8. INFORMATION GATHERING METHODS TO MONITOR THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD

In this chapter we summarise the information gathering methods that have been referred to in previous chapters. The method does not change depending on what analysis the information is generated for, so it does not need to be described separately in each chapter.

Most of these methods are widely used and have extensively been described elsewhere and an extensive description is beyond the scope of this volume. The intent here is to make right to food monitoring practitioners aware of the inventory of information gathering methods available and to indicate what type of information the method can generate.

Method selection depends in each case on a number of things. As a general rule, when two methods are being considered in order to generate specific information, the one that allows for greater compliance with human rights principles should be chosen. As we have seen in previous chapters, a number of information gathering methods are usually applied and the information is integrated when making an assessment or undertaking an analysis. Several methods can be combined in an information gathering package, as demonstrated below.

Information Gathering Methods to Monitor to the Right to Adequate Food

☑ DESK REVIEW

- Document reviews (official reports, scientific publications and 'grey literature')
- Inventories of laws, policies, regulations and directives

☑ INTERACTIVE METHODS

- Brainstorming sessions
- Key informant interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Structured observations
- Participant observations
- Rapid appraisals
- Client surveys

☑ SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

- Analysis of census and national survey data
- Analysis and synthesis of data contained in data inventories
- Analysis of data generated through research activities

☑ PRIMARY INFORMATION GATHERING THROUGH SURVEYS

The various methods mentioned in this volume have been classified into four categories: (a) desk reviews, (b) interactive methods, (c) secondary data analysis and (d) primary surveys. To avoid ambiquity, no method has been designated as "participatory", as in most cases the method involves consultation and contributing knowledge, perceptions and opinions on the part of stakeholders and grass roots groups. Chapter 6 briefly deals with this issue.

DESK REVIEWS

- Document reviews (official reports, scientific publications, and 'grey literature').
- Inventories of laws, policies, regulations and directives.

It is useful to start the assessment or monitoring process with an initial document review, relying on published or non-published documents. Documents that may be particularly helpful, if available, include: analytical reports based on relevant national surveys, censuses or data inventories, reports generated through research studies, programme evaluation and policy analysis reports, legal and regulatory documentation, documents that provide information regarding current jurisprudence as relevant to the right to adequate food. The desk review provides a first orientation to the broad food insecurity and vulnerability issues in the country or in a particular sub-national location. It also provides a basis to frame questions for further analytical work with respect to government actions related to the right to adequate food and their impacts. It contributes to defining the legal and institutional framework of the right to adequate food. Finally it also identifies information gaps with respect to important analytical questions. Desk reviews are part of the information gathering methodology for situation and vulnerability analysis, assessment of the legal, policy and institutional frameworks, and for policy impact and programme monitoring.

INTERACTIVE METHODS

- Brainstorming sessions.
- Key informant interviews.
- Focus group discussions.
- Structured observations.
- Participant observations.
- Rapid appraisal surveys.
- Client surveys.

Brainstorming sessions bring together stakeholders and others who are knowledgeable about, and/or have first hand experience with, specific issues involved in monitoring the right to adequate food. This may include, for example, food insecurity and vulnerability conditions, identification of groups of food insecure and vulnerable people, and with underlying causes and their livelihood characteristics. These sessions can include planners at national level to obtain information for the country as a whole, others may include food and nutrition researchers, technical staff from relevant sectors (agriculture, health, commerce, social welfare, etc.) at national and sub-national levels, staff that monitors the incidence of poverty, staff from NGOs and CBOs that implement food security and nutrition programmes and projects, and possibly human rights institutions. If the brainstorming session is held at a sub-national location, local and community level officers and staff may be invited to participate in the session (see box below)[47]. Brainstorming sessions need to be facilitated well and have a clear agenda which is shared with all present at the beginning of the session. This agenda may have been developed after a desk review has taken place about certain issues, or after a policy impact or programme assessment has been completed, and the session is conducted to validate the findings and conclusions. The presentation of a discussion framework at the start of the session may help to focus discussions.

47 *FAO (2001).*

BOX 8.1 - Stakeholder Meeting for Food Insecurity Vulnerability Analysis, Tanzania

In March 2001, a one-day stakeholder meeting was held in Morogoro, Tanzania, to identify and characterise food insecure and vulnerable groups in Morogoro, Dodoma and Iringa Regions. The participants included: village leaders/village executive officers, and district and regional planning officers. First a discussion framework was presented and discussed. Then the participants were divided by region to consider and discuss the following questions: (i) who are the food insecure and vulnerable groups in the region, and how can these groups be described? and (ii) where in the region are these groups located? Maps of the regions were made available. After the groups reported, the participants were divided by type of actor into three groups: village leaders/executive officers, district officers and regional officers. Each group was asked to consider and discuss the following questions: (iii) what actions will be needed to address the identified causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in each livelihood group? and (iv) what information will be required to plan and monitor the identified actions?

Open-ended or semi-structured interviews of key informants is a method that is either applied to obtain new or complementary information or to validate information that the monitor or analyst already has. Open-ended interviews are exploratory in the sense that the intent is to tap into the person's knowledge and/or experience without having defined precise and detailed questions about a general issue. For example, the general issue may be how the HIV/AIDS pandemic in certain areas impacts on household food insecurity. Little documented evidence is available about the household food insecurity and HIV/AIDS linkages so formulate more specific questions related to these linkages in these areas. Staff of programmes that provide assistance to households in areas with HIV/AIDS would be good informants, as well as heads of households. Where documentation does exist, the questions asked could have been more structured and specific. If the interviews are conducted to validate survey findings and conclusions the interviews should be more structured. Nevertheless, they are usually more conversational in style and try to encourage the informant to provide any unsolicited information that is relevant. Depending on the issue at hand, anyone who has some relevant knowledge and/or experience related to the issue, can be an informant. For instance, community leaders and representatives of community groups, local authorities, technical and legal staff, high level decision makers and planners, representatives of CSOs and the private commercial sector, and international technical cooperation agencies, etc. However, to make the task manageable, key informants need to be identified, i.e. those persons who are the most knowledgeable and/or have the most experience. It is also important to include people with different experiences or points of view, to increase both the breath and depth of the information provided.

So-called "*life histories*" (which were mentioned in chapter 6) are a type of open-ended interview with key informants. The key informants are usually community members who are asked to tell about a past event or changes in the community and to tell the story in their own words. The challenge for an outside interviewer is to understand the real messages contained in the "story".

Focus group discussions are often also used to complement other information. These sessions can be either highly structured, semi-structured or open-ended. Normally the person conducting or facilitating the session has a discussion agenda, i.e. the issues about which information is sought. It is a method that can be applied at all levels, i.e. at national, sub-national or community level. Focus groups usually consist of persons with similar characteristics - similar responsibilities, experiences and/or knowledge. For example, when focus group discussions are employed as part of institutional role and capacity analysis, different focus groups may be formed consisting of managers, technical staff and support staff. As part of vulnerability analysis that focuses on environmental risks to the livelihoods of small scale farmers, different focus groups may be formed consisting of technical staff of the environmental management agency, extension agents, local leaders and subsistence farmers. When analysing or monitoring household food access in vulnerable communities, focus groups would include groups of household heads (women and men) and community leaders. Participation in a focus group discussion is usually by invitation and therefore requires prior consultation to identify people to be invited. Once the session is underway, members of a focus group may express different opinions, indicating that additional information on those points needs to be acquired.

Observational methods can range from very simple observations on community infrastructure or housing conditions, to complex ethnographic observations on inter-personal behaviours. In the latter case, a highly trained ethnographer is required to interpret observed behaviours or events that involve people. To provide an ethnographer with the in-depth understanding of local personal behaviours, s/he may actually participate in some activities with community people and learn the skills that these activities require. This is referred to as *participant observation*. Direct observation of community infrastructure may be conducted by a so-called village *walk-through* with community members who provide additional information about what is observed. Such walk-throughs usually are done to construct a community map. Direct observational techniques can also be used to obtain information about community level delivery of public services: how certain services are delivered, the quality of delivery, attitudes and performance of service delivery personnel, attitudes of community members receiving the services. Local level information, particularly as a solid basis for local level action planning, may be obtained through *rapid appraisal surveys*. Much has been written about these surveys and some references are provided[48]. Sometimes these surveys are participatory (*participatory rural appraisals*), meaning that they include some of the interactive or consultative techniques described above, such as focus group

48 See the references provided at the end of this chapter. The website references also contain links to other relevant websites.

discussions, key informant interviews and observational techniques. Mini-surveys may also be applied. The survey results are meant to provide a basis for local level planning by focusing on constraints and facilitating factors in relation to specific actions. Rapid appraisal methods are particularly suited to examine how national policies or programmes are implemented at local level. Participatory rural appraisal methods are often used in relation to poverty, food security, agriculture and natural resource management issues. When applied periodically over time, the survey results can also serve as a monitoring tool. As rapid appraisals are applied to specific locations, the results are location-specific and usually cannot be generalised to other locations.

Client satisfaction surveys and participatory service delivery assessment (PSDA) surveys are similar, and are designed to provide information for concrete follow-up action related to public services. These surveys are also referred to as *direct beneficiary surveys*. Client satisfaction surveys were adapted from surveys designed to gauge how well clients like commercial products or services. PSDA surveys are a type of client satisfaction survey that are designed to monitor access to, and delivery of, public services. These assessments normally cover the following aspects: (i) key constraints faced by people in accessing public services, (ii) quality and adequacy of services, and (iii) capacity and effectiveness of staff in providing the services. These assessments are particularly targeted at poor and underserved population groups. The central instrument in these assessments is the so-called "*citizen's report card*". The findings of the survey serve to generate recommendations and a plan of action to address the constraints the poor face in accessing public services, and to improve the management and quality of public service delivery. These assessment surveys provide information to assist public officials to better implement their responsibilities, to improve institutional capacities, and for people to hold public officials accountable for the management and quality of public services. These assessments using the citizen's report card have been applied to different public services.

BOX 8.2 - Participatory Service Delivery Assessment (PSDA)

The citizen's report card concept was first introduced in 1993 in Bangalore, India. These scorecards have been applied in the Philippines to obtain feedback from citizens on an array of public services, and in Bangladesh to assess public services provided by local government. To assess corrupt practices in urban areas, the scorecard was used as part of the Kenya Urban Bribery Survey. A PSDA survey was piloted in two representative districts in Zanzibar in 2004 covering the provision of primary education and of drinking water. In follow-up to the survey, both the Ministry of Education and the Department of Water Services took concrete actions to improve the quality and access to these services. PSDA surveys are now part of the monitoring system of the poverty reduction strategy in Zanzibar.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

- Analysis of census and national survey data.
- Analysis and synthesis of data contained in data inventories (Annex 2).
- Analysis and interpretation of data in institutional databases.
- Analysis of data generated through research activities.

Data from large national surveys are available in many countries. Population and agricultural census data are by nature quite complete, but such censuses are conducted infrequently, perhaps every ten years. Data generated by means of sample surveys are often also available, and may or may not be up-to-date. Close-ended surveys such as listed below employ pre-designed survey forms, and some of these, such as the Demographic and Health Survey that is applied in a number of countries, are standardised. A second source of secondary data may be international data inventories, such as the ones listed in Annex 2. Their use may be limited though, as they do not usually present ways to disaggregate the data by geographic areas or population groups. Institutions such as sector ministries may also have databases. For example, a ministry of health may have a database that contains certain health and nutrition data obtained from medical facility records. A ministry of commerce may have a database that contains weekly market prices for basic commodities, and a ministry of agriculture a database with monthly market prices of agricultural inputs. The HMIS in Uganda is an example (chapter 7). Lastly, academic social research may also generate survey data that enter the public domain and that can be re-analysed for monitoring purposes. The data are likely to be specific to areas or population-groups, and not be nationally representative. The actual use of secondary data from these various sources to monitor progress with achieving the right to adequate food thus depends on whether it is possible to: (a) disaggregate the data by vulnerable groups or vulnerable areas, (b) construct outcome indicators from the data to monitor progress against established benchmarks and targets, and (c) provide national or regional estimates based on a representative sampling frame. To disaggregate the data from a nationally representative sample survey for vulnerable groups or areas requires that the sampling frame explicitly includes sampling criteria of group or area vulnerability.

BOX 8.3 - Close-ended Surveys with Structured, Predesigned Survey Forms

- *Population Census.*
- *Agricultural Census.*
- *Living Standards Measurement Surveys.*
- *Demographic and Health Surveys.*
- *Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.*
- *Agricultural Sample Surveys.*
- *Health and Nutrition Surveys.*
- *Social Impact Assessment Surveys.*
- *Household Income and Expenditure Surveys.*
- *Labour Force Surveys.*

PRIMARY INFORMATION GATHERING THROUGH SURVEYS

Primary surveys can range from *community mini-surveys to national sample surveys*. New surveys should always be used as a last resort when critical information for monitoring or analysis can not be obtained by any of the methods discussed above.

Particularly national sample surveys are costly, require a sound sampling frame, take long to develop and test, and require a well trained survey staff, good survey organization, an efficient data management system, and a skilfull analytical staff. The challenge is to produce results and conclusions in a timely way. To be useful for monitoring purposes, all or parts of the survey would need to be repeated periodically, which is usually not feasible. What is sometimes applied as a strategy, is to modularise the survey content, and have certain modules eventually included in another survey which is normally undertaken with certain frequency, such as a labour force survey. This "piggy-backing" onto another survey may address some of the concerns about costs and time.

National sample surveys can be helpful to establish certain baseline information when this is not possible from other sources. This provides inputs in defining national, sub-national or even population group specific benchmarks and targets, depending on the sampling frame applied in the survey. Monitoring the right to adequate food means monitoring progress towards achievement of those benchmarks and targets, and calling the government to task when progress falls short as apart of holding government officials accountable.

Brainstorming sessions, document reviews and key informant interviews may be useful to establish an appropriate sampling frame for a large area survey, and to provide inputs for the formulation of survey questions and to plan survey procedures. The sampling frame can be based on categorisation of areas, such as food economy zones, i.e. areas that are homogeneous in several aspects of the food economy (food production and marketing, food consumption patterns). These areas are clustered and are usually mapped and described. Another area categorisation may be based on homogenous agro-ecological zones. In each zone, food insecure and vulnerable groups are located through document review and interviews with key informants. This information is then used to refine the sampling design. At this point, brainstorming sessions may be useful in validating the information obtained and organised so far.

Once the survey is completed, and the data are processed and analysed, area-based and/or group-based profiles can be drawn, and complemented as necessary by more in-depth assessment reports based on statistical analysis of the survey data. An example of group-based profile generated as part of a vulnerability analysis, referred to as a *vulnerability profile*, is that of artesanal fisherfolk in Benin, presented in the FAO The *State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2000*. An example of an area-based vulnerability profile was presented in chapter 5 (Zanzibar).

Rights-based information gathering through surveys

When undertaking surveys, it is important to bear in mind the following points from a human rights perspective:

- In designing the survey, identify the most simple method(s) of information gathering, making sure that all the information to be obtained is really needed so that all information will effectively be used in the analysis.
- Respondents should have adequate information to provide informed consent or to decline participation in the survey.
- The findings of the survey should only be used for the purpose(s) that were initially announced.
- The information provided by individuals should be held strictly confidential and no individual should be identifiable in the final survey results.
- Respondents should have access to the information that they have provided about themselves, but not to information provided by others.
- The survey team should at all times provide detailed information about the survey process to respondents at their request, both during the survey and afterwards.
- The survey team should share the survey results with groups of respondents in ways that respondents can understand those results and draw their own conclusions.

The survey should be designed to collect only what is necessary and sufficient to meet information needs. Careful thought should be given when designing the methodology and data collection instruments about how the data will be analysed. The data should come back in a form that facilitates the desired analysis. Think about language issues, and when needed and possible, hire field workers who can speak and understand local languages or dialects. One concern sometimes is that the respondents may not adequately have been provided with all the information necessary to give informed consent for their participation in the survey, or that the information is provided to them in language or forms that do not facilitate their complete comprehension. “Informed” consent forms are now routinely included in formal surveys, stipulating confidentiality of the information that respondents provide, that the information provider will not be identifiable when survey results are disseminated, and will be used only for the purpose(s) for which the survey is conducted. This means that completed survey forms are stored in places with access only to personnel directly involved in the survey. It also means that the survey team, information processors and data analysts have been made fully aware of the above points before the survey is initiated. Sharing the survey results with groups of respondents not only provides them with information for their own interpretation and use in decision-making, but also can serve to validate these results and to learn from different interpretations of the same information.

REFERENCE SOURCES:

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