

Food In/Security in Rural Rwanda

Women's Understanding, Experiences and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to probe further into the manifestations and dynamics of food insecurity in Rwanda by attending to women's voices and experiences. By interviewing women from Nyabihu, a rural district in the Western province of Rwanda, this thesis addresses questions of how women in rural Rwanda understand and experience food insecurity as well as the strategies they use in order to prevent and cope with it. The study also explores women's views of how ongoing agricultural reforms affect household food security in the Rwandan context.

Theoretically, this thesis departs from literature on food security, the global debate about whether food security is a technical or political problem, as well as the study of development and gender. The analytical framework of the study addresses availability of food, access to food and the stability of the two, as well as the gender dimensions of household food security among women in Rwanda. Methodologically this study is a qualitative case study. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 51 female respondents and seven informants.

This study's findings support the view that food security is not only a technical problem that can be solved through increased food production, but that it is also crucial to understand how access to food is experienced by various groups of people. Moreover, the results indicate that there is an obvious gap between government food security policy and women's experiences. The stories from the respondents reveal that food insecurity is partly related to the implementation of agricultural reforms in Nyabihu district. The study also shows that food security in Rwanda needs to be understood in relation to issues of land and poverty since these play an important part in determining women's food in/security. In addition, women's experiences differ depending on their financial situation and their access to land. This study also found that intra-household dynamics such as distribution of household resources, gendered power relations between men and women, as well as participation in households' income decisions play a part in food in/security in Rwandan households.

Theoretically, this study contributes to existing food security theories by deepening the understanding of food insecurity from a gendered perspective and fine-tuning the analytic framework. The empirical contribution this study makes consists of the focus on women and food insecurity in Rwandan rural households, raising issues with regard to household dynamics partly ignored in previous studies.

Key words: Food security, availability, access, gendered dimensions, coping strategies, prevention strategies, women's experiences.