

# Adaptable Livelihoods: Coping with Food Insecurity in the Malian Sahel

## Operationalizing household food security in rural Nepal

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### Abstract

*This paper operationalizes household food security and links it to household food consumption patterns in rural Nepal. Food security has long been used as a macro-level indicator of agricultural stability by both agricultural and economic researchers. However, little work has been done to operationalize it at the household level. We view household food security as reflecting three different dimensions: past food supply, current food stores, and future supply of food adequate to meet the needs of all household members. A key method is the construction of scales that capture these different aspects of household food security. When operationalized in this way, household food security is associated with increased consumption of non-staple foods in this setting. Past household food security is associated with increased frequency of meat consumption and increased variety of food consumed. Current household food security predicts a higher frequency of meat and dairy intake and greater dietary variety. Future household food security is associated with increased total dietary variety and future consumption of dairy products. We feel that this conceptual approach to assessing household food security, i.e., the use of scales to measure past, current, and future components of food security, can be used as a framework in other settings.*

### Introduction

Food security has long been used as an important macro-level indicator of agricultural stability and progress for both agricultural and economic researchers. However, little work has been done to operationalize the concept at the household level. We view household food security as a concept that integrates environmental, economic, and cultural factors in a manner that can provide a useful tool for predicting dietary patterns within the household. These factors affect the manner in which households manage their food resources, either by affecting initial food selection and acquisition or by affecting the use of food once it has been selected. Household food security is an outcome of these decisions. This paper seeks to further the operationalization of household food security in three ways. First, a theoretical framework for household food security is presented, describing the set of relevant independent, intervening, and dependent variables. Second, a framework for operationalization is presented, using data collected from rural households in Nepal. Third, the relevance of household food security, measured at the micro level, is examined through regression models that predict household food security and that use household food security to predict diversity of diet at the household level.

### Food security and household food security: An economic perspective

Economic approaches to food security have traditionally focused on assessing aggregate levels of food supply, agricultural production, and the balance of agricultural trade [1-6]. In the 1970s, food security was defined at the macro level as the ability to avoid short-term deficits in aggregate food supply [7], and it was directly linked to grain stocks at the global and national level [8]. At the micro level, food security was conceptualized primarily as the ability to successfully weather transitory shocks to food supply, such as drought, floods, market failure, or civil strife [9]. The focus was on food staples (i.e., grains), national stores

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