

Extended Abstract

Food Security Practices of 4Ps Women in Urban Coastal Areas in Iloilo City, Philippines

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Introduction

Household food security has become a serious concern in the Philippines. Approximately 17.5 million Filipinos are still undernourished and 33.6 % of children are stunted (FAO 2015). Meanwhile, 19 % of the whole population live with a daily budget of less than Php 50.00 or USD \$1.25 (FAO 2015). Poor nutritional status is partly caused by food insecurity - a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life (FAO 2016). Food insecurity is influenced by the unavailability of food, insufficient purchasing power, and inappropriate distribution or inadequate use of food at the household level (FAO 2016).

Household food security, when viewed through an urban lens, is a key developmental challenge because low-income groups who rely heavily on market purchases for consumption spend the largest share of their income on procuring food (Battersby 2012; Floro and Swain 2009). Moreover, urban food security is viewed as secondary to rural food security and analysis has been largely framed as an issue of production so that solutions and frameworks adopted are designed for the rural challenge with urban agriculture as the main response (Battersby 2012). However, food insecurity in urban areas is not triggered by absolute food shortages but by failures of households to be able to

access food (Battersby 2012). In addition, spatial dimensions have been neglected in the analysis in terms of how people actually navigate their foodscapes (e.g. where they work and reside and where they buy food) and the availability of space for food production.

Equally important are gender dimensions in the way households respond to food insecurity. Women are key players in overcoming urban household food insecurity (Floro and Swain 2012). They also play predominant roles in food trading but also act as food producers, food preparers, and in-charge of income budgeting as primary caregivers in homes (Karl 2009; IIED 2013). They also grow traditional varieties of vegetables, herbs and spices in their home gardens.

Yet, there are socio-cultural, institutional, and behavioural factors which limit women's capability to access food for their families. These include the perceptions of both men and women (and women significantly more than men) that husbands should receive priority treatment in the family. As part of their reproductive role, women are held responsible for properly feeding their children and the household work force. However, they often do not have sufficient decision-making power and access to productive resources to increase own food production or buy food, unless new opportunities are created (Battersby 2012).

This paper investigates the experiential measures of food security by 30 women in 3 coastal villages (Calaparan, Sto. Nino Norte and Sto. Nino Sur) in the highly urbanized Iloilo City that has almost 500,000 residents. Between March-April 2016, ten females were selected from each village. These women were from among the 928 families under the 4Ps (Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program or Bridging Program for the Filipino Family) in the 3 coastal villages. The 4Ps is a human development measure of the national government that provides conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor, to improve the health, nutrition, and the education of children aged 0-18.

Methods

In Iloilo City, Philippines, the main land uses are residential, institutional and commercial uses. Light industries are allowed and only 4 % of land is utilized for agriculture. Study sites were the 3 coastal villages of Arevalo district, namely, Sto. Nino Sur, Sto. Nino Norte and Calaparan. The villages are the largest coastal urban barangays in terms of population and land area. The type of soil is sandy loam which is not ideal for growing crops. The 3 villages are vulnerable to typhoons, storm surge, water level rise, flood, salt intrusions, earthquakes, and fire. The latest profiles of the 3 coastal areas indicate the main sources of livelihood as: fish vending, and selling of other marine products such as shells and shrimps. Other sources of livelihood are food vending, manual labor, sari-sari (local variety) store owner, jeepney and pedicab drivers, government and private employees, and overseas Filipino workers. The 3 villages abound with eateries or 'carinderias' and water refilling stations. The local water district provides the source for drinking and other domestic uses.

The questionnaire included the respondents' personal information, their access to physical, human, economic and social assets, and their perception of food security. Supplementary methods were the 24 hour profile with 2 respondents representing the lives of working and non-working 4Ps women. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with 5 representatives to validate the results.

Results

Profile of Survey Respondents

The average age of respondents is 31 years old, with majority having 3 children (50 %) in each family. All were informal settlers and had resided in the city since birth. Most women respondents had reached high school level (33 %) but failed to complete schooling. Women respondents had limited access to social, physical, infrastructure and economic assets. They had below the household income poverty threshold. Only some of the women had part-time jobs with no permanent income. Adult men in respondents' households drove jeeps or pedicabs and engaged in carpentry jobs. They were the main income earners. Most children were engaged in paid manual work as helpers and salesgirls.

While the respondents and their husbands reside near the sea, the quality of natural resources is not anymore suitable for fishing. But since many of the residents used to engage in fishing before the water quality started to deteriorate in the 1980s, most of them are now engaged in fish vending. They purchase the fish (wholesale) at Iloilo Fishing Port and sell them by kilos or retail in fish stands that they have built in front of their houses.

With everyone having an informal settler status and limited space, very few own a home garden. The majority have access to credit or loans. Almost everyone reported that they did not have contact with officers of livelihood and health agencies. There were still a few respondents that did not have health coverage while an overwhelming number reported not having government or private insurance from illness, disability, death, and old age.

Respondents reported that they, the women, were mainly in-charge of buying food for their families, doing the budgeting, and preparing the food for the family. They also planned the food to eat when they had to cook. For the few who had a home garden, women took care of the vegetables/crops that were grown.

None of the participants reported that there was insufficient and limited access to food supply. The foods they ate at least 3 times a day were reported as: vegetables, fish, pork, beef and rice. However, the sources of these foods were not easily accessible within or near their homes. In preparation for calamities, the majority of the respondents stored food such as salted fish, meat, eggs, canned food, noodles and bottled water.

The abundance of carinderias or eateries in the neighborhood served as the main source of everyday food (FGD April 2016). Most houses had eateries within walking distance from their homes. These carinderias had fixed menus which were cheap but also contained quantities of monosodium glutamate (MSG) to give flavor to the food. Women mentioned that the fresh and safe food sources were available in commercial grocery stores and public markets, the locations of which were far from the respondents' residences.

Women and their husbands usually bought food in the morning and at lunch time. They only cooked fresh food at night time when all members of the family were already at home. Women believed they were able to save time and

money when they bought food in eateries rather than cooked it for every meal. By not cooking their own food, however, the food they bought from eateries contained MSG.

The women reported a number of coping strategies that they used to ensure access to food supplies and access to food. This included sharing meals and reducing meal size, income augmentation (part-time jobs, manicurists, laundrywomen, and massage therapist), children engaging in fish vending, sending adult children to work as housemaid/houseboy, hence decreasing household members to feed.

There were no reports of household members resorting to giving a child up for adoption to reduce household size, or joining religious organizations in order to eat meals, or selling their body parts to earn money. None intended to move out of Iloilo City and go to the countryside.

Discussion and Conclusions

Women in this study of food security in coastal barangays were basically food consumers and bought food in eateries for their daily food needs thus running the risk of consuming food with high amounts of MSG. This research showed that women played very limited roles in food security, and were relegated mainly to food buying, budgeting, and cooking once a day.

Given the limited space for gardening and the seeming abundance of eateries or carinderias, the following recommendations are made:

Enhancing fish-related activities

A common market place should be set-up where fish vending and other related activities can be undertaken. At present, the people individually set up their tables along the streets to display and sell fish and other products. Related to the earlier recommendation is the creation of an organization among fish vendors for better regulation of prices and other activities. Moreover, improving access to financial assistance with simplified process and requirements by the local government or other credit institutions can be made to augment the capitalization of qualified people.

At the household level

A simple practice like planning meals in advance helps to lessen reliance on expensive and unhealthy food. Listing of the required ingredients included in the menu ahead of time help in lowering food cost and ensures value of money. Families should buy groceries in volume as one way of saving money.

At the village level

4Ps women should establish a cooperative movement purposely for livelihood programs to be funded by the government agencies and to have access in credit from government banks and institutions, and access to training in the livelihood programs from the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA). Barangay Officials should provide the community an open space for communal gardens. This is another way of acquiring fresh food in a cost effective and enjoyable way. Householders could adopt the vertical garden in their backyards to address the issues of limited space. Each family should consider potted vegetable garden in their houses.

At the city level

Open spaces should be included in the land use planning of Iloilo City for the communal gardens. Both men and women should be given training, seminars and workshops particularly on food storing, preparation, production, budgeting and marketing. Authorities could provide list of local markets or lower cost retail options for food purchasing to enable families get better food value from their budget.

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