

# Does Inclusion in the Food Environment Mean Better Food Security?

Insights From the Lived Experiences of Communities in Thailand and Lao PDR

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Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy Week

BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH

DIETS AND NUTRITION IN PROTRACTED CONTEXTS

INNOVATIVE METHODS, TOOLS AND METRICS

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## 1. Research on external food environments

Food insecurity remains a global sustainable development priority

Food environment research informs external dimensions of food insecurity

Community-level research can shed light on social and cultural realities

## 2. Eliciting community perspectives

Qualitative study embedded in long-term participatory research

Study sites in rural Chiang Mai (Thailand) & Vientiane (Lao PDR)

16 community consultations and 2-hour focus group discussions

Thematic analysis of key issues in food insecurity research

## 3. Qualitative data yielded 4 main themes

**Theme 1**

Dietary diversity research can neglect local “food” such as vitamins, supplements, herbs, or insects

CRICKET FARM, LAOS

*We eat sour fruits and papaya salad together at the farm.*

FEMALE FOCUS GROUP, LAOS

**Theme 2**

Food environments are dynamic and social spaces

*Growing our own vegetable allows us to not have to buy them. [...] We only eat what grows on our fence. And we eat banana flowers, banana trunk. We put them in a curry.*

FEMALE FOCUS GROUP, THAILAND

**Theme 3**

Food sovereignty vs. inclusion into the food environment

**Theme 4**

Food insecurity and broader human security concerns are closely related

*R5: Say during the period when they disallow us from burning the forest, we can't go find food in the forest. If they [ie. the forest authorities] see us, they would check what we have in our bag.*

*Even a lighter can get us arrested.*

*Q: Right. So, if you have this [GPS] device with you, and it just happens that you go to the forest finding food [...]*

*R5: Yes! I mean we don't do anything [wrong], but what would the others think about us?*

FEMALE FOCUS GROUP, THAILAND

## 4. Rethinking food environment research

Consider actual behaviour in (dynamic) food environments

Revisit dichotomy between consumer and food vendor

Tailor dietary diversity research to local realities

Gauge acceptability of food research with communities

Photo credits: Nurturing Lives in the Forest documentary (“Theme 3) and Marco J Haenssger (remainder)

The Team

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The Project

“Activity spaces and household exclusion from food environments” is an interdisciplinary and mixed-method research project funded by the IMMANA Competitive Research Grant (ref. IMMANA 3.03). The project aims to develop a new index of household exclusion from the external food environment through geo-spatial tracking techniques, behavioural analysis, and theoretical framing through the concept of activity spaces. The community level EFE will also be mapped by identifying all elements of the EFE that are relevant to the respondent households. The activity spaces that households occupy in relation to the EFE may be constrained by socio-demographic characteristics and endowments and by food preferences and social and cultural norms. The mapping of activity spaces will capture variation in activity spaces over seasons and by gender, and link behavioural patterns to nutritional indicators.

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