Food and Nutrition "Wellness" Through a Sustainable Livelihoods Lens

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Abstract

Extremely high rates of obesity and nutrition-related chronic diseases in Canada and globally suggest that many people are "out of balance" and unwell with respect to food and nutrition. These issues are seen to varying degrees in both low-income and more affluent populations, suggesting a contextual environment that is not conducive to living "well" through our relationship with food. This is characterized by intensive use of packaged, processed foods of poor nutritional quality, "deskilling" with respect to food and nutrition knowledge and skills, and a loss of meaningful food traditions. At the same time, considerable concern is being expressed about the impact of food production methods on the natural environment. There is, therefore, a need to conceptualize "living well" through food and nutrition. It is proposed that using and expanding current definitions of food security (incorporating individual and household food security and community food security) through a Sustainable Livelihoods for Food and Nutrition Framework (SLFNS) will allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the resources required to achieve foods security and wellness. A Sustainable Livelihoods approach has been utilized extensively in global southern settings for poverty reduction and capacity development. Applying this approach to food and nutrition, and expanding it to include northern settings, provides a useful heuristic model for examining food and nutrition-related health issues, in the context of a globalized food system (including high proportions of ultra-processed foods) from which contemporary diets are constructed. SLFNS has the potential to be used in research and applied settings to: assess a broad scope of antecedents for food security and wellness; identify deficits and potential interventions at multiple levels and in multiple settings; and explain the conditions and assets required for uptake. This session will present the SLFNS Framework and explore approaches to transforming the Framework into applied, community-based tools and methods to assess individuals and communities and plan participatory interventions to improve food and nutrition security.