

Adaptive Strategies to Ensure Household Food Security in Two Regions of Burkina Faso.

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The dominant form of agriculture in Burkina Faso is a combination of crop production, livestock keeping and agro-forestry. This Ph.D. research investigated how the farmer decides which activity to undertake, in order to maintain food supply year-round, while navigating multiple labour, time and monetary constraints. 8 family compounds (a total of 23 households) were followed for an entire agricultural cycle (Oct. 2009 – Dec. 2010) to investigate the seasonal changes in food-acquisition strategies in two contrasting regions of Burkina Faso. As none of the families studied were able to grow enough food to last until the next harvest, they also bought food, gathered wild foods and received food from friends and relatives. The results showed that the household head makes the best out of the multiple constraints by allocating different tasks to different household members throughout the year. The capacity of the household members to adapt to various foreseen and unforeseen expenses was critically examined. Strategies which minimised risk were clearly preferred, demonstrating that the management of food stocks is done on a medium-term basis (>two years). Food insecurity was perceived as a rather permanent situation, going hand-in-hand with the notion that somehow, they will always be able to cope, as long as they are healthy and physically fit. It is essential to understand the local perception of risk and food insecurity in order to predict how strategies will be adapted when agricultural production becomes less reliable, as a consequence of climate change and increasing land pressure. This study demonstrates that analysis needs to be done at the level of the whole livelihood (farm and non-farm activities) as well as at the level of the whole family compound, to understand how their different elements interact, both in time and in space.