

ASSESSMENT OF FOOD ACCESSIBILITY IN THE BIE PROVINCE (ANGOLA)

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Abstract

Angola belongs to the countries with a very high rate of prevalence of undernourished population (FAO, 1999). The study assesses a food accessibility of randomly selected respondents in Kuito and communities nearby in the Bie Province. Various reasons contributing to the current situation related to access to food and the rate of influence of food inaccessibility on people's life quality are discussed. The majority of surveyed households are engaged in agricultural activities. More than half of the households cover their food consumption needs from own production, which cannot offer well-balanced diet and make people more vulnerable.

Key words: food accessibility, Angola, people's vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

Food problem is one of many consequences of the long-lasting war. Regions most affected by long and heavy fights together with the enormous forced migration of population and troops of soldiers are slowly recuperating from economic and social destruction. Agriculture has been deeply influenced by the war consequences. Casualties, disability, loss of schooling, savings, livestock, seed and tools have lead to the current unsatisfactory situation of agriculture. Even though the climate is generally favourable for crop cultivation the soils tend to be of low fertility. Agriculture in the Bie Province is still dependent on the external assistance, especially in terms of knowledge, skills and agricultural inputs supply. 70% of population (MINADER, 2006) is involved in agriculture or related activities. Food insecurity, a low level of health care, HIV/AIDS prevalence and limited agricultural possibilities increase people's vulnerability.

Food accessibility is only one aspect of the food security. Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is then the application of this concept at the family level, with individuals within households at the focus of concern. Physical unavailability of food, population's lack of social or economic access to adequate food and inadequate food utilization form the framework of food insecurity (FIVIMS).

Objective

The objective of this study consists in an assessment of food accessibility of randomly selected respondents in Kuito and communities nearby in the Bie Province. Accessibility of basic food items, preferences in food consumption and rate of influence of inaccessibility of some food items on population were studied. Results

could serve as a source in decision making process related to future agricultural activities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The survey process contains of following parts:

1. analysis of secondary data
2. training in using methods of Rapid Rural Appraisal and participatory methods to collect and understand information from the selected target group
3. fieldwork in different areas. Data collection and direct analysis within the whole team. The fieldwork was executed in June–December 2006. To gather information there were used the following tools: focus group discussion on agricultural production, individual household visits and interviews and structured and semi-structured questionnaires. As the survey languages were used Portuguese and Umbundu.
4. analysis – final organization of collected data, writing summaries, discussions at the regular meetings.

The study was covered by *Centro de Educação Agrário da Província do Bié (CEAB)/Center of Agricultural Education in the Bie Province* established within the Czech Development Cooperation.

The survey sample is formed by 100 respondents. 55% (55) of respondents live in a city (Kuito) or in its suburb, 45% (45) then in countryside areas. It can be stated that in the survey sample, the urban and suburban population is represented balanced in relation with the total amount of Angolan population living in urban area (53%) (World Bank, 2005). Kuito is a capital of the Bie province. The estimated population of Kuito municipality counts approximately 500 000. The estimation of city population is not known.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Household characterization

Angolans belong to a collectivist society (Hofstede, 1991). The consistency of larger family is their nature but also a need coming from the local conditions. Only 3.3 % of respondents live alone. In contrary, the absolute majority of respondents share a household with more family members. 22.4% of respondents stated that their households share five family members, 19% share a household with six more people (7 family members) and 13.8% with five more people (6 family members). 29.3% then live with more than seven family members in a household. The remaining respondents (15.5%) form families of four or less members. The typical respondent is more likely a town-dweller living in a household of five members.

Food production

A majority of Angolan population is directly linked with agricultural activities. One of the sections of the survey was focused on the gathering information about respondents' relation to land tenure and their running activities related to land. 28.8% of the respondents consider themselves as the farmers working on their

own land, 8.5% of the respondents represent the farmers working on land of someone else. 75% of the respondents did not provide sufficient information about this problematic. As a possible explanation could be regarded the fact that land property relations have not been clearly determined so far.

Even though more than a half of surveyed sample represent urban population, 81% of the respondents stated that they have cultivated various crop plants or participate in food production in other way. Only 19% of the respondents are not engaged in agricultural activities. These results indicate that low-income households solve problematic of food supply with their own production.

71.4% from the 19% of the respondents which are not engaged in agricultural activities admitted that at least one member of their household participates in food production through agriculture. These results support a significance of agriculture for livelihood strategies of local households.

The most commonly cultivated crops are maize and beans cultivated in a consortium (98% of the respondents) and cassava. Other crops and their cultivation by the respondents are given in a Figure 1.

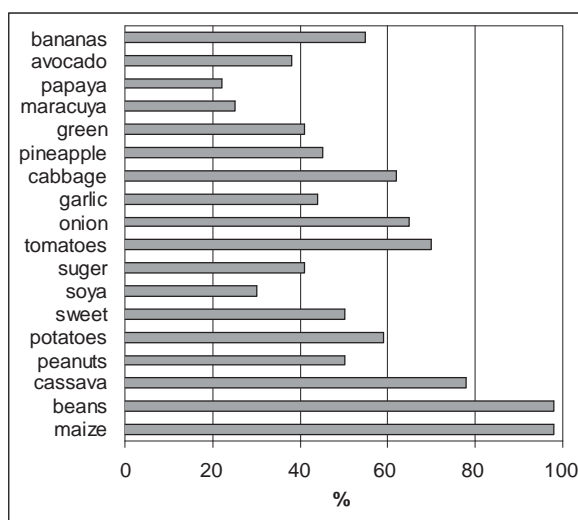


Fig. 1: Percentage expression of cultivation of various crops

The main identified purpose of sugar cane cultivation a distilled beverage production (*caxi*). *Caxi* production belongs to the significant income generation activities at a household level. On the other hand *caxi* production highly contributes to the overall problem of alcoholism.

Livestock production is rare. 11.2% of the respondents keep poultry and only 2% keep goats and

pigs. Beef cattle are scarce and only used for animal traction.

Management of food products

The term of food product involves fresh food as well as processed food products (dried products, flour, beverages). 25% of the respondents keep the complete agricultural products for their own consumption while 34.1% of the respondents sell smaller part of their products and bigger keep for themselves. A half of products is kept by 36.4% of the respondents. None of the respondents sells a complete production.

At the local markets 55% of the respondents sell a higher amount of their food products, 30.8% smaller amount of their food products and 17.5% do not sell there.

Selling the higher amount of their products to retailer is used by 17.9% of the respondents, 30.8% of the respondents sell in this way smaller amount of their production and 51.3% of the respondents do not use this way.

Exchange of own products with the neighborhood is selected by 53.8% of the respondents for smaller amount of their production. Exchange of smaller amount of own products with other vendors at markets is practiced by 41% of the respondents.

Less accessible and not accessible food

The following list presents such basic food which the respondents consider for whatever cause as less accessible or not accessible at all. The most frequent food items belonging to this group are as follows: oil, sugar, salt, eggs, meat, rice, wheat, vegetables.

The reasons of this inaccessibility and rate of influence on people's life quality according to the respondents are shown in Figure 2. The respondents identified the following reasons of inaccessibility of selected food items:

1) these food items are too expensive

Food is relatively expensive in the Bie Province and hence people opt for such food items which make them feel full. The preferences of food choice related to nutritive content were not reported. Basic awareness of food security and food safety as well as information about food and health interaction is still insufficient,

especially in isolated rural areas. Meat belongs to the group of the most expensive food items. Its insufficiency at the markets is caused by very a low or absent livestock production as a consequence of the long-lasting war. More than half of the respondents admitted a very high influence rate of food price on their quality of life.

2) these food items are not at markets in a sufficient amount

Insufficient amount of the food items listed above is mainly caused by still "emergency" approach to agricultural systems even if it was recognized that transition from emergency to development process should have been initiated earlier (Whiteside, 2005). Low crop diversity, lack of seeds of good quality, low level of agricultural knowledge, lack of tools represent only the most obvious causes of the current situation. Despite the high agricultural potential of the Bie Province, only few crops are cultivated. Wheat and rice as most demanded by the respondents are still missing on the fields. Recognition of this situation by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Angola, a call for rehabilitation of wheat and rice cultivation and their post-harvest processing was implemented among other recommendations submitted at XXVIII Consultative Council of MINADER in 2006. As the Figure 2 shows the respondents perceive the insufficient supply of the given food items as significant.

3) to gain these food items is difficult due to a distance of markets

Very weak transport infrastructure is the main constraint to market opportunities. The poor conditions of the

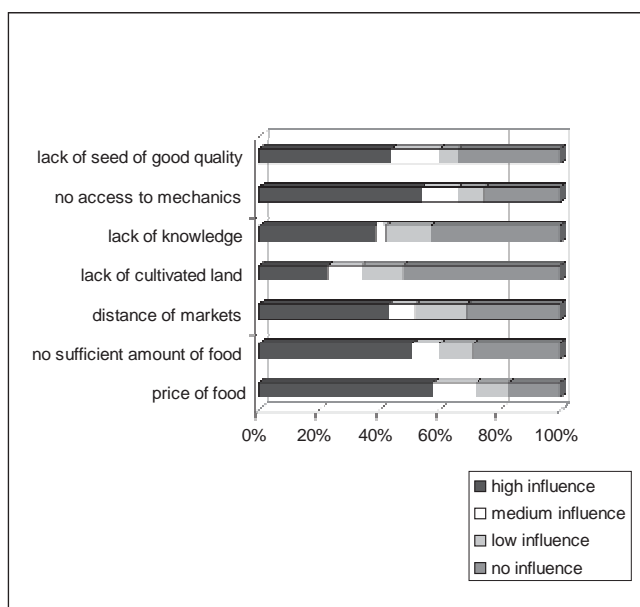


Fig. 2: Rate of influence of various reasons of food inaccessibility on people's life quality

¹ Available on-line from: [www.minader.org/eventos/xxviiconselhoconsultivo\(2006\).h](http://www.minader.org/eventos/xxviiconselhoconsultivo(2006).h)

road and non-functioning of the railway cause most of the high transition costs at markets. Access to the main roads from isolated community is a major problem. Tertiary roads and farmers' ability to buy bicycles and ox-carts can be considered as limitation factors. Distance of an urban market is usually one or two days of walk which significantly increases vulnerability of walking women (assault, rape).

4) the respondents cannot produce the food items by themselves because of lack of cultivated land
According to the results shown in Figure 2, the respondents do not consider lack of cultivated land as a significant constraint of food production. This fact is in accordance with the results of the survey lead by Norfolk (Norfolk, 2004) which reported that almost all families had recognized access and tenure over more land than they were presently able to cultivate. In most cases this was land, in addition to areas of fallow land that had never been cleared or cultivated (i.e., virgin bush land).

5) *the respondents cannot produce the food items by themselves even if they have a land they do not know how to produce them*

Knowledge of good practices of soil preparation, crop cultivation and crop rotation seem to be at average level among the Bie population. Rural population knows the basic practices related to cultivation of maize, beans, manioc, peanuts, and potatoes. The knowledge of cultivation and post-harvest processing of former cash crops as coffee and sisal are kept only by elder people. Transfer of agricultural information was interrupted during the war period and its rehabilitation is in the initial phase fully supported by MINADER or NGOs. By interviewing the rural youth it was reported that they approve only very limited recognition of knowledge of the generation of their parents.

Knowledge related to soil protection and utilization of organic residues is very rare and seems to be as a consequence of Portuguese agricultural practices in Bie. In terms of knowledge and skills realizing in livestock production the situation is even worse. In the war period livestock was the first part of agriculture hardly damaged. Cattle almost disappeared from the Bie province and nowadays it suffers its rehabilitation only with the support of MINADER and NGOs' distribution programmes.

As it is obvious from the Figure 2, less than 40% of the respondents assume that with better knowledge they could improve their access to hardly accessible food items. On the other hand, more than 40% do not assume so.

6) *the respondents cannot produce food items them-selves because even if they have a land and knowledge related to cultivation they do not have access to mechanics of good quality*

The level of mechanization of agriculture is low mainly because of unavailability and high prices of agricultural

machines and its implements. Most of the agricultural operations are practiced within hand-tool technology, only small part as draught-animal technology.

7) *the respondents cannot produce the food items (especially crop and vegetable production) because of no access to seed of good quality*

Access to seed of good quality is very low. Currently there run several programmes of seed distribution supported by MINADER and NGOs – CARE International and Africare. However, the results are not very satisfactory since the main obstacle is seen in a low and not complex technical support, even in the NGOs' distribution programmes. Apart this, seed of good quality at markets are beyond rural population's financial means. In the majority of cases the peasants produce seed themselves. In practice it means putting aside a part of the production; store it to the next sowing. There are identified two crucial factors influencing the yield of this seed. First, seed is smaller, with a low germinative capacity and often damaged. Secondly, during storage time losses can achieve even more than 50% of stored amount. The causes mainly consist in fungal, mould and pests attack.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the surveyed households are engaged in agricultural and related activities. Variability of food production is limited and do not offer a well-balanced diet to local population. A low accessibility or an inaccessibility of certain food items is above all caused low inputs in agriculture and limited market opportunities. As a consequence, insecure food supply situation do not only lower people's life quality but in addition it can cause the adoption of risk behaviour increasing so people's overall vulnerability.

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