

## ABSTRACT

**GALLIFA L. Identifying farm-level pathways to household food security in West Africa: a qualitative case study in Côte d'Ivoire.**

**Background:** Despite the large recognition of important linkages and challenges between food security and agriculture, there is little evidence that proves farm-level relationships between agricultural production and food security. Furthermore, malnutrition remains a major issue in rural areas of West Africa. Understanding the multiple linkages between agricultural livelihoods, nutrition, health and wealth in their complexity is needed to identify policy levers.

**Objective:** This research aims at embracing livelihoods complexity by *Identifying farm-level pathways to household food security*, using a people centred and qualitative approach. First, by understanding *what key assets influence farm-level pathways to household food security*. Since agricultural livelihoods are strongly embedded in its larger context, it secondly explores *how key contextual elements influence farm-level pathways to household food security*. Finally, this research investigates whether the complexity of *farm-level pathways to household food security can be identified discussing farmers livelihoods*.

**Methods:** For data collection the Sustainable Livelihood (SL) Framework was used to operationalize the research questions and develop data collection tools. Data was collected in four villages in the department of Taabo, south-central Côte d'Ivoire. Data was obtained from 14 individual semi-structured interviews, 4 focus group discussions, 4 key informant interviews, 8 dietary diversity questionnaires and 10 structured interviews. Participants were farmers from two different ethnic groups (Baoulé and Dioula) as well as representatives of the health sector, a rural development agent and the head of a cocoa cooperative. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and later coded based on content analysis using the SL categories, while pathways were deduced in a second step.

**Results:** Interviewed farmers are largely self-sufficient but rely on the market on a regular basis. Two main farming systems coexist in the region, based on farmer's cultural preferences. The variation of income and food stocks depends strongly on the farming system, which implies different perceptions of the lean period. Consequently, this also translates in a different diet.

Women are responsible for subsistence crops and use the income from selling surplus to buy additional foods. Men rely on cocoa for their income, which represents a relatively high share of total household revenue. Latter is used to cover non-food expenditure such as education and health. When women engage in a more remunerative activity, they use the income to support child education. While a diversity of service providers which support small-scale farmers growing cocoa exists, subsistence crops under women responsibility are completely neglected.

Difficult access to health services due to high costs paired with traditional beliefs and lack of awareness are elements that prevent farmers to seek support in case of bad health conditions. Still, farmers have identified health and climate change as being the major threat to their fields' productivity. Every single farmer is concerned about climate change. Since they are strongly relying on rainfed agriculture, changes in rainfall patterns have tremendous consequences on their farming system. Furthermore, low social cohesion and conflicts at various levels are restricting activities that could lead to an improvement of farmers livelihoods.

**Policy implications:** Based on the results of the present study, to improve farm-level food security special attention should be given to the following areas:

- *Policies should promote good nutritional practices and consumption of locally produced nutritious foods*
- *More policy support for subsistence farming lead by women could improve food availability and access*
- *Policies for food security should pay special attention to gender roles, intra-household dynamics and mental accounting*
- *Improved access to health and education for women could improve food utilization*
- *Policies should focus on sustainable and climate-smart agriculture and tackle land-use conflicts*
- *Policies need to translate into action*
- *Livelihood approaches help to prioritize policies and determine key milestones that can be measured in order to monitor changes and/or identify leakages along the impact pathways*

**Key words:** Agriculture, Food security, Smallholders, Livelihoods, West Africa