Conducting Food Security Analyses Using Household Expenditure Surveys

VAM Guidance Paper - Brief

More Mileage from National Statistics

Statistics are vital for WFP's monitoring and planning. The agency relies on national agencies for much of its data on population, anthropometry, health services, consumer prices, agricultural production, school attendance and much more. These statistics are produced regularly.

Historically WFP has not regularly used the data-rich national **household expenditure surveys** (HES), which ask households how much they have consumed or spent on food in a given period, together with what they spent on other things.

This is changing. As part of a more cost-effective approach, WFP is increasingly utilizing existing data sources. Accordingly, WFP is making more use of national HES to derive household level figures on **diet quantity (food energy consumption), food quality/diversity** and **expenditure on food**.

Using HES is a highly cost effective way to access valuable baseline information for programming and monitoring.

These surveys enable WFP to obtain food security data with national coverage, large samples, regular updates and the opportunity to cross tabulate with several other social indicators.

A major advantage of working with HES that it facilitates the analysis of the food security indicators together with the wealth of other information (education, labour, housing, etc) usually collected with these surveys. This allows us to learn more about the households who are food insecure.

Guide to Household Expenditure Surveys

There may still be instances when a HES is not a sufficient substitute for a WFP-led data collection exercise.

For example, WFP's lack of control over the timing of the survey, the assessment objectives, sampling and implementation as well as the comprehensiveness of food consumption data, may still warrant a primary data collection exercise.

VAM has produced a guide for country offices to determine whether an HES survey is suitable for a WFP food security analysis. The guide can be found on the VAM Resource Center: ***resources.vam.wfp.org***

The Core Indicators

Diet Quantity	Diet quantity indicators measure the *amount of food* people consume in terms of calories. Inadequate calorie consumption (or food energy) is a key cause of under-nutrition. Food energy deficient individuals are vulnerable to many food security related health risks including increased risk of mortality, impaired ability to undertake physical activity and concentrate, and increased risk of infection and infectious disease.
Diet Quality	Diet quality indicators (dietary diversity and share of calories derived from staple foods) describe the *types and variety of food* people consume. A person can consume sufficient calories (food energy) but, due to nutrient deficiencies, may be prevented from leading an active and healthy life. Inadequate nutrient intake can lead to increased risk of mortality and long term impact on health and learning abilities.
Economic Vulnerability	Poverty and food insecurity are intrinsically linked. Assessing whether a household falls above or below the national *poverty line* and *food poverty line* is a standard approach for determining a household's **poverty status** and central to the HES surveys. Food expenditure share is also often reported by the NSO. This indicator measures the percentage of each household's total expenditures devoted to non-purchased and purchased foods. Households that spend a large share of income on food are highly vulnerable to food insecurity because they have no buffer to protect them if prices rise or

Work closely with the National Statistics Office

The in-country VAM officer should seek to strengthen the working relationships with the NSO. Knowing when relevant survey activities are scheduled is important to ensure that WFP gains early access to HES data, and to possibly influence questionnaire design.

Seek high-level engagement with NSOs, particularly with regard to future possibilities of integrating food security data in national surveys. This requires advising the NSO of WFP's interest in survey data, and pointing to the mutually beneficial elements of collaboration.

Third, be aware of donor fatigue regarding food security reporting mechanisms and of their desire to see surveys more efficiently implemented. By harmonising our food security analyses with that of NSOs, we can enjoy both cost-efficiency gains, and generate more credible and unified findings. Contact relevant donors (e.g., the World Bank, UNDP, regional development banks) to find out about the organisations and activities they are planning to support.

Although WFP is only a user of the survey data, when appropriate it can advocate for the inclusion of additional questions relevant to food security analysis. For example, vulnerability and coping strategies can be included when WFP engages in discussions with the statistics office at the survey planning stage. The Jordan Living Conditions Survey (2011-12), the Ethiopia Welfare Monitoring Survey (2011), the Afghanistan National Risk And Vulnerability Assessment (2008-09 & 2011-12), the Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (2011-12), the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (2014), and the Burundi Enquête sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages au Burundi (2013), all include WFP modules.

Take it to the next level

Typical HES capture information spanning education, gender, health and livelihoods. Some HES datasets will also include modules on shocks experienced by the household and/or anthropometric information. Equipped with full access to this data, the analyst can develop a meaningful narrative to contextualise the findings from the key indicators and develop a comprehensive assessment.

By engaging with the NSO regarding the type of data the HES collects and how to analyse it, WFP will not only gain access to national data that it needs, but can also enable food security statistics to be more widely used in national planning. The ideal outcome is that the NSO, and other relevant government partners such as the Ministry of Agriculture, are empowered to independently monitor these indicators and improve survey design to capture food security information, and to produce food security statistics on an on-going basis. To achieve this, VAM can offer capacity building opportunities around food security measurements for statistics offices and other relevant partners in government.

Key Considerations when Using HES Data

Access to Data	NSOs sometimes share HES datasets freely. However, the timing of data release can be tricky. Often delays occur and data cannot be accessed for 6-12 months after they have been cleaned. This limits the ***timeliness*** of published findings.
Questionnaire Design	• **Length of the recall period** should be less than two weeks, but sometimes it is 30 days or even a year. • **The list of food items** should contain all types of food and beverages that make up the local diet, varying from 40 to 100s of items. • **Food sources:** the survey should ask households about foods obtained via purchases, own-production, in-kind and food consumed outside the household. • Households should be asked about **actual consumption** of foods rather than merely food purchases. • Data collection may take place across 12 months to capture seasonal variation in consumption/expenditure, but sometimes fieldwork is undertaken over, say, three months. It is then important to account for this seasonality.
Survey Representation	Be aware of the survey's sampling strategy. HES results are usually representative at the administrative level 1**,** but are sometimes representative at a lower level as well. The level of representativeness of the survey may not produce results disaggregated to the level that a WFP programme would require. It is important to manage this expectation accordingly.

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