of food security and nutrition through FSN-supportive health campaigns and government policy (from food standards, safety, prices protection....), so as to make it a cultural priority to defend the individual household's FSN.

Great forum. Thanks.

23. Eileen Omosa, facilitator of the discussion

Come, we need to end our discussion in style

To date, you have shared information on the different roles played by social relations and networks in food security: helps us define the quality of our communities, determine outcomes from development projects, enables members to spread risk, an important tool for education, and a way through which to understand a people, among many other roles.

To conclude our discussions,

Please pick one or two roles listed above or generate a new one and provide details on how you would like to see social relations and networks applied in the future.

Example: In the future I would like to see more nutritionists use social networks as a vehicle for educating and sharing information with mothers. The information can be in the form of the different food groups, food combinations to achieve a balanced diet, foods of nutritional value to infants, for prenatal, postnatal periods etc, etc.

That way, each one of us leaves the on-line discussion table with a self-assigned activity to implement.

Eileen Omosa

24. Emilia Venetsanou, Italy

I would definitively like to see going on honest and courageous applicable research (Action – Research – Training) on the social determinants of Food and Nutritional Security. That also means that budget has to be allocated for.

On the agenda of such applicable research, the dimension of social differentiation and inequality within communities (including its smaller social unities as nuclear family) has to be among the topic issues. Policy-makers and development practitioners should not turn a blind eye to the dynamics of social differentiation and their consequences to food security.

To give a trivial example. When a nutritionist starts his/her work in a community has to reach a good understanding of families' internal dynamics and the role / position of women. What is the position of each family-unit within the whole group is equally important. And so on. That is about a sociological analysis to be carried on. But it has to be dynamic and fully relying on a participatory approach. Therefore, I speak about "Action – Research – Training".

Another example could be the case of design, implementation and monitoring of Social Protection schemes. What are the internal dynamics, endowments of the several groups, how all that work together? How work the traditional safety / solidarity systems and what are their deeper dynamics and which their effects in the maintenance or transformation of the productive system as a whole? Which are the engine-factors and which the blocking-factors. To only just list ones.

Eventually, I wish that our our contributions to a public debate are honestly taken into account, and that public debate is an authentic channel for making voices heard. I consider important seeing into the final wrapping up all the core ideas herein expressed, if not public debate just will not make much sense.

To help the facilitator on her wrapping-up tasks, the core idea that I put forward is about budget allocation at all relevant programmes and projects for applicable research relying on participatory approach "Action – Research – Training" addressing: a) social differentiation and inequality within communities and their consequences to food security and b) social determinants of Food and Nutritional Security.

25. Group 4, University of Guyana, Guyana

How do people who already have access to food security and nutrition utilize social relations and networks to better the lives of the less fortunate?

It is said that the quantity of food being produced on a daily basis is more than enough needed to feed the world; still, the world is becoming increasingly populated with malnutrition and persons dying of hunger. It is our belief that good social relations and networks in household food security and nutrition can help to alleviate this problem. The individuals that already have access to food security and nutrition can utilize social relations and networks not only to further help themselves but persons who do not have access to food security.

Social relations and networks such as connections with governmental organizations and other institutions (NGOs, etc.) of which can provide safety nets designed to promote better management of unexpected shocks and, in the longer term, reduce chronic poverty for the most vulnerable individuals or households.[1] Such relations can boost the resources of households, example; the distribution of food and money or vouchers. Therefore, individuals with access to Food Security can help others by getting involved in community work as well as participation in health programmes and training in exchange for food distribution for the less fortunate.

Social relations and networks like these allow households to cover their immediate food needs, not to mention other essential items of expenditure such as health and education. Unlike emergency interventions, these social relations and networks can be enforced which enables households to keep hold of their possessions and production tools (e.g. animals, implements, land) during difficult periods (lengthy spells between harvests, crop failure), making it possible ultimately to reinforce and stimulate the local economy.

In concluding, people who already have access to Food Security and nutrition can utilize social relations and networks to help those that are less fortunate to have such. They can form alliances with organizations hence, creating a network chain to mitigate the problem of increasing malnutrition and poverty in the world.

26. Agri econs5, University of Guyana, Guyana

What are some of the challenges facing social relations and networks in food and nutritional security

Social relations among farmers provide many important services and promote food security. In relation to this forum the group would like to focus on the manner in which credit has influenced food security. It is a widely accepted fact that while small farmers are important in a world where the population is growing they are also hampered by a variety of problems which may include: price volatility and limited access to credit and insurance. In Guyana, it can be observed that the rural area which is home to many farmers has a closely knit community in which farmers engage in barter whether it's in the form of gifts or loans. Small farmers are assumed to have a preference for or are likely to pursue the acquisition of funds via the informal market. The informal market in this instance refers to money lenders in the form of a neighbor, a familiar trader, or family. It is also assumed that small farmers prefer not to use the financial institutions (formal market) because they lack sufficient collateral. Thus, the general consensus is that small farmers prefer to utilize the informal market because they may be unable to access loans through the formal financial institutions due to a lack of capital and also because they may be perceived as high risk clients thereby attracting higher interest rates.

Small Farmers due to financial constraints are unlikely to hold liquid assets and more likely to hold assets such as a land in a nearby community or livestock. As a result, when farmers need credit they are most likely to acquire funding from money lenders within the rural community. However informal markets also have their shortcomings in that farmers are exposed to the exploitative behavior of the "loan sharks" since they are likely to pay an above market interest rate or farmers may be coerced into purchasing the trader's input only. These exploitative behaviours may only serve to impoverish small farmers and this creates a serious challenge for food security.

It can be observed that governments have experimented with the use of varying policies to promote food security. It is also well agreed upon by all that the credit policy is the best alternative because it does not inject any form of distortions within the market. The importance of credit is not to be understated since it promotes the use of capital and inputs by farmers. To remedy this credit problem donor agencies and government have utilized programmes which are supply led credit policies which are unsustainable because they have a high default rate and poor supervision of the loans. Governments invest heavily in these programmes because small farmers generally have a slow adoption rate of technology.

On the other side of the coin, the problem of fungibility exists whereby farmers utilize the credit but not for its designated purpose. For example, the farmer may divert the money from increased farm inputs to increased food consumption. This may result in slower growth in the agricultural sector and may even put programmes and financial institutions at risk. In other studies done the market driven approach has been highly successful as adduced in the case study of Mozambique.

"impressive progress in rural production and development has clearly been achieved. With market-driven approach and an improved policy environment focused on small-scale producers, the process of rural recovery has started. The total production of cereals increased from 239 000 tons in 1992 to 1.8 million tons in 2001, and the north and the centre of the country now regularly generate surpluses for export"[1]

In conclusion, the group believes that a public private partnership between financial intermediaries (whereby the financial intermediaries supervise the farmer's allocation of

resources) and the government (provide technical expertise and subsidized loans) can aid in the alleviation of these problems faced by farmers.

[1] <http://www.ifad.org/ruralfinance/policy/pf.pdf>

27. Future of Agricultural Economics ECN 4103 Group 2, University Of Guyana, Guyana

The immediate family is the first interaction that an individual will ever experience from the time they enter this world; that is, all the morals, ethics, manners, nutritional habits and anything relating to the social development of anyone all starts in the home. We would like to steer this post in the direction of the nutritional habits that are formed in an individual's immediate social interaction at home.

Family plays a very important role in the nutrition of its members. Usually most nutritional habits are not by the individual's own decision, but because that individual was born into that way of life in their household or because of some constraint or another. For instance, if someone is born into a vegetarian family they will most likely develop vegetarian habits; if an individual is born into a family who lives in poverty then that individual may be constrained to a different diet from someone who is better off; if an individual is born into a busy working class family then they will probably eat a lot of fast food than those individuals who have persons to prepare home cooked food. Given these scenarios, it can be seen that the nutrition of individuals are habits that are formed in the home and some of these habits may not be by choice but by constraints such as time and finances.

It is also known that habits are hard to be broken, especially when it is an instilled way of life. Hence, major intervention will be needed in order to reach out to the different types of families and their different cultures in society in order to break the bad nutritional habits in pursuit of a healthier life. These interventions can be in the form of public awareness that there is malnutrition in society through the civil society, private sector and government by means of the media in terms of advertisements. Another worthy venture to intervene is through public outreach programmes such home garden/farm or community farm establishment in order to grow healthier food for those who cannot afford to buy and those who are too busy to go to the markets.

28. UG Agricultural Economics Focus 2014, University of Guyana, Guyana

This post seeks to show how the civil society, private sector and government can play a role in strengthen the application of social relations and networks for food security and nutrition from the perspective of the students of Group 6, Agriculture Economics, University of Guyana.

The civil society, private sector and government can play a role in strengthening the application of social relations and networks for food security and nutrition. Social relations play a major role in food security around the world in most rural areas; most farms are located in the rural areas. Prior to marketing their produce, there was the presence of self-sufficiency in the rural community, so if a family does not produce a certain kind of food they would trade with their neighbors and also give away excess foods to other neighbor who does not have a farm of their own the persons living in rural areas is like an extended family. The urban areas on the other hand, people do not share excess food or do self-sufficiency so they compete for the limited food available to them, and because most food items are expensive you would never find urban citizens giving or sharing food with others. Families living in urban areas most times do not socialize with other families due to the hours of work and after school activities, so we find that some persons don't even know their neighbors. The civil society, private sector and government can all play major roles in strengthening social relations and networks for food security. The above mentioned groups can play a major role by investing in educational seminars in the area, informing the citizen of improving access their access to nutritious food by working together. These seminars should

involve; Community residents, the local health department, civic organizations and neighborhood commissions and schools or colleges. They should provide information on starting food cooperatives, community buying clubs (purchasing food in bulks to get it at farm gate prices), the usage of food Kiosks (local or community farmers), and the establishment of community farms and farmer's market. The CSOs, private sectors and government can also plan a local food fair in the community, this will encourage local farmers to showcase their produce to other residence and this will help in the establishment of trust among residence which encourages more local purchases and also allow them to interact with each other by sharing farming and health tips. The above mentioned approach by the CSOs, private sector and government encourages social relations among residents, since it allows them to participate and interact with each other. This kind of communication develops trust so person will be more comfortable purchasing produce, working together and sharing with each other. This would improve the overall access to food in the entire community, resident's participation and development of the community.

29. UGAgri Group7, University of Guyana, Guyana

This conversation follows the testimonies we've heard from our group members on their experiences securing food in different geo-economic settings: urban, sub-urban and rural. What they've generally shared, with the exception of the suburban and rural areas, is that accessing food through social connections and not through private means, is very difficult. We think this is because the model that's so successful in Ms. Omosa's Kenyan village and our own Liza's Wakenaam- and that's based on trust, cooperation, benevolence, and a kind of social policing to keep strayers from the norm in check, can't be easily replicated in an urban locale.

But do these social associations in the city necessarily have to take the form of what we saw in Wakenaam or Linden? In fact, these experiences aren't even duplicated in many similar rural and suburban villages, particularly in those that aren't heavily agro-based. Rural communities like Wakenaam complain of dwindling supplies of food from their own community and island farmers that can't be easily supplemented by kitchen gardens. Farmers point to the unpredictable weather, the lack of irrigation, high costs of production- mainly from the increasing prices of inputs- and so on.

What's needed is an eco-system, meaning that the system is largely self-sustaining; an eco-system that allows communities to establish groups driven first by personal needs to secure nutritious and cheap food. We advise that producers and consumers form self-help groups- grassroots organizations and the more formal cooperatives- to provide and to obtain respectively a sustainable supply of food. The FAO has identified in its project document on the value of cooperatives, Building Innovative Institutions for Food Security that the first step for any small farmers is to work together in groups to address their immediate practical or survival needs or shared interests relating to food security. Shermain says about Linden:

"Farmers are unable to provide a sustainable amount of produce for supply in Linden, especially with the increase in prices for farm inputs and the cost of marketing. Thus, many of them have to travel to the big city, Georgetown to purchase goods for resale in Linden. Through a farmer's cooperative, the farmers can purchase farm inputs in bulk which makes it cheaper to access and in some cases the inputs like heavy machinery can even be shared. A simple initiative which was done in Linden by West Watooka farmers was to secure a prime spot near the Wismar/Mackenzie bridge linking the two villages too establish a Sunday market. The market was maintained collectively, all costs and insurance associated covered jointly. And, this was driven by the frustration of local farmers fed up with their produce being wasted from no available markets."

The cooperative model can also be applied to large groups of consumers, in any setting. In most parts of Guyana-city, country- we have a simple, extremely effective way of raising money: the Box Hand. It's a way of saving money that requires a large group of people and strong policing. Yet, it

works and it's popular among working groups in cities in particular, which flouts the popular notion that everyone in a city is an island, cut off from the rest and sustaining only itself. Consumers can form cooperatives formally to purchase bulk produce and access loans for food or small groups of friends may form food clubs to do the same. In either case, the decision to form these groups is made through shared interests and goals.

30. UGAgri Group7, University of Guyana, Guyana

UGAgri Group 7's previous post dealt with private intervention of producers and consumers, in advocating social relations to ensure food security and health. This post is a bit of an extension to that; here we incorporate the government's and civil society's contribution to the same.

Public policy intervention for food security either by state or non-state agencies to determine whether it is appropriate, two criteria at least must be met: 1) In strengthening survival mechanisms, not only of the most vulnerable families but also of their most vulnerable members by explicitly focusing on any interfamily inequality in the impact of contingencies. And, 2) In complementing rather than undermining people's own efforts at dealing with contingencies, with people being seen as actors in the process of change rather than passive recipients of aid and relief. The Government of Guyana's Grow Local Campaign encouraging households to keep kitchen gardens is one such way. Governments can be much more creative than this though in encouraging consumers to capitalise on community, familial and professional networks to help themselves secure their own food security in ways that aren't defined by the government by individual preferences expressed collectively.

Regarding producers, governments should seek to influence the environment affecting the agricultural sector, encouraging linkages between producers at all stages of production. This kind of surplus supply not only stabilises supply but prices and improves conditions affecting food security. The Government of Guyana has encouraged producers to do same in several efforts such as the Grow More Campaign. The FAO has made a point of saying in their project document[1] on building cooperatives to fuel rural development that the leaders of civil society are instrumental in organising groups in local communities and guiding self-help groups in taking collective action (pg.72). The NGO, Myrada in India taught small groups of farmers lessons on credit management. What the FAO has recognized as important, and too often is overlooked, is the confidence that managing their funds gives these members to achieve their objectives.

[1] Building Innovative Institutions for Food Security

31. Eileen Omosa, facilitator of the discussion

Learning Never Comes to an End!

What did you learn from the 22 days' of discussions on the role of social relations and networks in food security and nutrition?

I have gained new knowledge from both the content of your input and the processes used: One of the many ideas I am taking away from the discussions is that active communication and open sharing (Kent's sharing-caring communities) results in strengthened networks and social relations. Drawing on the example of use of working groups (University of Guyana) to make contributions to the discussion, I learnt that active communication results in more sharing as one group's input on a particular issue acts as a catalyst, getting other groups in the network to generate new ideas, and the sharing continues. I foresee our networks growing as we continue to share information, innovative ideas and food items.

What lesson are you taking away from the discussions?

Eileen

32. Pradip Kumar Nath, National Institute Of Rural Development, India

Dear Issue raiser Eileen,

I am Pradip Kumar Nath , CAS & DM, NIRD, Hyderabad.

It is the extent of information that comes suo-moto that determines the level of Food & Nutrition Security.

Not to speak of Rural India, even Urban India has immensely benefited from the mobile connectivity and the Social media by the Net connectivity.

It is the connectivity which has diversified the food baskets even in the poor households.

It is surprising to find the the so-called Chocolates - international brands like Cadbury which have entered the remotest part of India.

And during my Field study of different research projects , I happened to learn that the Adivasi (Scheduled casted as designated by the Constitution of INDIA) know well what the chocolates give to their body and in what way that can be used.

I have the privilege of having a cup of tea mixed with Cadbury chocolates in the absence of SUGAR & Milk, in a remote village near Gadiras in Sukma District of Chatisgarh - INDIA.

It is not a question of what is the knowledge base- but the choice of products which have increased manifold due to increased level of Information at the disposal of Common man.

Next comes the Major Trail blazing Acts like -- the present Food Security Act in INDIA & the erstwhile MGNREGS- the biggest ever Self Employment Programme ever taken up in such a massive scale by any Government in the world.

Yes, the MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) has brought about a sea change by pumping in a huge amount of money into the kitty of the Rural households in India. Having equal wages to both man & women these wage wage-seekers have really been empowered to conquer the menace of Food & Nutrition Security.

Only big question will be how to ensure a sort of changes in food habits of Indians to switch over to a staple diet constituting items(food material) other than Rice & Wheat.

That is, how to go about a food package bereft of Rice & wheat.

It may not be possible to have self- sufficiency with Rice + Wheat combination as Staple diets.

Without adequately supplementing our dietary requirements with millets & other substitutes, it seems a gigantic task to go for self sufficiency ensuring food & Nutrition Security to a population of 1.23 billion.

The other is putting up the dietary packages with locally available seasonal fruits and the extensive increase in production of the same. Fruits like Mango, Banana, Papaya,Guava,Amla,Kedu, Jack Fruits, water Melons etc.

Thanking You.

Sincertely Yours,

Pradip Kumar Nath,

Centre For Agrarian Studies & Disaster Mitigation, National Institute of Rural Development(NIRD),

Hyderabad,

33. UG Agricultural Economics Focus 2014, University of Guyana, Guyana

What is your understanding of social relations and networks in food and nutritional security, and do you have examples of the role they play in the attainment of food and nutritional security?

As a result of the progress of regressive globalization and the increasing concentration of wealth in a few hands, the economic gap has widened between the rich and the poor which has often affected the survival of social groups. This inequality is one of the core elements of failure in the eradication of hunger and poverty.

Social relations are relationships between two or more people. In general, it involves the actions of a person or people, which solicits a reaction from the other person or people, and is the underpinning of a society and its social structure. Networking on the other hand, is the interaction with others to exchange information with a view to developing professional or social contacts.

Nutrition security goes beyond food security because it considers a community's access to essential nutrients, not just calories. Fertilizers play a significant role in food security by helping farmers in a given country, produce enough food domestically to meet the caloric needs of that country's population. Yet, fertilizers also play an important role in nutrition security by facilitating access to a balanced diet that includes all of the essential nutrients that is primary, secondary and micronutrients. According to the International Fertilizer Industry Association, micronutrient fertilization programs should target Zinc, selenium and boron to ensure sufficient quantities of these nutrients in human diets. This is known as "farming for health". The World Health Organization (WHO) attributes 800,000 deaths each year to zinc deficiency. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, also found that close to 50% of the soils in the world where cereal grains are grown are deficient in zinc. Fertilizers help increase the level of zinc found in food crops, and it is also key to fighting malnutrition and under-nutrition in human and animals.

Social relations and networking plays a pivotal role in rural communities across Guyana. Ideally the distance and lack of transportation, you find people willing to exchange with neighboring villages. Cattle farmers and poultry farmers give manure to agriculture farmers who in exchange give some of their produce (cash crops). This occurs when good relationships exist between neighbours and even villages. These are the types of relationships that can develop through social relation and networking because the need of each person is known before the exchange takes place.

It is through social relations and networking that many multilateral organizations such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many regional associations such as Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) and the Caribbean and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) have made recommendations to governments to reduce the internal gap and dedicate more resources for human development. According to these organizations government should address basic food production systems with job creation, increase low salaries and subsidies for the marginalized and promote cheap prices of basic food for the urban poor. These recommendations are directly linked food security to the wider concept of human security.

Growing up everyone knows everyone. After migrating to Region four, an urban area. I was now engulfed in a community where everyone fights to survive. In this community people are not willing to help each other; instead it is a matter of survival of the fittest. According to the WHO there are three pillars that determine food security: food availability, food access, and food use. The FAO adds a fourth pillar: the stability of the first three dimensions of food security over time. In 2009, the World Summit on Food Security stated that the "four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization, and stability. Just to give a brief idea as to what the different pillars of food security are. Food availability relates to the food supplied through production, distribution, and exchange. Food access refers to the affordability and allocation of food, as well as the preferences of individuals and households. The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights noted that

the causes of hunger and malnutrition are often not a scarcity of food but an inability to access available food, usually due to poverty. Poverty can limit access to food, and can also increase how vulnerable an individual or household is to food price spikes. Access depends on whether the household has enough income to purchase food at prevailing prices or has sufficient land and other resources to grow its own food. Households with enough resources can overcome unstable harvests and shortages and maintain their access to food. Food stability refers to the ability to obtain food over time. The final pillar of food security is food utilization, which refers to the metabolism of food by individuals.

34. Future of Agricultural Economics ECN 4103 Group 2, University Of Guyana, Guyana

This post contributes a success story of how social relations in a close knitted rural community have helped to instil the importance of food security and good nutrition in its community members.

I, Dahvis Caldeira, grew up in the village located on the West Coast of Berbice, Guyana. Being a keen observer of the activities in my household and the neighbourhood, I can attest to the fact that social relations has played a significant part in enhancing the environment as we embrace change. My father is an active planter and at such we have a kitchen garden. I remember the days of sitting on the steps watching my father plant, mold and water his crops while having memorable, warm conversations with me. This was generally the trend for most of my neighbours as kitchen gardens are very dominant in my rural community. The garden had every little necessity, from Eschallot and Peppers to season food, to local main courses such as Pumpkins, Bora, and Pakchoi. The neighbours would share whatever was harvested as well as produce such as Cashew, Pineapple and Owarra received from relatives on the river side areas.

Over the years this practice has not necessarily changed, but the scale of farming has increased. I recall my father along with other villagers, who also had kitchen gardens, attending meetings held among themselves. One farmer, who has a bountiful supply of land by the seaside, generously offered his land temporarily for farming by the villagers. These villagers, however, are not full time farmers but had various occupations; the farming was done in the afternoons or early morning before they left for work. This neighborhood bond and to some extent an informal agreement of the offering of the land came about from acts of love, unity and cooperation shared by the majority of the community. The villagers refer to themselves as "Brothers". This is in the sense that they attend the same church, have similar culture and is a part of a Brotherhood Union and knew each other for many years such that a common understanding as well as trust has developed. Following this agreement for the land to be offered, relevant actions such as fencing and dividing the land took place. Farming was then done both at home and the seaside. Some of the people, such as my neighbour who retired from his job, as well as those who lost their jobs, made farming their new occupation. As time progressed these farmers continued to pool their resources and bought a pump to access water from the sea as trenches dried up during Guyana's last El Niño season.

This agreement, which started off with five persons, has now grown and found themselves members of a cooperative society which provided the village with the medium necessary to allow some of the village produce to be marketed. The extra land available was well utilized since there was an extension to include an active Tilapia and chicken farm. My neighbour is now in partnership with members from the Ministry of Agriculture and would be seen from time to time extending invitations to youths in the village, by word of mouth, encouraging them to attend leadership training or management sessions coordinating by the Ministry. This effort is well praised because the workshops held not only apply to agriculture but can be applied to any field.

My father who continues to plant at both locations uses his produce for the family while the remaining is shared or sometimes given to the others for sale, because he uses farming as a form of exercise to keep him fit as he approaches old age. Apart from agriculture and the sharing of produce, an enthusiastic farmer, who is privileged to have a daughter residing overseas, has

donated a computer for use in the cooperative society. This enthusiast, in his remarks emphasized “This initiative was taken so that farmers can have adequate information as well as use the internet to learn about the different technology and methods available to deal with pest, as well as new seeds, fertilizers and also to address other issues and concerns to the community farmers.

35. University of Guyana Agriculture Economics Research Group 1, University of Guyana, Guyana

Social Relations and Observation of Rural Communities:

Cases Under Observation

The County of Berbice in Guyana
The Gold Phenomenon in Guyana

As we would have identified in our preceding post, we believe that the Social Relations Dependence Paradigm can be largely successful if the conditions that had been highlighted are held. The following exemplifies our claim as we observe relations in rural areas of Guyana.

The social relationships forged in the rural areas with respect to food security are strong in the many ‘countryside’ or outlying communities of Guyana. Branching from many stories heard told by grandparents about their younger days being involved in farming, we can find very strong social dependencies. For instance in the far reaching communities in West Coast Berbice in rural Guyana, after spending most of the week tending to crops on the farm, Thursday afternoons were designated for many families as a time for reaping produce so that early Friday mornings they could be transported to one of the large community markets. The incidence of market days coincides with the payday of the community’s largest employer-the Blairmont Sugar Estate- a social dependence evident here. Also, in many communities where rice cultivation was the major income earners, the formation of cooperatives to assist rice cultivators in acquiring collectively what they were incapable of acquiring individually. These rice cultivators were able to pool their resources together to obtain essential machinery such as Combine Harvesters, Tractor Ploughs and pumps for irrigation purposes.

Moving from Guyana’s coast to the interior villages where the recent ‘gold rush’ has taken place, many coastal dwellers have flocked interior communities in search of the precious metal- communities which were originally occupied by the Amerindians- Guyana’s indigenous people. These communities were usually involved in subsistence farming to cater for their own use, but with the influx of coastal dwellers, the issue of food security for the new immigrants was brought into question. From the experience of miners, the food security problem was averted when the Amerindians capitalized on the opportunity to transform their subsistence farming into income generating opportunities to cater for the food needs of miners in their vicinity.

Inherent in our cases are the conditions that we are outlined in our preceding post for this concept to bear fruit. It is noteworthy that these areas had/have not been subject to heavy competitive markets. With the devising of intensely competitive markets and modernization of the Berbice economy, one can observe that the level of social relations present has declined.

36. Future of Agricultural Economics ECN 4103 Group 2, University Of Guyana, Guyana

What roles do social relations and networks play in education, information sharing and policy formulation and implementation?

In the words of William Shakespeare:

*All the worlds a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits, and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.*

Social roles and networks play different roles in society depending on the situation ("situation specificity") and use.

Social relations and networks in Information Sharing

The sharing of information has transformed immensely from traditional methods which involved the use of "hear say" or 'word of mouth' to social medias and now social networks. Social network community fosters a more subjective and holistic disclosure of information. That is information and its dissemination is now readily available globally through the use of the internet. Gone are the days of having to sit in front of the television or the radio at a certain time to hear the news, or about job openings and new agricultural products. Information is now readily available as individuals, groups etc. seldom hesitates to post information received despite of its substance or relevance on Facebook, Twitter or any social media. Conversely the age of informal information sharing is not ruled out as individuals and farmers still learn about new products (seeds, fertilizer etc.) over a glass of drink at a corner shop as it is in the rural areas or on the public transportation system as they travel. In summation social relations and networks play an informal as well as a formal role in information sharing as information can now be accessed by a variety of means through formal and informal channels.

Social relations and networks in Policy formulation and Implementation

Policy formulation and its implementation requires more than having a goal to achieve. In formulating a policy it is important to have all the necessary information and it is in this sense that social relations and networks play apart. For instance in formulating a policy to allow farmers to access better seeds for planting; meetings must be carried out with famers in order to hear their views and negotiate with them so that a solution can be met. It is here that the benefits of decentralized management are seen as the top management must come to the bottom to better understand what is happening. Social networks can also aid in disseminating information to policy specialist about other countries that has implemented a similar policy and the process, success, failures they experienced. Social relations tend to bring that finishing effect to a policy as it is through interaction that we learn and are made aware of any situation as well as receive guidance and information about in this instance a policy that has been implemented or in its formulating stage.

Social relations and networks in Education

Education is defined as a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, or research. Therefore this transformation happens formally and informally once in the presence of individuals or even by themselves. Children for instance learn from playing with other children in the park (social interaction) or by chatting on the internet (social networks). The process of educating never stops once one is alive. That is to say a common conversation is educating as participants will leave each other learning something new or refreshing something that was already learnt. Farmers attending a workshop held by the ministry is a form of education as they will learn of new methods to deal with agriculture issues; also farmers conversing as they plan will learn about a new fertilizer another farmer is using on his yields or about the success a farmer in another part of the country has had using drip irrigation while surfing the internet. The roles of social networks and relations snow balls into each situation as while an individual may use social networks and relation to share information at the same time someone else in learning. Social relations are one of the first methods

of learning, sharing and growing as without these an individual is left alone in the sense that we can never really live without socializing with others.

37. Anna Antwi. GD Resource Center, Ghana

The food system is an important social, political and economic unifier in most rural settings in Ghana. Again, food festivals are held in many societies at the beginning of new harvesting season. Some of the festivals are: Yam festival, Deer hunting, draining of the Lagoon (“Bakatue”) for fish etc. All these festivals have specific names depending on the locality and the purpose. Aside being grateful to God for the food from the new harvest season and asking for rains and protection in the coming year, the festivals and seasons bring people together for socialization and networking around food (be it crops like maize, yam etc; animals such as fish, deer etc). Families also come together in preparing, sharing and eating of specific foods during celebrations of any of human life cycle like birth, puberty, marriage, death and its related ceremonies. It also builds a sense of belongingness, and common purpose for households and families to keep in touch. Families unite, eat, share information, settle disputes, and advise each other during such times.

In close societies, no-one goes hungry for lack of food. Food is freely shared and that reduces food poverty and vulnerability especially in rural areas and compound houses in urban areas. In effect, everyone is each other’s keeper. Nursing mothers and old ladies (grandmothers) who stay at home prepare food for children and the sick to ensure food availability or access at meal times. The women also ensure nutritional wellbeing of all household members. Household members and at times able-female community members take turns to provide for women who have delivered. Traditional foods served by these women are more nutritious and have medicinal purposes. The extended family structure acts as a support system by providing labour for farm activities and environmental sanitation to ensure access to nutritious food. Farmers produce all kinds of foods needed in any particular setting to ensure wellbeing of their households in particular and the community at large.

Presently, societal values have degenerated and the current situation is “each one for him and God for us all”. This may be due to a number of factors such as; over use of electronic and electrical gadgets such as TVs, radios, phones etc for communication and educational purposes. Others including globalization, liberalized policies, urbanization and probably population growth have affected the food system of societies. People are consuming fewer foods in their natural states and more processed foods with more inorganic chemicals affecting health. There is growing numbers of fast food outlets springing up all over the place, limited control over the use of agro-chemicals, less inter-cropping and mixed farming (almost all farms are into mono-cropping and large commercial farms with more use of synthetic agro –chemicals). Parents are too busy working or looking for money, and have less time to cook and spend fewer hours at home to the extent that they are not aware of what the households are consuming. Most working people are also eating from outside without knowing the nutritional value of the food. Urbanization has also contributed to the societal break down. Societal relations and networks have also broken down leaving more people to fend for themselves and their nucleus family.

It is not only national governments, private sector and civil society but traditional rulers and local authorities (in a decentralized system) can support to ensure food and nutritional security at the household levels by using food-based approaches. Extension services can be used for nutrition knowledge sharing and technology transfer, farmers can be encouraged to diversify production (crops and animals) and all households to consume diversified nutritious diets. Researchers may go into bio-fortification of main staple crops, and general population may be encouraged to consume fruits and vegetables in addition to the body protection and building foods. The multi-sectoral approach to food and nutrition is a must in all countries. Communities need good portable water, and personnel to provide extension services in agriculture and health education. To conclude, we all have a stake in ensuring household food and nutrition security.

Anna Antwi (PhD).

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38. Moussa Na Abou Mamouda, AfricaAdapt, Senegal

I would like to highlight the crucial importance of the Social Capital especially in traditional African societies. Social Capital encompasses the institutions, the relationships between people, the way societies are organized, the way societies face together external shocks, etc. See [here](#) a paper I wrote on the role of Social Capital in dealing with food insecurity in a changing climate - a case study of Maradi, Southern Niger.

Moussa Na Abou Mamouda

39. Eileen Omosa, facilitator of the discussion

This was my first and it became a FIRST, thanks to each one of you.

In the past I have made contributions to on-line discussions, but this was the first time I initiated a topic and read through all the articles contributed to the discussion. The reason I remembered to log into

<http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/networks-for-FS> at least four times each day was to read and learn from your rich and captivating experiences. I can already feel the new knowledge pushing me to the field to put into practice some of the great ideas we have shared. Thanks to your individual contributions, many of us have learnt something new about social relations, networks, food security and nutrition, including:

- Networks help us understand our communities, our food habits and how to care for one another.
- Through networks and strong social relations, members get to share risks, thus spread it thin and in the process build inclusive communities void of situations of isolation and vulnerability.
- Strong social relations and networks are important vehicles for education and for sharing information and best practices on food security and nutrition.
- There are many success case studies out there; all we need do is continue to network long after the on-line discussion is closed.
- Social relations and networks promote the growth of income and help strengthen economic security; factors critical for the attainment of food security.
- Enables policy-makers and development practitioners to appreciate the dynamics of social differentiation and their consequences to food security and nutrition.
- Strong social relations and networks are relevant to both the needy and able in any society – as channels through which the able give and those in need receive.
- A public-private partnership between financial institutions and government can aid in the alleviation of challenges faced by farmers, to realize food security.
- Strong and diverse networks encourage and strengthen agricultural extension agents to share integrated messages with individuals and groups i.e. share information on nutrition, technology transfer, diversification of products (crops and animals) and the benefits of diversifying and diversified diets.

- Gender dimensions of social relations: women as majority of cultivators and providers of food to families and are depositories of knowledge on food and nutrition, therefore potential educators, and channels through which to transmit valuable knowledge from one generation to another.
- Social relations and networks in food and nutritional security are important but under practiced and taken for granted in our day to day food endeavours.
- While some of you pointed out a decrease in social relations and networks with increased urbanization; others differed, noting that social relations and networks are relevant and practiced in both rural and urban settings. Strong relations and networks are still alive in urban settings – when auntie travels across town to deliver a basket of the iron-rich *chinsaga* vegetables she bought from the grocery store after her friend, a clerk at the store called to inform her that the occasional vegetable was available on that day. Or a friend informs followers on social media of the upcoming farmers’ market in the city.

As I noted at the very beginning of our discussions, Mama was able to access the best ingredients to prepare the infant’s nutritious weaning food, thanks to her good social relations and networks, which she still works hard to sustain. Mama’s ability to relate with people both at the social and market levels is sometimes all it takes to achieve food and nutritional security.

I conclude by saying that ‘the market is one place through which to satisfy our food security and nutritional needs, but strong social relations and network is where the action starts.’

On my own behalf and that of fellow discussants, we say a big thank you, gracias, mercie to the organizers and facilitators of the overall discussion list at FAO.

Eileen Omosa