

UNIVERSITÄT HOHENHEIM

Institute of Social Science in Agriculture

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**Scoping sustainable diets in rural South African communities -
Adults and adolescents' perceptions of food security and local
food system**

Master Thesis

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Agricultural Economics

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Abstract

Background: South Africa is undergoing a health and nutrition transition; overweight and obesity commonly co-exist with under-nutrition. At the same time, a large number of people in the country are food insecure. The larger project in which this study is situated explores the sustainability of diets in rural South Africa, linking nutrition, food systems, and the environment at the local level to help improve nutrition and consumption outcomes.

Objectives: This study aims to explore community members' perceptions on food security, and the local food system in the context of sustainable diets in rural, resource-poor communities in South Africa, by gaining an in-depth understanding of food and nutrition security and local food systems. The emphasis was on the perceptions of adults and adolescents at Ganspan and Valspan communities in Phokwane local municipality in the Northern Cape Province.

Methodology: The research paradigm used was a qualitative research approach. Data were gathered through six focus group discussions between August and November 2013. In addition, two key informant interviews were conducted with a Municipal Agriculture Extension officer and a member of a small-scale farmers association. The sustainable diet concept served as the theoretical framework for conceptualization. Content analysis was applied to analyze data with the help the of Atlas.ti software.

Findings: The findings confirm the food insecurity in rural South Africa; financial constraint was perceived to limit food access leading to monotonous diets. The communities demonstrated knowledge of food products in the region and perceived it to be of better taste and fresh; Interest in home gardening was high, however, home gardening and livestock keeping rarely exist. The use of supermarkets was prominent because of perceived quality and safety standards. Adolescent groups perceived packaged foods from the supermarket to be of a higher quality. Opportunities perceived in the local food system were employment, small-scale farming, and home gardening however, limited access to productive lands, inputs, and access to market was perceived as barriers. CASP and the Ilima-Letsema agricultural projects were mitigating these challenges; however, its service delivery needs to improve.

Recommendations: The current local food system makes these rural households vulnerable to food insecurity and unsustainable diets. Home garden and nutrition education promoted in tandem could serve as a conduit for improving food security and dietary quality. Consumer awareness and regulations for local procurement by large supermarket chains may stimulate local production and economic activity for more sustainable diets.