

Food Insecurity in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala

The perception of and coping with food insecurity



Romy Smit & Milou America

All photos are taken by the authors in Santa Cruz del Quiché during the fieldwork period in 2019

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Utrecht University

Bachelor thesis Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology

Student: Romy Smit

Studentnumber: 5600383

E-mail: R.Smit8@students.uu.nl

Student: Milou America

Studentnumber: 5697565

E-mail: M.M.H.America@students.uu.nl

Supervisor: dr. Gijs Cremers

E-mail: G.Cremers@uu.nl

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Table of Content

Acknowledgements	5
Words and abbreviations	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1. Poverty, Food and its Insecurity	14
1.1 Poverty and Vulnerability	14
1.1.1 Poverty as a multi-dimensional, cyclic, fluid social relation.....	14
1.1.2 Vulnerability.....	15
1.1.3 Resilience.....	16
1.2 Perspectives on Food and Food Insecurity.....	17
1.2.1 Perspectives on food.....	17
1.2.2 Food (in)security.....	19
1.3 Livelihood strategies and strategies against food insecurity	20
1.3.1 Livelihood strategies.....	20
1.3.2 Strategies against food insecurity.....	21
Chapter 2. Poverty, Food and Food Insecurity in Guatemala	23
2.1 Poverty in Guatemala.....	23
2.2 Food and Food Insecurity in Guatemala.....	24
Chapter 3. Poverty and Vulnerability	27
3.1.1 Organizations striving to Poverty-Reduction.....	27
3.1.2 Basic Needs according to these Organizations.....	29
3.2 Vulnerability and capitals as a lens to the perception on poverty	33
Chapter 4. Food and Food Insecurity	39
4.1 Meaning behind Food.....	39
4.2.1 From food availability to access to a healthy diet.....	43
4.2.2 A division of two food insecure groups.....	47
Chapter 5. Strategies against Food Insecurity	50
5.1 Coping strategies of IYP, MFF and the church.....	50
5.2 Coping strategies by households.....	53
Discussion and Conclusion	57
Bibliography	63
Appendix	68
Appendix 1: Spanish Resumen.....	69

Words and abbreviations

Aldeas = Surrounding villages

CADER = Committee of Agriculture, Development and Rural Extension

IYP = Indigenous Youth Project

Ladinos = A group of people who identify more with a Spanish origin

Licuarios = Fruit juices

MFF = Ministry of Farming and Food

Nahuales = Levels of energies

Pollo Campero = A Guatemalan fast-food chain

Semana Santa = The holy week of Easter in April

Tamales = A roll of corn dough

Tenis = Sneakers

Traje = Traditional clothing

Tuktuk = A local means of transport

Quetzal = The Guatemalan currency

USAID = United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

“Foodways can only be understood holistically, with just about every aspect of human life taken into account. Daily practice brings together many disparate determinants, from need for vitamin A to desire to emulate the rich and famous.” - E.N. Anderson³

Writing about food is urgent, as there is a widespread hunger among the poor and among the less poor an increase in obesity (Anderson 2005, 6). Food is one of the most important basic needs. Following this statement, food and food insecurity can be used as a lens through which it is possible to see how people give meaning to their lives in a framework of poverty. According to the World Bank almost 60 percent of the people in Guatemala live in poverty (2014). Poverty includes not only the measurement of income per capita per day, but can point to a scarcity of capacities or love or be the result of comparing to others who own more than you (Green 2006, 1110).

In Guatemala, many people are insecure of their food intake, not knowing if they will have enough food or meet their nutritional needs that week (Janvry 2010, 1328). This can be due to food not being available, accessible or manifest because of a undiversified diet with a lack of nutritional value (Schmidhuber 2007, 19703). Livelihood strategies are the actions taken and resources used when gaining their living (Scoones 2009, 172). These strategies are an insightful lens to look at how people give meaning to and deal with food insecurity. Besides, the strategies of the households themselves, some organizations try to improve the situation of food insecurity in Santa Cruz del Quiché in Guatemala as well.

As a part of the broader concept of livelihoods, perspectives on food insecurity have played an important role in the development and interventions trying to improve these livelihoods (Scoones, 2009). The relevance of this research on the topic of food insecurity becomes even more clear as the second sustainable development goal of the United Nations focuses on ending all hunger before 2030 (UN, 2015). The aim of this research is to put this global goal of combating hunger in a local perspective, by gaining more knowledge about the way in which Guatemalan people deal with food insecurity. The local level has to be understood to make a change at a greater scale (Nelson, 2007). Within the local level, we differentiate between the public and the private, to get to a holistic understanding of coping with food insecurity (West, 2015). Actions by non-governmental and governmental organizations form

³ Anderson 2005, 7

the public action-taking, while the private level focuses on the coping strategies which are used by families. By combining these two visions we contribute to the body of knowledge on food insecurity which mainly focuses on only one of the two levels, thus providing new insights. Because of the two different levels and thus different research populations, the research results in complementary knowledge. All these aspects and the combination of the public and private level lead us to the main question:

'How do people give meaning to and cope with food insecurity in a framework of poverty in Santa Cruz del Quiché on both household and organizational level?'

To cover all aspects of our main question and to have a clear plan on how to operationalize, we have divided the question in sub-questions, which are equally organized as the thematical order of this thesis. We started by investigating the perception of poverty, *how do poverty and vulnerability shape the framework for people in Santa Cruz del Quiché?* As poverty reduction proved to be the main focus of the organizations, the interpretation of it is important to elaborate. Next, the connection between poverty and the specific basic need of food has been made by elaborating *the role of food in Santa Cruz del Quiché*. The role of and meaning behind food lead to the specification towards food insecurity: *How do people perceive food insecurity?* To focus on the level of households and include the livelihood strategies, we researched *how people organize and experience livelihood strategies in Santa Cruz del Quiché?* Finally, we were able to get to the coping strategies used by both organizations and households to cope with the problem of food insecurity: *How do people cope with food insecurity?* To bring the two levels involved together we investigated how households perceive change and projects, and how organizations experience their attempt of making a difference: *What are factors determining change?*

In order to answer these questions we used qualitative research methods (DeWalt, 2011) during eight weeks of fieldwork in Santa Cruz del Quiché during March and April 2019. The data is gathered within two different population groups and thus lead to complementary results. On one hand, Romy focused on households within the area of Santa Cruz del Quiché. They were mainly located in surrounding communities of the city, not further away than ten minutes by bus. On the other hand, Milou operated within three organizations: Ministry of Farming and Food (MFF), Indigenous Youth Project (IYP) and the Evangelical church '*Jesús es la esperanza*'. These three organizations were chosen because of their active programs close to the city of Santa Cruz and their different characteristics. Whereas MFF is a governmental

organization, IYP is independent, although relying on the funds of the United States (USAID). Given the importance and big role of the church around Santa Cruz, focusing on the church lead to an interesting comparison to the indigenous character of IYP, diversifying the data gathered and creating a holistic view on the situation of Santa Cruz. By combining these two research populations, we could supplement and complement each other and capture the interaction between the two.

During our fieldwork, we mainly used the methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviewing. By participating and simultaneously observing we could build strong relationships with our informants, creating a space to understand the ‘reality’ of the habits of families as complete as possible. This corresponds to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 111) who mention that the goal of participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study. The functioning of projects became clearer as well since we could observe the reactions of the participants, sometimes reacting apathetic or ashamed, and sometimes just acting as if the project were a social convenience. In this way, we could decide ourselves which data was valuable and interesting for our research. This method of participant observation complemented the data we gathered through many semi-structured interviews, where we only wrote down the information what our informants told us and wanted us to know, leaving the sometimes differing untold reality away. An example of this is when Romy visited a family for the third time and she joined them for dinner. They told her in the interview during the first visit that everybody gets the same amount of food, while in reality Romy witnessed the opposite during the third visit.⁴ So, the participant observation gave a better insight to the reality.

We also used other forms of interviewing to enforce the effect of triangulation, which DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 128) see as the use of different techniques with different strengths and limitations and thus allow for the cross validation of conclusions by comparing the collected data. Romy conducted multiple life history interviews, which gave a good insight into the changes that some people make in order to achieve better living conditions. These interviews also gave a lot of information about the discrimination of indigenous people. ‘Organization history’ interviews were relevant showing the process of project-building and the reasons behind certain aspects the projects know nowadays. Photo-elicitation is another method that Romy has used. This method led to concrete examples and living data on the important aspects of a meal for the people. It showed a very clear way of how people look at their own

⁴ Fieldnotes 28-03-2019/10-04-2019

decisions in the context of food and was definitely of great value. In total, Romy conducted 24 interviews, whereas Milou conducted 20 interviews. We asked verbal informed consent at the beginning of the interviews with all our participants, assuring their privacy and anonymity. Therefore, all names are feigned.

During all times, consciousness of our position as a European female researcher was needed, since we were our own research instruments. The people of Santa Cruz were not used to people from different backgrounds, as not many tourists visit Santa Cruz del Quiché. They would react surprised by seeing us walking through the streets, often yelling at us or trying to get our attention. It seemed like people felt intimidated quickly, sometimes being afraid to talk to us and say no more than the words which were absolutely necessary. So, it took a lot of time to introduce Romy to the households. Sometimes the researcher needs particular individuals who take the ethnographer under their wing and help to introduce her to the society, as DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 44) mentioned. Thus, with the help of a gatekeeper and key informants she gained trust and got access to a great network of people, and over time a few strong relationships were built. Within the organizations informants were rather easy to find, just having to enter the network of the organizations by sending some emails and stopping by the offices.

Another important aspect that was of influence for our research was language. Employees of organizations did not have a problem with speaking Spanish, so this was not an obstacle for them. However, some of Romy's participants only spoke K'iche. Although she received help from her gatekeeper and key informant with translating, the language barrier made it more difficult to conduct an in-depth interview. We both realized that we would probably have asked different questions and got different interpretations, if we would have possessed better language skills from the beginning on. This does not only have to do with the language barrier, but with the abstractness of the concepts of poverty and food insecurity as well. Whereas Milou could ask difficult and in-depth theoretical questions, Romy needed to make sure her questions were as concrete and easy as possible.

This thesis is organized in a thematic way. In chapter one, the theoretical framework, the central themes will be elaborated regarding to important theories and relevant literature, like the work of Scoones (1998) on the sustainable livelihood approach and the works of Anderson (2005) and Counihan and Esterik (2013) on understanding the relation between food and culture. From the framework of poverty, the focus will move towards the culture of food and what it means if there is a shortage or insecurity of it, and after that it will move towards the strategies which are used to deal with this situation.

In the second chapter, the context of Guatemala and Santa Cruz del Quiché will be described keeping the central themes of this research in mind.

In chapter three we will argue that poverty is a social construct, not only defined by missing basic needs but felt as a result of comparing to others. It proved to be not only manifested through a shortage of money, but includes a shortage of different basic needs and capitals, and is reinforced by vulnerability.

In chapter four we will focus on the habits around food in Santa Cruz and the symbolism of certain foods. The problem of food insecurity will be elaborated in this chapter as well. Availability, access, and consummation were considered important factors determining food insecurity according to employees of the organizations. Through these concepts a division can be made into two groups of which one lacks the access to food while the other experiences a lack of nutritional values.

In the fifth chapter, we focus on the strategies organizations use to make an impact on the situation of food insecurity and on the livelihood strategies used by families to strive towards food security. Within these strategies, difficulties in making an impact arise and are elaborated.

In the concluding chapter, we will discuss the main insights and we will finalize our thesis with a recommendation for further research.

Chapter 1. Poverty, Food and its Insecurity

1.1 Poverty and Vulnerability

In this paragraph, we will conceptualize poverty as a multi-dimensional social relation, shaping the daily life and perceptions of people in multiple ways. Declared next, poverty is aggravated by and results in vulnerability and the lack of resilience.

1.1.1 Poverty as a multi-dimensional, cyclic, fluid social relation Milou

Human rights are rooted in the assumption that all people are of equal worth and have the right to meet their basic needs (D. Green 2012, 22). Still, as a result of global inequality, billions live in poverty. Tucker (2011, 293) argues that poverty is a set of social relations. A structure of exploitative power relationships, which can both manifest within one country as between different countries, forces poverty on people to be on the powerless side. Unequal social relations can for example be impacted by discrimination which reinforces the situation of poverty. Here, poverty is not only the result of social relations but also defined by those relations (Ravaillon, 1994). Poverty does only exist when people cannot live up to a certain degree of well-being considered as minimum by that country's standards. These 'standards' represent what is seen as 'normal' and make that comparison to that leads to the experience of being poor, which thus is relative.

M. Green (2006, 1110) adds that this relation is multi-dimensional; deprivation known by the poor does not only become clear by low income and consumption, it is also deprivation of capabilities, entitlements, rights, access to resources and social networks (M. Green 2006, 1110). D. Green (2012, 7) agrees by explaining it is not only about wealth but also about wellbeing, including for example health. These dimensions reinforce each other in a cyclic way. D. Green (2012, 7) explains this through the example of people being discriminated because they are poor, but also becoming more poor because of the ongoing discrimination.

Another dimension of poverty is the way in which it is experienced, which seems to be rather homogeneous (D. Green 2012, 7). When poor people were asked to define poverty, they often mentioned feeling frustrated or exhausted (D. Green 2012, 7). Some feel powerless and excluded from decision-making, generating a sense of hopelessness towards improving their situation. Some acknowledge to experience a lack of access to public services, feeling like they cannot rely on any help. They tend to worry about their appearance or 'look', and the future of

their children. As well, personal dimensions of poverty are central in the experience (Lister 2008, 113). Poverty leaves its scars on people's self-esteem and self-worth, reinforced by not feeling respected and feeling excluded through 'othering' by the non-poor (Lister 2008, 113).

Still, people who live in the framework of poverty do play an active role in creating this social reality, instead of being passive responders (Groenewald 2012, 17). People build on the knowledge they gained from the past and are able to imagine alternatives for the future, which they use to consciously act in the moment. This is shown in the diversity of social arrangements and strategies used to cope and adapt in comparable circumstances (Groenewald 2012, 18).

Thus, poverty is a multidimensional social relation manifested through all areas of life. Experiences of being poor influence people's perspectives and the choices consciously made within the situation of poverty.

1.1.2 Vulnerability

Milou

In addressing poverty, a local specific, historically and politically determined space of vulnerability has to be explored to understand the mechanisms of poverty in that specific context (Leatherman 2005, 54). This space of vulnerability influences people's perceptions, priorities and values on the conditions of poverty (Leatherman 2005, 53).

Vulnerability is the reduced capacity to cope with events and stresses people are exposed to (D. Green 2012, 167). These events can be nationwide like droughts as a consequence of climate change, but they can also occur on household level, like the loss of a job (D. Green 2012, 167). The opposite concept of vulnerability is security and between them is a scale of in-between levels (Chambers 1989, 1).

Vulnerability and poverty are closely related concepts. Vulnerability is not only a consequence of poverty because of limited options and capacities to cope, but also an aspect which leads to more poverty by not being able to cope well (Morduch 1994, 224; Leatherman 2015, 54). A difference is that the concept of poverty misses the risk-component which is important for the theory of vulnerability (Morduch 1994, 224).

Within the classical work of Chambers (1989, 1), it is argued that vulnerability has an internal and external side. The internal environment is the lack of means to cope with shocks and the defencelessness felt when trying to cope. The external side emphasizes the degree in which an individual or household is exposed to shocks and risks. The interaction between these two factors determines how vulnerable a household can be considered (D. Green 2012, 167). A household weak in means can be highly affected by a minor incident, and thus be highly

vulnerable. A household which does have certain means to cope with shocks, can also be considered vulnerable because of the high risk on a massive shock.

Concluding, vulnerability is the fragility of a household or community when exposed to stresses, both as a cause and consequence of poverty. This vulnerability forms a space which determines perspectives and strategies on poverty. People living in contexts which are high in vulnerability could benefit from resilience building, which is discussed in the next paragraph.

1.1.3 Resilience

Romy

The strategies people use to cope with a high degree of vulnerability, equalizing a lack of resilience, can improve this degree by building resilience (Barrios 2016, 28). The degree of resilience depends on the outcomes of the strategies used.

Resilience is defined as the capacity of an individual, a household or community to cope with changes that might occur and still be able to continue functioning, with minimal effects (Davies 1996; Barrios 2016). Shocks and catastrophic events will continue to happen, so it is good to see resilience as an ongoing process, and not a stable outcome which is reached and maintained (Berkes 2013, 11).

So, resilience is a way to describe the qualities and capacities that human beings need to recover from catastrophic events (Berkes 2013, 8). To increase resilience within communities, within households or for individuals, it is important to reduce their vulnerability. Human beings must develop their economical resources and improve their (social) status, thus improve their livelihood, in order to be more resilient to shocks (Norris 2008, 145).

Resilience and vulnerability are central in estimating the strength of livelihoods, in which security equalizes sustainability and resilience, and insecurity equalizes vulnerability. An important part of livelihoods which is affected enormously by poverty and stresses like droughts, is the security of food. The security of food cannot be measured in definite standards, but is formed by the way people perceive food. Therefore, the complexity of people's perspectives on food is elaborated next.

1.2 Perspectives on Food and Food Insecurity

Food can be used as a lens to make an analysis of societies and how people relate and organize those (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 11). Different aspects of being food insecure are elaborated in the second part of the paragraph, as food insecurity can be a lack of availability or access to food, but also encompasses people's preferences and the quality of the diet.

1.2.1 Perspectives on food

Romy

Food is necessary for every human being in order to stay alive. That is why food and the right to it is protected under international human rights and humanitarian law (Claeys 2015). It protects human beings to live free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (Claeys 2015, 62). Claeys (2015, 62) defines the right to food as: *'The right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.'* In this paragraph, we will elaborate the importance of and the meaning behind food. We will also clarify the connection of the meaning behind food to insecurity of food and poverty.

Food is a universal concept and is part of the life of each citizen in the world. But what is it about food that makes it an insightful lens to make an analysis of a society? As Appadurai mentioned (1981, 494), food is a 'highly condensed social fact'. Since food is important for everyone it is a construct that unites all humans. Besides the fact that it unites humans within and outside societies, food can be seen as a social and cultural expression of individuals as well. Thus, it can be used as a metaphor for the way people are included or separated from a society or class (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 585; Anderson 2005, 124). Human beings organize their households and communities around social and economic status (Scoones 1998). A vulnerable household that lives in poverty organizes their household around food in a different way comparing to a prosperous household that lives without food insecurity. In short, food can reflect a perception of poverty. In this way, it is a powerful lens on a society and its capital, labor, health and the environment (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 7).

So, beyond the 'goal' of food to provide enough for the maintenance of the body, it also has meanings for groups of human beings about what to eat, when to eat and whether to eat (Goody 2008, 34). The constructs of the meaning of food arise from the availability, costs, culture, social status and taste of food (Goody 2008, 36). The meaning of food, in a social

situation, is constructed through daily life contexts and events in relation to cultural and social norms in that social environment (Goody 2008, 34).

Food is a means of communication (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 10). This communication is established since food is experienced through different kinds of senses, because of its different properties of smell, sound, sight, touch and taste. As Barthes (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 24) mentioned, because of these multi-sensorial properties of food it has the ability to communicate in different ways. Eating particular parts of an animal for special occasions, like ears, can be seen as very luxury in a society, while another society defines the ears of animals as 'trashfood' (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 32). Besides these different meanings of the same type of food between societies, there is also a difference between types of food within a society. Certain foods are only served during celebrations or special occasions. They symbolize friendship and hospitality (Goody 2008, 38), and such food can even symbolize the heritage of the society or economic status (Goody 2008, 39). As made clear above, food can bring a lot of meaning with it, like protocols of usage, situations and behavior.

Besides the means of communication, food is also seen as an index of power relations (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 11). As elaborated above, food can be seen as a metaphor to how human beings organize and relate to a society. The usage of food is a way to examine political and social relations, like inclusion and separation, within society (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 585; Anderson 2005). It displays practices through which unequal power is acted out, for example unequal power between different households or unequal gender power (Counihan & Esterik 2013: 234; Counihan 1999, 59-60; Goody 2008, 41). The decision-makers about food and the preparation of food within families and societies are in key positions to make changes within these contexts (Goody 2008, 41). While Goody (2008) still states that women are the ones within families and societies who are in these key positions, Counihan (1999, 59) stated earlier on already that women were losing their power and that within the real power imbalance men were more often the ones who determined who eats what.

As elaborated above food is a concept which is part of every household. The meaning of food differs in every situation. It includes providing the body with enough energy and strength, preparing special types of food for celebrations, but food also displays relations within a society and how the society is organized. Next to the organization within a society, food also shows the organization within a household. Both organizational roles of food are very interesting for our research.

Concluding, the meaning to and behind food varies a lot, which makes it very multidimensional and dynamic, but the right to food is something which is universal for every

human being. The right to food is all about the security to food, where food security is conceptualized as the full-time availability of diverse and nutritional food (Pottier 1999, 20).

1.2.2 Food (in)security

Milou

In his book 'Anthropology of Food', Pottier (1999, 20) writes that in order to achieve food security, enough food has to be available to be sure of a steady consumption. In this way, not only availability is highlighted as important but also stability, which is often challenged because of climate variability and little savings (Schmidhuber 2007, 705).

To profit from availability and stability, there has to be physical and economical access at individual, household and regional level (Pottier 1999, 20). Empirical work shows that particular groups around which there is enough food available, still cannot acquire sufficient food through their set of entitlements (Rai 2016, 261). Entitlements are commodities over which people can receive legal rights (Rai 2016, 261). These are entitlements to produce and purchase food, and the right to work for food. Entitlements are politically constructed structures in which social inequalities are reflected through unequal access to resources like land or jobs (Rai 2016, 261).

Unstable economical access to food leads to a focus on quantity enforced by the rise of imported products available (Lebailly 2011, 60). This means that big amounts of cheap, often unhealthy products are consumed to get to a feeling of saturation. Even though the calorie intake of these people is high, their diets are unbalanced and therefore create deficiencies in proteins or vitamins, which is considered to indicate food insecurity.

Logan (2016) argues that the concept of food security is all-inclusive, meaning that you are satisfied after eating your meal and confident where your next meal will come from. Food insecurity means that you cannot eat as much as you need in one meal and that you have to live in fear because of not knowing if you will have enough food that day. There is a spectrum between these concepts of cases in which the food available will not be the food of preference or of adequate quality when looking at nutrients. Also, the spectrum encompasses the feeling of hunger and having to deal with illnesses which are a common consequence for people who are malnourished. The combination of context, entitlements, experiences and feelings surrounding food insecurity shape the livelihood strategies used to gain a living and fight food insecurity. How this framework of context and feelings leads to a combination of different livelihood strategies and thus certain outcomes will be explored now.

1.3 Livelihood strategies and strategies against food insecurity

In this paragraph, we will elaborate the sustainable livelihood approach within the framework of poverty and vulnerability, after which we will continue to explore strategies used to improve a livelihood and specific situation of food insecurity.

1.3.1 Livelihood strategies

Milou

A livelihood is the totality of activities taken and the social and material resources used while gaining a living (Scoones 2009, 172). It is a system with an internal and external livelihood environment (Niehof 2001, 24). The external livelihood is the physical and social-economical environment, involving social relations which determine how work, income and property are distributed (Scoones 2009, 186; Leatherman 2005). Internal includes the characteristics of households and the mechanisms within those which are of influence on the livelihoods (Niehof 2001, 24).

We follow the sustainable livelihood approach, which researches the way in which people cope with vulnerability using livelihoods as priority, stressing both short term satisfaction of basic needs and long term security (Arce 2003, 203). A livelihood can be considered sustainable when it can recover from shocks while maintaining its capabilities and assets (Scoones 2009, 175).

The livelihood system can be divided into different elements which determine the effectiveness and sustainability of the system. In a specific context, certain resources shape a combination of different livelihood strategies, resulting in outcomes (Scoones 1998, 3). Following Scoones (1998, 7), resources are the ‘capital base’ on which strategies can be build and can be identified as different kinds of capital. Natural capital is the stock of resources provided by the natural environment like water, including the environmental situation. Financial capital comprises cash, debt, savings and all other money related resources. Scoones (2009, 8) includes physical capital within financial capital, although we make the distinction between these, defining physical capital as capital created by economical production processes, like infrastructure and modern equipment (Ellis 2000, 32). Human capital emphasizes the skills, knowledge, and health and thus can be improved by education and health services (Ellis 2000, 32). At last Scoones (1998, 8) mentions social capital as referring to the community, network and relationships people have on which they can draw in times of need. These networks may

be vertical in the form of hierarchical relationships, relating to organizations or politicians or horizontal, pointing to personal relations or voluntary organizations (Ellis 2000, 37).

The sustainable livelihood framework involves three sorts of strategies (Scoones 1998, 9). First, intensification and extensification concern the attempt to get more output as a result of financial investment or enlarging the scale. Second, diversification aims at diversifying risks by combining different ways of gaining a living. At last, people migrate as a livelihood strategy. Scoones (1998, 10) calls the activities combined as a strategy a ‘livelihood portfolio’.

So, if livelihoods strategies are successful, this will lead to resilience as the livelihood has a big capacity of coping with shocks (Scoones 1998, 6). The other way around, a less successful livelihood portfolio will result in vulnerability. Though, reality has a lot of factors which have to be considered when analysing the specific outcomes of the strategies put to use (Scoones 1998, 9; Groenewald 2012, 30). Outcomes are not only shaped by internal factors like household characteristics. There is influence of external conditions which form the vulnerability context, and of external processes like policies and institutions which influence the decision-making of individuals, households or communities around livelihood strategies (Groenewald 2012, 30).

Through livelihood strategies people try to strive towards food security. However, food security is not universally established, partly as a consequence of the widespread poverty and long processes of vulnerability (Claeys 2015; Pottier, 1999). In this paragraph, we will dive into strategies that can be used against food insecurity.

1.3.2 Strategies against food insecurity

Romy

A way of coping with food insecurity is by using strategies. The most vulnerable households find themselves forced to adapt strategies in order to survive and improve their current situation. We conceptualize household in our research as *“a co-residential unit, usually family-based, which takes care of resource management and primary needs of its members”* (Groenewald 2012, 40). Most poor households and farmers do not look at strategies on the long term notice, but only on short term notice (Pottier 1999, 30). These strategies can be classified as ‘coping strategies’ (Oldewage-Theron 2006, 796). They give priority to ‘food first’ behavior. In this way, households keep rather unsustainable livelihoods and the problem of the insecurity of food does not disappear. Examples of coping strategies are: short-term dietary changes, reducing or rationing consumption, altering household composition, altering intra-household distribution of food, depletion of stores, increased use of credit for consumption purposes, increased reliance

on wild food, short term labor migration and short term alteration in crop patterns (Maxwell 1996, 291-295; West 2015, 61; Maxwell 1999, 413-414). Maxwell (1996, 296) also elaborated six food-based coping strategies which households can apply to improve their situation on short term; eating less preferred foods, limiting portion size, borrowing food, maternal buffering, skipping meals and whole days of not eating. So, many of the households adapt themselves to strategies that just enable them to survive but not improve their welfare at all (Groenewald 2012, 38).

As Pottier (1999, 16) argues, there is a contrast between approaches on food insecurity by food-insecure groups and approaches on it by agencies. As mentioned, food-insecure groups look mainly at temporary responses. That is why agencies, besides the food first strategies, must also integrate strategies which are focused on livelihoods of the households and look at the long-term solutions (Oldewage-Theron 2006, 796; Maxwell 1996, 293). The goal of these strategies is to improve the welfare of households and make permanent changes in their livelihoods (Groenewald 2012, 36; Oldewage-Theron 2006, 796). The difficulty with these strategies 'from above' is that they have to be implemented in a society who might have an opposite view on the whole situation. As Davies (1993, 66-67) argues it is important to keep in mind, while incorporating these strategies, what the response of the food-insecure group of people will be and what their view on the situation is.

So, different strategies and possible solutions for food insecurity are very complex since all of the developments of humanity, meanings behind the construct food and circumstances in the world are of influence. There is an ongoing dilemma within food security strategies whether to strive to long-term sustainability or immediate food aid (food first versus sustainable-livelihood approach) (Davies, 1996).

Chapter 2. Poverty, Food and Food Insecurity in Guatemala

This part will put food security into context within Guatemala, the site where the research is done. At first it is important to understand more of the historical, economical, social and cultural factors which form the vulnerability context of poverty in which Guatemaltecos structure their livelihoods. After that, we will focus on food, the meaning behind it and its insecurity, specifically in rural Guatemala.

2.1 Poverty in Guatemala

Milou

Between 1960 and 1996 the *Conflicto Armado*, a civil war, occurred as a result of complex national and international conflicts (Bellino, 2015). The indigenous population was affected the most after already being discriminated and denied certain rights for years by the other major ethnic group of Guatemala, *ladinos* (Manz 2008, 157; Tegelberg 2013, 82). The genocide of *Mayas* has had a big impact on the society (Manz 2008, 155). A sense of hopelessness and distrust still terrorizes the repair of the country, stagnating social cohesion and cooperation (Manz 2008, 155). As Colletta (2000, 64) argues, there was a negative impact on cross-cutting social capital, pointing to the laborious relationship between *ladinos* and *Mayas*. On the other hand, the conflict resulted in strong inward-looking social capital, which for example points to strong bonds within one family. This strong unity, the household, is the focus of this research as it can be seen as the central place where livelihood strategies are constructed (Groenewald 2012, 38). A household can be defined as a residential unit, where resources and daily activities are shared (Groenewald 2012, 38).

Even though Guatemala has the biggest economy of Central America, Guatemala still knows devastating rates on poverty which have severe effects on the society (Renos 2003, 35).⁵ The growing export sector does not lead to profit for small farmers, as they cannot afford to take part in the big price fluctuations the global market knows. As well, arising problems like the bad soil quality and increasing pesticide resistance, make it hard for them to keep using traditional farming strategies (Carletto 2008, 2). Inhabitants struggling with their livelihoods have increasingly admitted that they feel like entitlements and rights are selective and inaccessible for them (Burrell, 2010). The economic insecurity they know leads to wage-labor

⁵ Source: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview> consulted on 17-12-2018.

migration from Guatemala to the United States, which was recognized by Scoones (1998, 9) as one of the livelihood strategies. Also, economical hopelessness results in more criminal activities as a part of the daily life in Guatemala (Burrell, 2010).

Poverty in Guatemala is highly correlated with discrimination against people who seem indigenous, often recognized by clothing, language or appearance (Cabrera 2015, 263). An 'indigenous person' is twice as likely to live in extreme poverty than a non-indigenous individual (Cabrera 2015, 263). In concrete words, almost 60 percent of the indigenous and only one fourth of the nonindigenous population live with less than \$2,5 a day. The Guatemalan government attempted to fade some of this inequity by investing in social policies. The budget of this 'social' money is still one of the lowest of Latin-America and thus leads to little positive results (Cabrera 2015, 265).

Different problems tend to arise when Guatemaltecos construct livelihoods. Resources to natural capital such as land are highly concentrated among the non-poor (Renos 2003, 35). Many Guatemaltecos have a one sided human capital depending on physical strength and health instead of knowledge, as a result of high levels of illiteracy and low levels of education. This makes that opportunities for indigenous people to get a non-agricultural income are low (Tegelberg 2013; Renos 2003, 35). Also, indigenous, non-Spanish speakers and women are often discriminated when applying for jobs (Renos 2003, 34). The poor often do not have the capital needed to build a business and have a hard time getting access to social services providing credit, which shows the importance of social capital (Renos 2003, 32). Poor people thus have less options for diversification of income sources. Outcomes of the context and livelihood-portfolios often result in food insecurity in Guatemala. The importance of food, the meaning behind food and food insecurity in Guatemaltecan context will be explained in the next paragraph.

2.2 Food and Food Insecurity in Guatemala

Romy

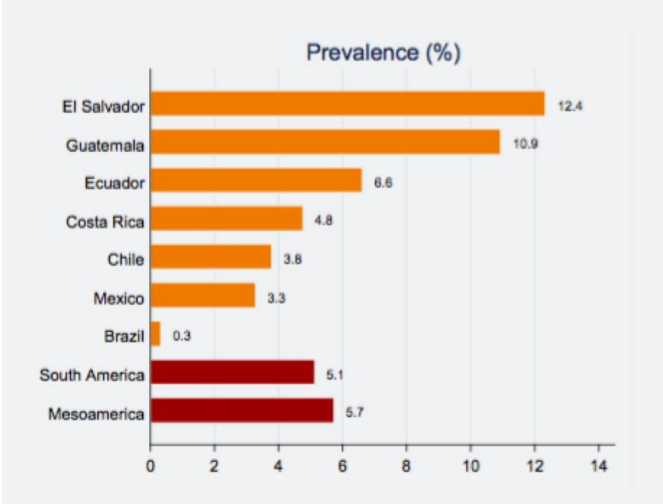
The meaning to the act of consuming food is formed by people's reasons about what to eat, when to eat, and even whether to eat (Goody 2008, 34). Besides the necessity, food is a very important factor for Guatemalans during celebrations and special occasions (Goody 2008, 36). The typical foods that are eaten during these special occasions symbolize Guatemalan heritage, and the social and economic status of people. Although many people live in poverty, the importance of food during traditions and celebrations must be honored. People try to show their position in the society in this way (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 11). So, Guatemaltecan households that live in poverty try to save up for food for these occasions, because of the

important role of food within the society (Goody 2008). But, Guatemala has had some natural and economical shocks lately which affected the positions of these poor and vulnerable households even further (Janvry 2010; FAO 2017) and food insecurity is one of the problems for them (FAO 2017, 2).

Climate change has been of influence on many natural resources. In Guatemala drought has been a huge problem lately (FAO 2017). There is a big amount of agriculture in Guatemala, but drought caused crops to fail (FAO 2017). Many households do not have enough resilience and are too vulnerable to cope with natural shocks like this (FAO 2017, 2). Rural populations are often hit hardest by natural disasters, since their livelihoods depend largely on the natural resources affected by these disasters, such as soil or water (FAO 2017, 90). Thus, natural shocks can eventually induce a food crisis (FAO 2017).

Besides the natural disasters, there have been problems for households on economical level as well. During the period from 2006 to 2008 food prices rose sharply (Janvry 2010, 1328). The high amount of poverty in Guatemala together with these high food prices resulted in many people being unable to purchase enough food and thus being food insecure. The poverty status of many households was affected by the crisis, since Guatemala is highly dependent on imports of several key foods. Households were too vulnerable and lacked resilience to cope with the ‘shock’ of the so-called “Global Food Crisis” (Janvry 2010, 1328). The high amount of food insecurity is still visible years after the crisis, seeable in the image below.

Severe Food Insecurity Status in Latin America, 2014-2016.⁶



⁶ Source: FAO (2017, 18)

The World Food Programme partnered with the government of Guatemala to find solutions for this issue of food insecurity (CARE 2014, 6). Although this strategy looks at ‘foodfirst’ behaviour, it is also important to establish sustainable solutions in Guatemala.

This complexity of possible coping strategies to improve food security is what makes it a challenging subject. Especially in a country like Guatemala, with its specific space of vulnerability and context of poverty.

Chapter 3. Poverty and Vulnerability

Milou, Romy

To sketch the framework of poverty in Santa Cruz it is important to take a closer look at both the etic and emic perspective on poverty. At first the organizations will be introduced briefly, so the perspectives of its employees can be elaborated. These perspectives show how people are being classified as poor from an outsider's point of view, using mainly basic needs of which interpretations will be described. Within this conceptualization, a debate on the underlying problems of poverty came to the surface, explained by elaborating the strong visions of the pastor and the director of the Indigenous Youth Project.

After that a shift will be made towards the perspectives of 'poor' people themselves on their situation. The vulnerable position that these people have will be clarified by describing all kinds of capitals that these families have. These capitals and the shortcoming of them, makes clear why most of these families are and empathically feel like they are in difficult situations. Since, the meaning people give to their own situation is dependent and based on the people around them who have more opportunities.

3.1.1 Organizations striving to Poverty-Reduction

Milou

Within this paragraph, I will elaborate how people from certain organizations in Santa Cruz del Quiché categorize people as 'poor'. This will be done by taking a closer look at their interpretations of basic needs, of which the absence is considered as a poverty-indicator. To do so, a context will be created by introducing the organizations.

In Santa Cruz del Quiché, many organizations are actively working on making a social impact with poverty reduction as a goal.⁷ This research is focused on three of those organizations: The Indigenous Youth Project (Non-Governmental Organization, IYP), the Ministry of Farming and Food (MFF) and the church '*Jesús es la Esperanza*'. IYP is a private organization that focuses on the (indigenous) youth of the communities around Santa Cruz.⁸ The phase between the ages of 15 until 24 years is critical, because as Fabiola, a woman working on her PhD in pedagogy, states: "*In this culture they are not considered as youth*

⁷ Fieldnotes 21-03-2019

⁸ Interview Julio 07-03-2019

anymore but adolescents, and expected to act as responsible adults.”⁹ She explains that many youth do not see opportunities close to them, and consider the United States to be the solution. *“The goal of IYP is to show them they can find close-by opportunities, and create a plan for their lives.”*¹⁰ Through the weekly project they work on improving capacities and soft skills. As well, they provide practical workshops in order to teach the youth how to make a shampoo, how to create a good menu for a restaurant or how to keep chickens.

The ministry of Farming and Food (MFF) is a governmental organization working on improving the situation of food insecurity and malnutrition specifically.¹¹ Through the rural extension teams, existing out of an educator and an agronomical specialist, they work together with a community promoter to organize the activities. The promoter organizes a CADER (*Comisión de Agricultura, Desarrollo y Extensión Rural*¹²), which is the group of participants. The CADER and the promoter tell MFF what kind of help they need so the team can organize different activities once or twice a month. Some activities focus on teaching how to cook a traditional meal in a healthier way, while other activities promote growing food in their gardens.

Within the church *‘Jesús es la Esperanza’*, a ministry of compassion is formed to help people with urgent necessities. This ministry offers help by providing food boxes to ten families. They fill the boxes with donated food, which includes ‘basic needs’ only, like white pasta, beans, sugar or instant soups.¹³ If not enough food is being donated, they buy extra food at low cost at a local distributor. To decide who receives the box, the pastor uses a list of church members who live in poverty.¹⁴ Besides, the pastor organizes different kind of classes. He provides a study of eight months for every member to discuss how to live right according to biblical principles and gives private classes on finances.

⁹ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹⁰ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹¹ Interview Maria 03-04-2019

¹² Translation: Committee of Agriculture, Development and Rural Extension

¹³ Fieldnotes 09-04-2019

¹⁴ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

3.1.2 Basic Needs according to these Organizations

Milou

In general, the employees of these organizations state that people could be considered poor when they are not able to cover their basic needs like food, clothes and education.¹⁵ In this way, they also include aspects of wellbeing, coming to the surface in emphasizing capacities and education as an indicator of poverty (D. Green 2012, 7). It is discussable when these needs are being considered as fulfilled, depending on the standards of that specific society (Ravallion 2017, 3). In this case, basic needs have to be interpreted within the specific framework of standards, values and meanings in Santa Cruz del Quiché. Basic needs as interpreted in this context will be elaborated now.

Fabiola told me most participants of IYP do eat three meals a day, as she argues that they have sufficient food available and accessible to do so, or else they reduce the quantity of one meal so they can eat three times.¹⁶ *“It can be that they eat twice a day, but that is only in extreme cases.”*¹⁷ Therefore, eating twice a day seems to be an indicator of poverty for employees, while eating three meals a day is considered to be the standard. Julio, an older experienced employee of IYP told me: *“They have food, but its nutritional values are low.”*¹⁸ This shows that the basic need of food can also be interpreted as the need to have access to a diet of certain quality. *“Poor families in the rural area do not eat meat until the weekend.”*¹⁹ In his voice I heard that he felt bad for people who practically have to live without meat. Meat is seen as a rather expensive product of quality and thus the absence of it, as a result of its economical inaccessibility, is interpreted as a sign of poverty to the employees.²⁰

*“If people are not educated, they do not know what is healthy.”*²¹ Pedro is not a general colleague of Julio, but a specialist in education. He states that many children finish primary school, but carry different responsibilities afterwards, like helping their mom or contribute economically. In addition, many parents do not see value in further education. In communities it is standard that after completing primary school children start to drop out²², but for employees

¹⁵ Multiple interviews 19-03-2019 / 03-04-2019

¹⁶ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹⁷ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹⁸ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019 + Julio 07-03-2019

¹⁹ Interview Julio 07-03-2019

²⁰ Multiple interviews 07-03-2019 / 19-03-2019

²¹ Fieldnotes 04-03-2019

²² Fieldnotes 04-03-2019

it is seen as a big problem.²³ Pedro's trust in the power of education is big: "*Education can change many of these problems.*"²⁴ Education is not only seen as an indicator of poverty, but as a powerful means to change the whole situation of poverty.

The basic need for clothes holds a special importance in Santa Cruz del Quiché. In the communities domestic animals are not eaten, but held as an investment so *traje*, traditional dresses, can be bought when special occasions approach.²⁵ Even if people are insecure of their food intake the animals will not be eaten but sold so the dresses can be bought. Anita told me those dresses could even cost up to thousand dollars.²⁶ MFF employee Maria, as a daughter of a woman who makes *traje*, sees importance in the tradition that *traje* should be made by hand.²⁷ When people wear cheaper versions made in factories, she recognizes it directly and sees it as clothes for the poor.²⁸ The importance of traditional hand-made *traje* shows how Indigenous people value traditions and how important their appearance is to the outside world, not wanting to prioritize buying food over buying clothing. It indicates as well that people try to cover up their poverty, trying to avoid discrimination as a result of being poor.²⁹ In contrast, for people who do not consider themselves indigenous and do not wear *traje*, it is seen as 'poor' if they have to make their clothes at home.³⁰ When the pastor studied in the capital, fellow students would ask him why he was wearing *tenis*, sneakers, because they thought people from Quiché are poor and thus only have sandals.³¹ In this way, the options to buy or make clothes have to meet the cultural standards before not being considered as poor.

The pastor stated that some people should not be seen as poor even though it looks like they are when it comes to their basic needs.³² "*We helped a family because they did not have food, but the next week they bought an automatic washing machine.*"³³ The pastor provided me with a complete list of examples of families not being able to fulfill their basic needs, but

²³ Multiple interviews 06-03-2019 / 02-04-2019

²⁴ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

²⁵ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

²⁶ Fieldnotes 08-04-2019

²⁷ Fieldnotes 18-03-2019

²⁸ Interview Maria 03-04

²⁹ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

³⁰ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

³¹ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

³² Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

³³ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

prioritizing enormous televisions, expensive telephones and pickups. *“These are people we call poor here because they do not know how to live. They spend what they do not have.”*³⁴ He expresses a general frustration of employees here, for whom the priorities of poor people seem illogical. The statement that they do not know how to live indicates that the pastor is under the impression that poverty is, at least partly, the result of a lack of capacities. He implies that many poor people lack skills like long term thinking, saving and doing administration. Here the pastor seems to agree with M. Green (2006, 1100) that poverty is not merely the deprivation of resources, but also the deprivation of capabilities.

Lilia, a young employee of IYP, explained that some people feel poor as a result of comparing themselves to others.³⁵ *“For example phones. They want an iPhone but have a Samsung. They tell me they are poor because they do not have a decent phone. So, there are people who feel poor because they do not have what other people have.”*³⁶ This corresponds to the notion of relativity within poverty, stating people feel poor when they compare themselves to others and have fewer resources (Notten 2011, 251). Moreover, it indicates that people feel poor if they compare themselves to others, showing poverty is a social relation (Tucker 2011, 293). This relativity was reinforced by the statement of the pastor that he and his church-members are *“poor people helping the poor.”*³⁷ By this he indicates that he sees himself as poor, even though he seemed to be a relatively wealthy person for the standards of Guatemala. His opinion on ‘his poverty’ depends on the people he compares himself to and the social relation of which he thought of during the conversation. Thus, poverty is defined by comparing yourself to others or a certain societal standard and multi-layered as the interpretation depends on the social relation it is compared to. This makes it a fluid and complex concept.

For multiple church-members poverty is seen as a consequence of not living according to biblical principles.³⁸ Mainly the elite and government of Guatemala is blamed in this way: *“The politicians have been corrupt, government after government.”*³⁹ Paco argued that this is a consequence of them refusing to live according to the biblical principles. This indicates a sense of paternalism, acknowledging the bible as the book with the only right answers on how to live

³⁴ Multiple interviews 06-03-2019 / 15-04-2019

³⁵ Interview Lilia 02-04-2019

³⁶ Interview Lilia 02-04-2019

³⁷ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

³⁸ Multiple interviews 28-03-2019 / 15-04-2019

³⁹ Interview Paco 15-04-2019

correctly. Adrián adds that it is not only about living according to biblical principles, but he also points to the importance of believing in ‘his’ God.⁴⁰ He stated people are poor because their ancestors believed in different Gods than the true one. This was a mistake of which the consequences are carried on for four generations, carrying the mistake in their blood. Poverty here was described as a kind of punishment of God for not believing. Paco told me: *“In the communities they still believe in Gods and stones, and they have certain ceremonies to do ‘things’. This is where you can still see how people stay in the same situation for long periods of time. People are poor and use witchcraft so they can leave their situation.”*⁴¹ He considers ceremonies to be useless and a waste of time. According to Paco, ceremonies do not lead to better wealth or wellbeing and therefore keep Indigenous people in the same situation of poverty.

On the other hand, the director of IYP, Antonio, who identifies himself as indigenous and wants to fight for better circumstances for ‘his people’, has a different view on the cause of poverty. He argued that before the Spaniards came, there was no poverty in Guatemala.⁴² Only then they enslaved the indigenous population not only physically, but also in their minds and created a space of a weak cross-cutting social capital (Colletta 2000, 64). The ‘ladinos’, people who identify more with a Spanish origin, made them believe they were worth nothing, small and stupid. *“Still many indigenous are mentally slaves, because their minds have not changed. They are slaves of the ladino culture.”*⁴³ This imprinted insecurity is a reason stopping them from taking action in order to improve their situation. Even if they try, they are still denied many opportunities as a consequence of the ongoing discrimination, which also is supported by the research of Renos (2003, 32).⁴⁴ This is in line with the fact that indigenous people are twice as likely to live in poverty than ladinos (Cabrera 2015, 263).

*“We are in ideological conflict with them, ladinos. For example, they do not want us to talk about nahuales, energies, they say we should not teach about that.”*⁴⁵ Nahuales are important to determine what to be thankful for that day: *“How do you ask for money in the Mayan Cosmovision? You are thankful. You bring some corn and give it to the birds, because*

⁴⁰ Fieldnotes 09-04-2019

⁴¹ Interview Paco 15-04-2019

⁴² Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

⁴³ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

⁴⁴ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019 + interview Pastor 28-03-2019

⁴⁵ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

today is the day of birds."⁴⁶ Letting go of habits and traditional knowledge like this leads to poverty according to Antonio. Besides knowledge, he states important values are forgotten: *"You have to ask for what you need and work hard. Some people work, but now many young people do not want to anymore."*⁴⁷ He implies that forgetting these values is generating poverty.⁴⁸ In this way, the worldview of Antonio proves to be totally different from the one of the church-members, revealing a debate on the reason why Santa Cruz knows poverty.

As the organizations used basic needs to describe situations of poverty, the aspects households used to describe poverty can be organized by taking a closer look at different capitals. As many households struggle to make ends meet and organize their livelihoods, they find themselves in a vulnerable position. Within the next paragraph, this space of vulnerability is elaborated through taking a closer look at capitals.

3.2 Vulnerability and capitals as a lens to the perception on poverty Romy

How citizens of Santa Cruz del Quiché perceive poverty and cope with it will be explored by using the concept of household as basic unit of all social organization. "A household is a co-residential unit, usually family based which take care of resource management and primary needs of its members" (Groenewald 2012, 38). It is the place where its members undertake social and economic activities to provide people's basic needs as much as possible. Many families in Santa Cruz struggle to cope with poverty and fulfill their basic needs.⁴⁹ An example of this is when I meet Anna during a visit to a school in the surrounding areas of Santa Cruz del Quiché, a woman from around 40 years old who looks extremely tired. We start a conversation and she tells me about her daily life. *"We both work very hard every day to have food and to have the opportunity to buy clothes when it is necessary. It is difficult being this poor and not being able to buy or do whatever you want. We never have a day off. All we do is work, which makes us hopeless to believe in change."*⁵⁰

In addressing poverty, a local specific, historically and politically determined space of vulnerability should be explored to understand the mechanisms of poverty in that specific

⁴⁶ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

⁴⁷ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

⁴⁸ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

⁴⁹ Interview Dario 25-02-2019

⁵⁰ Interview Anna 08-04-2019

context (Leatherman 2005, 54). Anna, like many of my participants, is unable to cope with changes due to poor living conditions, which is why she experiences a vulnerable position.⁵¹ “Vulnerability is the capacity to cope with events and stresses to whom people are exposed” (Green 2012, 167). Examples of these events and stresses are an economic crisis which can affect the price of products, natural disasters that affect the harvest or the loss of one of the incomes. The lack of resilience results in a high number of vulnerable households who are not able to cope with stresses or events and this only increases the poverty rates in Guatemala.⁵²

As Leatherman (2005, 54) argues, people’s vulnerable position is also politically determined. The Guatemalan government is corrupt and only provides help for the ‘upper class’.⁵³ This means that the people who really need help do not receive it and stay in the same position. Thus, the Guatemalan government is of great influence on the position and the possibility of change of its citizens. Due to this corruption and impunity many people stay poor, while the rich only get richer⁵⁴, which Sofia, a mother of nine children who I have met many times during my research, mentioned to me as well.⁵⁵

A situation that emphasizes this vulnerable position of many households in Santa Cruz del Quiché is the one of Isabel, a woman with grey long hair in a ponytail until her waist. Overlooking the whole city from a little mountain I get into a very sensitive conversation with her. She looks sad and worried. *“My husband passed away many years ago and he was the one who earned money, not me. After his dead, my living conditions only got worse, since I did not receive any help. I can only buy food from the money that my son earns the day before. It is always a question how much money he earns that day.”*⁵⁶ So, when a change, like the loss of an income due to the death of someone, takes place, Isabel lacks resources to respond to this.

Another example is, that one season of bad harvest can affect a lot of families in a negative way. Many households, like Alba’s, do not have anything to fall back on in times of need. *“Last year it started to rain very late and when it did rain it would not stop anymore. This resulted in a lot of failure of our harvest. What caused us to miss part of our income.”*⁵⁷

⁵¹ Interview Anna 08-04-2019

⁵² Fieldnotes 25-03-2019

⁵³ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

⁵⁴ <http://theconversation.com/guatemala-in-crisis-after-president-bans-corruption-investigation-into-his-government-109864> consulted on 03-05-2019

⁵⁵ Interview Sofia 01-04-2019

⁵⁶ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

⁵⁷ Interview Alba 17-04-2019

So, the daily routine of these families can be affected a lot with just a little change. This vulnerability of the households will be clarified with the different kind of capitals such as natural, physical, financial, human and social capital. These capitals and the shortcoming of some of them give a good insight in how a big part of the population of Santa Cruz is struggling to construct their livelihoods. That is why these capitals will be used as a guideline to understand what poverty means for people living in Santa Cruz del Quiché and how they experience poverty in their daily lives.

Natural capital is the stock of resources provided by the natural environment (Scoones 2009, 8). The stock of resources that families own is extremely variable in Santa Cruz del Quiché. On one hand, people living within the city center do not own a huge amount of land like my participant Inez mentioned, while on the other hand, people living on the outside of the city center, like became clear with Isabel and Anna, possess a bigger amount of land and most of them have their own agricultural production.⁵⁸ Water is another aspect of natural capital. People living on the outside of the center have a lot of problems with the access to water, while people living in the city center can find water in every shop. Still, Alisa, a mother of five children who lives in the city center, argues that most of the households within the city center do not have the opportunity to buy water in the shops since it is very expensive.⁵⁹

Besides that, the access to running water, but also electricity, roads, schools and medical clinics are a big problem in Santa Cruz as well.⁶⁰ Especially in the areas around the city center the lack of these physical capitals is critical, because it withholds many people from all sorts of opportunities due to the lack of roads.⁶¹ People living in the city center are not affected in the same amount, since in the city center a lot is more accessible.⁶² Besides that, the people living on the outsides of the city center are completely depended on electricity or candles during the night hours to have some light. Not many people live close to each other in the rural areas. So, when it gets dark there is no other light that helps. While families living within the city center have a lot of lights from surrounding properties, which makes it easier to live without electricity.⁶³

⁵⁸ Interview Inez 15-04-2019

⁵⁹ Interview Inez 15-04-2019 + Interview Alisa 12-04-2019

⁶⁰ Fieldnotes 17-04-2019

⁶¹ Interview Inez 15-04-2019

⁶² Fieldnotes 25-03-2019

⁶³ Multiple Interviews 21-03-2019/12-04-2019

The lack of electricity also brings another aspect with it, which became clear during my conversation with Luiza, a mother of six children living in a house of just two rooms without electricity, running water or a road to get to. *“I can buy a cheap mobile for my son, that is not the problem. It is just that we cannot charge it, since we do not have electricity. It makes me sad that my son is not able to keep up with his friends in school in this way.”*⁶⁴ Luiza told me that she does not want her son to feel excluded by his friends and this makes her worried. This shows that Luiza, like many of my participants who lack opportunities, wants to keep up with the richer people, but lacks possibilities to do so. She told me that she starts to feel poorer, when it is impossible to keep up with richer ones. Thus, poverty influences people’s self-esteem and feeling of exclusion (Lister 2008, 113). It emphasizes the hopeless and disrespected feeling of their situation of poverty another time.

The low minimum wage in Guatemala ensures that most of its citizens do not have a lot of money to spend and, as many participants told me, lack the opportunity to save money.⁶⁵ Another problem is that there is a lack of jobs in the Santa Cruz area.⁶⁶ Sofia her husband told me that a lot of men have difficulties finding a job, since jobs preferably go to someone who is educated, and can write and read.⁶⁷ Like became clear from my interviews, many of my participants lack this type of knowledge.⁶⁸ Besides that, most of the families in Santa Cruz del Quiché do not have the possibility to get a loan, since the bank does not allow them due to the lack of secure income.⁶⁹ The income and loans that people have are all part of the financial capital (Groenewald 2012, 24).

As mentioned, many of my participants lack education. They do not see a lot of positive aspects in going to school, and want to and are expected to earn money and help their family from a young age. This becomes clear during a meeting that I joined at a school a five-minute ride away from the city center.⁷⁰ One of my informants tells the six teenagers that she has an opportunity for them at a school in the city where they can study a whole year for free. The only girl in the group of teenagers looks around to her brothers and starts talking to them. *“I know that it is great opportunity guys, but it is just not an option for us. We must help mom and*

⁶⁴ Interview Luiza 21-03-2019

⁶⁵ Interview Sofia 28-03-2019

⁶⁶ Multiple Interviews 06-03-2019/12-04-2019

⁶⁷ Fieldnotes 20-03-2019

⁶⁸ Multiple Interviews 15-03-2019/10-04-2019

⁶⁹ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

⁷⁰ Fieldnotes 05-03-2019

dad. I mean who else is going to earn money for our food?" The younger boy looks sad to his feet, while the older boy responds to her that he understands what she means.⁷¹ So, the girl does not feel the urge to study, since having food every day is their priority. This priority is striking, since they often compare themselves to the higher social class and strive to reach to that class without success, which leaves scars on their self-worth (Lister 2008, 112). Thus, a high education gives more opportunities compared to a low education, which puts the uneducated people in a mindset of seeing change as an unreachable goal.⁷² As Sofia said, they do not have a lot of abilities and do not have a big chance of getting a well-paid job in their lives.⁷³ The human capabilities and properties, like education, are important aspects of the human capital (Groenewald 2012, 24)

At last, social capital refers to the community, network and relationships people have on which they can count in times of need (Scoones 1998, 8). In Santa Cruz del Quiché, the social capital of citizens is very variable. Some are rooted in a lot of relations and can rely on many different persons in times of need,⁷⁴ while others have no one to rely on.⁷⁵ One of the reasons for the lack of social capital for many people is discrimination.⁷⁶ Daniela is one of the many people who experience discrimination and feels disrespected and excluded through ‘othering’ by the richer ones. *“It is like this since the war. The ladinos think right away that every indigenous is poor and that is how they deal with us. They look at me like I am worth nothing and some do not even talk to me.”*⁷⁷ She is a woman from around 60-year-old living on the outsides of the city center and she explains to me that that the ladinos exclude a lot and only want people in their group of friends from the same social class. Many people only have people from the same class in their social capital, while all of them want to end up in a higher social class. This means that the capabilities to help others with their improvements are often not present.⁷⁸ Therefore a lot of people do not have social relations on which they can rely in times of need.

⁷¹ Fieldnotes 05-03-2019

⁷² Fieldnotes 04-03-2019

⁷³ Fieldnotes 28-02-2019

⁷⁴ Interview Fe 02-04-2019

⁷⁵ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

⁷⁶ Interview Fe 02-04-2019 + Interview Daniela 03-04-2019

⁷⁷ Interview Daniela 03-04-2019

⁷⁸ Interview Kiki 04-04-2019

In short, personal dimensions are central in getting an insight in the experience of poverty (Lister 2008, 113). Poverty leaves its scars on people's self-esteem and self-worth, reinforced by not feeling respected and feeling excluded through 'othering' by the non-poor (Lister 2008, 113). Thus, by explaining these different capitals, it becomes clear that many people define their own situation by comparing their own capitals to the capitals of others and do not want to exude poverty, which makes the perceptions on poverty relative.

Chapter 4. Food and Food Insecurity

Romy, Milou

After explaining the situation of poverty for the population in Santa Cruz del Quiché, it is important to look at an example in which these living conditions become clear. Food is a construct in which personal relations and dimensions within a society become clear, which, as explained in the previous chapter, are central in the experience of poverty. So, within this thesis we chose to take food as lens to get an insight in this framework of food insecurity and poverty.

First, to get an insight in the meaning behind food, three classifications of food will be elaborated, namely price, quality and symbolism. After that the concepts solidarity and separation, two messages behind food, will be amplified based on the three classifications. In the next paragraph, there will be a focus on the difference between the interpretation of availability of food by the organizations and by households. Then the aspect of financial, physical and social access will be elaborated, differentiating between the responsibilities carried by men and women, and the importance of nutrient diets in striving to food security will be elaborated. In the last paragraph of this chapter, there will be a division between two groups of food-insecure. On one hand, there is a group who lack the access to sufficient food, while on the other hand there is a group who lack nutritional knowledge, thus have an insufficient diet.

4.1 Meaning behind Food

Romy

So, the need of food goes far beyond only nutrition (Anderson 2005, 40). The cultural values behind food show that the food choices that people make in their lives are intertwined in all kinds of relations within Santa Cruz del Quiché.

To get an insight in the food choices that are made I will elaborate the classifications that my participants made during their interviews.⁷⁹ The first classification that is made within communities is the price of food.⁸⁰ Many people do not have the opportunity to buy expensive products, so they only eat the cheap products. A product like meat is for a lot of persons something that they only eat once a week if possible, because it is so expensive for them. This became clear during my interview with Xiomara. We talked about her favorite food and what stops her from eating it. *“We only eat meat on Sunday, since it is expensive food and everybody*

⁷⁹ Multiple Interviews 06-03-2019/15-04-2019

⁸⁰ Multiple Interviews 12-03-2019/12-04-2019

is at home that day. So, after our visit to the church we can enjoy it all together. Meat is really tasty, but we cannot afford to buy it more often unfortunately.”⁸¹ Products like beans and corn are the fundament of the alimentation in Guatemala. These two products are cheap in comparison to other products and many people have these products on their land.⁸² Being able to buy products which are more expensive can put them in a different social class or position since it gives them prestige, as Luiza argues.⁸³

The second classification that is made is the quality of food.⁸⁴ Products like broccoli and tomatoes are perceived as products of high quality and very healthy. Where Instant soup, is perceived as low quality⁸⁵. The knowledge the people themselves have about healthy or unhealthy food is very limited. The only knowledge that most of them get about this is the information that the medicals give them, when there is a health problem already.⁸⁶ Paula, a 22-year-old mother of four, explained to me that the doctors told her which products are health: *“Before my little boy got sick I did not know that beans and corn was not sufficient. Everybody always says that it is the best to eat corn and beans, but the doctor told me to eat more different things. My son is feeling way better now. I cannot believe that no one has told me that before.”*⁸⁷

The third classification that is made is the symbolism of food. Meat is perceived as a very special type of food in Santa Cruz, where rice for example is not.⁸⁸ The classification that is made here is influenced by cultural and religious values in Guatemala. Cultural values are very important in Santa Cruz. A lot of the families, like Luiza’s, eat something because their ancestors have told them that it is special.⁸⁹ During our meetings, Luiza told me a lot about food traditions within her family: *“My mother used to cook extremely healthy for us. She always told me how important it is to eat ‘tamales’ and homemade honey during Easter. It is a tradition that has been running in my family for many years.”*⁹⁰ It stays in the family and goes from one generation to the other. These special foods are only served during celebrations or special

⁸¹ Interview Xiomara 18-03-2019

⁸² Fieldnotes 02-04-2019

⁸³ Interview Luiza 08-04-2019

⁸⁴ Multiple Interviews 06-03-2019/15-04-2019

⁸⁵ Multiple Interviews 12-03-2019/15-04-2019

⁸⁶ Fieldnotes 25-03-2019

⁸⁷ Interview Paula 12-03-2019

⁸⁸ Interview Julia 25-03-2019

⁸⁹ Fieldnotes 03-04-219

⁹⁰ Interview Luiza 21-03-2019

religious occasions when the whole family is together.⁹¹ They symbolize the affirmation to their religion (Goody 2008, 38), and can even symbolize the heritage of the society (Goody 2008, 39).

As made clear, food is constructed through daily circumstances and special occasions in relation to cultural and social norms (Goody 2008, 34). Being able to buy pricey or special food can show how wealthy someone is. The people who cannot afford these products can evolve a feeling of separation from the ones who can buy the things they wish to buy. The feeling of exclusion, as Inez told me, by not being able to buy meat that often puts scars on her self-worth.⁹² So, food is a construct that makes a separation between classes, groups or positions that get included or excluded based. Yet, the fact that people in Santa Cruz only eat expensive or special food on days that everyone is together shows the aspects of respect, inclusion and being solid. So, food is a metaphor for the way human beings organize and relate to a society. Therefore, it can communicate class, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 585; Anderson 2005, 124).

These messages of separation and solidarity become clear through the different systems of classifications used in the specific framework of Santa Cruz. Solidarity in a way that eating together means sharing and participating. Solidarity became clear of the days that I have spent with families. Every time I came to visit, they prepared something special to eat together with me. An example of this is my visit to Sofia during *Semana Santa*⁹³. She walks out of her cooking area and comes to me. “*This honey is very special and we only eat it on Thursday during Semana Santa, but for you I will make an exception.*”⁹⁴ She gives me homemade bread with the honey and sits down next to me on the ground. “*I am so happy to share this with you. I feel so lucky that you spent your month here visiting us every week. I want to show you that you will always be part of our family*”, is what she responds a little shy.⁹⁵ It becomes clear here how solid many people are by how eager they want to include a person they only know for a month by offering expensive food, even though they do not have many opportunities. By showing how important I am for them, the link between sharing food with others and being personally close to them becomes clear (Anderson 2005, 125).

⁹¹ Multiple Interviews 06-03-2019/15-04-2019

⁹² Interview Inez 19-03-2019

⁹³ The holy week of Easter

⁹⁴ Fieldnotes 17-04-2019

⁹⁵ Fieldnotes 17-04-2019

Sharing food outside of their households brings an extra dimension. People want to exude a message of solidarity and they do not want to exude poverty to others, which Thomas told me. *“I do not want to have that my friends think that I am poor. Being poor is kind of shameful. That is why I still try to show the best to others.”*⁹⁶ So, when there are people invited for dinner most families buy expensive, high quality and special food. Since, people who share high-valued, thus expensive, special and of high-quality, food with others, show extreme solidarity and gain a lot of respect and prestige.⁹⁷

The message of separation becomes clear in a way that food marks social class and ethnicity (Anderson 2005, 124; Counihan & Esterik 2013, 585). This marking of social class becomes clear out of my conversation with Fe, a woman who is in the end of her sixties. She tells a lot about her childhood memories and how she felt different than her friends: *“We only ate tortillas with salt when I was younger, while my friends ate a lot of other things every day, because they had a lot of money to spend. I remember that I felt really sad about that.”*⁹⁸ In the eyes of Fe, the richer people have more money to spend and they can eat expensive, special and high quality food whenever they like.⁹⁹ This shows that people with more money appear to have more possibilities and the poor ones feel like the ‘other’ because of that.

Alisa also told me that in her eyes, rich people are people who have access to fast food and can eat everything whenever they want to eat it¹⁰⁰, where fast food is seen as special and expensive.¹⁰¹ So, Alisa looks up to and feels separated from these higher classes due to her lack of possibilities. Families with all kinds of possibilities within price, quality and symbolism are perceived as rich and have a higher social status, compared to families who lack these possibilities.¹⁰²

The separation is not only taking place between different households, but also within households. The person in the family with the key position gets treated differently. They get more food in comparison to other members¹⁰³ and they position themselves at the head of the

⁹⁶ Interview Thomas 26-03-2019

⁹⁷ Interview Fe 02-04-2019

⁹⁸ Interview Fe 02-04-2019

⁹⁹ Interview Fe 02-04-2019

¹⁰⁰ Interview Alisa 12-03-2019

¹⁰¹ Multiple Interviews 12-03-2019/15-04-2019

¹⁰² Multiple Interviews 12-03-2019/12-04-2019

¹⁰³ Interview Thomas 26-03-2019

table and the highest chair available.¹⁰⁴ Striking enough, they told me that they treat everybody within the household in the same way, while spending time with them the opposite became visible.¹⁰⁵ I was invited for a dinner at Sofia's with her whole family. When I arrived there the father and I were the only people who received a chair to sit on, and when one of the children asked for more food Sofia said that it was finished, while she insisted that I ate more.¹⁰⁶

Thus, it is not just eating food, but the meaning behind it and the knowledge about the nutritional values are important aspects of the food choices that are made. The meaning of food in Santa Cruz del Quiché is constructed through the daily life and special occasions in relation to cultural and social norms (Goody 2008, 34). In short, the usage of food is a way to examine political and social relations within society (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 587).

4.2.1 From food availability to access to a healthy diet

Milou

Foods of different prices, quality, or meanings can communicate several messages, as elaborated in the last paragraph. As food can be seen as a means of communication, it influences people's choices on which food they buy and how they use it. This in turn, determines a part of the food insecurity as organizations perceive it. Employees recognized mainly availability, economical, physical and social access as predictors of food insecurity, as described below.

I meet up with Sofia, a community facilitator for the Ministry of Farming and Food, and her two-year-old daughter at the local bakery to talk for a moment. Her traditional dress is bright green and full of ornaments, just like the dresses of the women she seems to know from one of her communities. After five minutes of talking politely, she tells me about some of her experiences in their community: *"I went there and the first thing I saw were various trees with fallen apples which were rotten, because they were not looked after. Also, lemons were rotten. And when I entered the house, one of the women told me she did not have anything to eat. These are lies."*¹⁰⁷ She seems frustrated, by using a loud voice and sharpened face expression, clearly annoyed by people 'lying'.

Her experience shows that the meaning people give to food differs and that their food preferences should be taken into account when determining food insecurity (Logan, 2016). In

¹⁰⁴ Fieldnotes 01-04-2019 + 03-04-2019

¹⁰⁵ Interview Sofia 28-03-2019

¹⁰⁶ Fieldnotes 01-04-2019

¹⁰⁷ Interview Sofia 12-03-2019

this case, employees of MFF recognize lemons as food, while people in the communities do not. Besides, Sofia explains Santa Cruz has a wide availability of native plants like amaranth and blackberries, but people rarely eat them. *“They lose the culture of eating these native plants. Our grandparents did have the habit of eating those, but not anymore. Young people forget how to cook a plate with it and now it is even hard to make children eat them.”*¹⁰⁸ Alvaro, an older MFF employee, adds that the connection humans have to nature is weakening as a result of the many imported products and the switch from people working on the land to people working in shops.¹⁰⁹ In his opinion this weakening connection leads to forgetting how to use and cook native plants. Preference for other foods like tortillas and beans distracts and restrains them from using other options available, like lemons and those native plants. This shows that food availability only determines food insecurity partly, because it depends on what people culturally perceive as ‘good’ food and thus want to use in their diet. Employees like Sofia and Alvaro are conscious about that and therefore attempt to fight food insecurity by organizing regular cooking classes in their communities to show people how to cook native plants.

Pedro emphasizes the division of roles which are generally still accepted in the communities around Santa Cruz: *“Basically, the fathers of families are economically responsible for the basic needs of the children, the mother has to be at home.”*¹¹⁰ This division of responsibilities leads to different ways in which they influence the family’s food security. Like Pedro states, the father should provide financial capital for the family. In the eyes of the employees of MFF, the tradition that this responsibility is not shared leads to vulnerability as the whole family depends on one income, and thus increases food insecurity.¹¹¹ Besides, the pastor argues that it is problematic that the man decides how much of his earned money he will give to his wife.¹¹² The man can spend money on himself first behind the back of his wife, which often happens with alcohol as elaborated next.

“Amores, are you coming to the table?” Anita’s voice sounds caring as she is, though compelling. Just like every other day, she prepared lunch for us. Normally it is us two eating at the huge table, because the other members of the family are not yet hungry. However, today a boy of around ten years old is sitting on a chair within a safe distance from the table. Anita

¹⁰⁸ Interview Sofia 12-03-2019

¹⁰⁹ Interview Sergio 11-04-2019

¹¹⁰ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

¹¹¹ Multiple interviews 06-03-2019 / 04-04-2019

¹¹² Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

leans in to whisper she found him on the street looking lost and hungry. He said his dad is one of the alcoholics we see every day at the end of our street. Anita goes on to stir in her big pan and while we continue eating out lunch, we feel rather uncomfortable.

During this experience we got to see why the pastor implied that alcoholism plays a role in the food security of Santa Cruz del Quiché. Even though some men earn sufficient money, prioritizing alcohol can leave their family without food.¹¹³ The pastor makes it a priority to change the responsibility for finances during the bible study. Alcohol is not the only thing which, in some cases, is prioritized over food according to employees. *“For example, many people own chickens, but when a festivity approaches or there is a special event in the community, they sell those to buy special food or clothes. It is like an investment.”*¹¹⁴ Pedro uses this example to show that many people use a potential source of food as an investment for certain occasions, when a big amount of money is needed. He indicates that it is important for people in the communities to have special clothes, and that this is worth eating less or eating food of lower quality. Julio is left with a dilemma, stating that within the IYP they want to stimulate investments like chickens, but also want people to eat their domestic animals.¹¹⁵ In the next passage another debatable priority, using *tuktuks*¹¹⁶, comes to the surface and the use of different kind of capitals on the market will become clear.

“Can we take a tuktuk?” Even though the market is only a ten-minute walk away, Anita refuses to go by foot. Arriving to the market, she enthusiastically greets some of her many cousins and walks by the stalls where her friends sell fruits. Even a woman we know she hates is greeted like she is a good friend. A lot of stands offer the same kind of tomatoes, but she consciously decides where to buy them. She either knows a friend of hers selling tomatoes, or she knows where she can find them the cheapest. Still, whatever price is offered, she answers by offering half and most often this approach succeeds. After looking away for one second, we find Anita with an ice cream. Smiling she says: *“My friend gave it to me.”*¹¹⁷

As the pastor kept emphasizing, many women are used to take *tuktuks*, even though it costs money which is scarce for them.¹¹⁸ According to the pastor they prioritize the commodity of not having to walk over having sufficient food, which frustrates him and makes him think

¹¹³ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

¹¹⁴ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

¹¹⁵ Interview Julio 07-03-2019

¹¹⁶ A local means of transport

¹¹⁷ Fieldnotes 12-04-2019

¹¹⁸ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

that food insecurity, at least partly, is a choice.¹¹⁹ However, this choice is made unconsciously as they use it as a means to participate in the ‘normal’ daily life of Santa Cruz.¹²⁰ For many taking a *tuktuk* is an unquestioned habit. After getting physical access to the market, the women have to bargain for a good price, which gives them power in determining their access to food. Anita offers half of the original price and stubbornly walks away when she does not get the discount. The skills she uses here are part of her human capital and determine how well she spends her financial capital. She developed these skills through her daily life, but according to Pedro other skills like financial administration should be thought in school, as many people lack these further *soft skills*.¹²¹ The fact that Anita managed to get ice cream for free shows that social capital is used as well. As many other employees, Julio sees big families as problematic as it is hard to feed so many children. However, the described experience shows that the value of knowing many people in the city should not be underestimated in determining food insecurity.¹²² It can be concluded that the market is a space where women challenge food insecurity on a weekly basis.

During this process of buying food, decisions have to be made regarding to what to buy. By choosing the products, women decide what their family members consume. *“But the diet is bad. Mainly the people in the communities buy foods like corn, beans, rice. But they do not eat other things. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are beans with tortilla or tamales¹²³.”*¹²⁴ Fabiola confirms that the traditional diet is limited to only a few elements, lacking diversity and thus these people are considered to be food insecure.¹²⁵ Pedro states that women in the communities argue that they have sufficient food when they feel satisfied after a meal. *“We know it does not cover all the nutrients when people only eat beans and tortillas, but they see it as sufficient.”*¹²⁶ In this case, what may be seen as ‘normal’ and acceptable by the people in the community themselves, is seen as problematic by employees as they realize people lack nutritional value in their diets over the long term.

¹¹⁹ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

¹²⁰ Fieldnotes 12-04-2019

¹²¹ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

¹²² Interview Julio 07-03-2019

¹²³ Translation: A roll of corn dough

¹²⁴ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹²⁵ Multiple interviews 06-03-2019 / 28-03-2019

¹²⁶ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

Also, the quality of the products eaten is important for Sofia in determining the food security: *“So many times we go to communities in which they tell us they do not have the resources to buy food, but you find the son of the family drinking a soft drink, which is worth 15 quetzales.”*¹²⁷ According to her, by spending money on coke, the mother limits her own resources needed for buying more necessary nutrient-rich products. It becomes clear that the choices women make in buying food are of significant importance in assuring a food secure family. During the whole process of interpreting availability, getting access and preparing food, food insecurity thus can be manifested for a household. This results in two groups of food insecure people, which will be elaborated in the next sub-paragraph.

4.2.2 A division of two food insecure groups

Romy

During my fieldwork within multiple households a separation between two groups of people who are food insecure became clear. In Santa Cruz, there are two groups of people who are poorly nourished: people that do not have access to sufficient food, thus lack food, and people that do have access to sufficient food, but lack nutritional values.

Having sufficient food can provide a feeling of security. So, not having sufficient food provides a feeling of insecurity, as Julia told me.¹²⁸ Guatemala is one of the many countries in the world where sufficient food is not guaranteed (WHO, 2017). The weather has been changing in Guatemala, so the farmers start sowing later every year due to the lack of rain.¹²⁹ A lot of crops, like the beans and corn from Isabel’s family, failed in Santa Cruz del Quiché because of the lack of rain.¹³⁰ Due to the decrease of availability of the products the prices started to increase, which made it even more difficult to buy products for most of the families.¹³¹ In combination with the existing high rate of poverty, many people, like Hugo, have difficulties with providing sufficient food each day.

Hugo, a ninety-year-old man living in nothing more than just a few walls of cardboard, looks at me with cataracts in his eyes. A drop of blood falls on his dirty sweater. He looks so extremely ill is the only thing that I can think about. His hair is thin, almost all his teeth are

¹²⁷ Interview Sofia 12-03-2019

¹²⁸ Interview Julia 25-03-2019

¹²⁹ Interview Thomas 26-03-2019

¹³⁰ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

¹³¹ Interview Kiki 04-04-2019

gone and he has a lot of difficulties with pronouncing words. He looks so relaxed despite his health problems. He tells me that he is completely dependent on people who bring him food. “*God will look after me. He decides till when I will be able to live. I am not able to change this*”, is what he says.¹³²

Hugo, like some of my participants, is completely dependent on others, but he does not feel sad about his insecurity at all.¹³³ He has faith in his religion and believes that he will be saved and will be able to survive somehow. In comparison to Hugo, there are also people, like Sofia, feeling stressed and sad about not having sufficient food.¹³⁴ “*I feel really sad about it. I am the one who is responsible for my children. I must give them food, since they need it to keep working and earn money*”, is what Sofia tells me during our talk while we prepare some food together on a sunny afternoon.¹³⁵

Some people who have access to all kinds of food, eat a lot of unhealthy food like Burger King or *Pollo Campero*¹³⁶, and thus lack nutritional values.¹³⁷ This ‘malnutrition’ is a result of many reasons, but in my fieldwork three came to light. First, many people lack education about nutrients and do not know much about what is healthy.¹³⁸ Besides that, fast-food or other unhealthy food is easy to access and they do not have to prepare anything anymore, which saves time in which they can work.¹³⁹ Some families, like Diego’s, start consuming more fast-food when there have been problems within their families. During our walk around town, Diego, a middle-class man who is in the end of his twenties, tells me: “*My mom does not feel like cooking anymore since my dad passed away three weeks ago. She thinks that our family is not complete. So, the only thing that we have been eating is fast-food*”.¹⁴⁰ The last reason why people eat a lot of fast-food, is because it gives a status to people (Anderson 2005, 124). When people have access to ‘expensive’ fast-food most of them like to show it to others, since it gives them respect and people will look up to them.¹⁴¹ The pressure that is felt, by people like Luiza, to have the

¹³² Interview Hugo 25-03-2019

¹³³ Fieldnotes 15-03-2019

¹³⁴ Multiple Interviews 19-03-2019/28-03-2019

¹³⁵ Interview Sofia 28-03-2019

¹³⁶ A Guatemalan fast-food chain

¹³⁷ Interview Diego 04-04-2019

¹³⁸ Fieldnotes 26-03-2019

¹³⁹ Interview Diego 04-04-2019 + Interview Kiki 04-04-2019

¹⁴⁰ Interview Diego 04-04-2019

¹⁴¹ Fieldnotes 31-03-2019

'fancy' food to not be separated or 'othered' from a social group becomes clear. It emphasizes the importance of being respected and included within a social group.

So, food can be used as a lens to make an analysis of poverty in Santa Cruz del Quiché, since it is one of the basic needs that people struggle to fulfill. The meaning people give to food determines the food they buy. Even though some do not have a lot of resources, they still want to buy expensive, high quality and special food because of the messages behind it. Therefore, some people see themselves as food insecure, while they have access to cheaper food with less symbolism. So, the meaning they give to certain foods also leads to the interpretation of food availability.

In short, in accessing food, the men and women carry different responsibilities and both influence different aspects of food insecurity. Within these people who are seen as food insecure is a division of two groups; people who lack access and people who lack nutritional value. By elaborating this division, it becomes clear that the experience of food insecurity is dependent on the food choices people make. In the next chapter, the strategies people and organizations in Santa Cruz del Quiché use to cope with food insecurity will be elaborated.

Chapter 5. Strategies against Food Insecurity

In this chapter, the coping strategies organizations use will be elaborated. These strategies and how they are diversified show how the organizations interpret the problem of food insecurity and what they think that is the underlying cause for this which should get dealt with. Organizations adapt their strategies to the circumstances of Santa Cruz, taking into account cultural difficulties influencing their projects.¹⁴²

After that, the coping strategies used within food insecure households will be discussed. The limited livelihood strategies show how the households face difficulties when finding solutions to cope with food insecurity. Receiving help is one of the strategies that are used to cope, but in the opinion of the families, there is not a lot of impact right now.

5.1 Coping strategies of IYP, MFF and the church

Milou

The IYP uses an integrated strategy to make an impact. *“To create resources for them is the principal goal.”*¹⁴³ Pedro emphasizes the importance of financial capital, but instantly adds that this goal is only reached by ‘awakening’ all kind of capacities and thus improving their human capital (Ellis 2000, 32). His colleague Fabiola argues that by teaching capacities, young people can see their potency. *“If they do not know what they are worth, they will not make anything of their lives.”*¹⁴⁴ By saying this she acknowledges the insecurity many young community members feel, as mentioned in chapter 3. Fabiola expresses the often confirmed opinion that this mindset has to be changed in order to improve the situation, which they try through the capacity trainings.

The capacities taught through the project vary per module. By focusing on different kinds of capacities and broad soft skills, IYP acknowledges that many factors influence the problem of poverty and food insecurity¹⁴⁵. One specific module is called ‘A Healthy Life’ and focusses on food insecurity. Pedro explains: *“We teach them healthy habits around food, hygiene, and sexual reproductive health.”*¹⁴⁶ IYP combines the two aspects of human capital:

¹⁴² Fieldnotes during the whole research period

¹⁴³ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

¹⁴⁴ Interview Fabiola 19-03-2019

¹⁴⁵ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

¹⁴⁶ Interview Pedro 06-03-2019

skills and knowledge. *“We meet up with the group and if they decide they want to make licuados¹⁴⁷, we bring them the materials and search for a place to cook. We show them how to do it and talk about the nutritional advantages it has. After that, they will teach their families.”¹⁴⁸* Lilia sounds enthusiastic talking about the *licuados* and she is convinced that in this way she makes a positive impact.

However, when I ask IYP director Antonio about the impact of his strategies, he sounds less optimistic. *“I do not feel like we make an impact yet.”¹⁴⁹* I look at him, shocked by his answer, which came as a complete surprise to me after having heard all of the positive answers he was giving until now. *“We still cannot see better living conditions, or a certain quantity of young people with jobs. But next week we will bring some free seeds for them. I am happy because we will finally help them.”¹⁵⁰* He tells me he realizes that his way of thinking is influenced by paternalism, implying that real help is considered to be handing out concrete things. Roberto explained to me earlier that after the peace accords of 1996 many organizations started to hand out things like food. Still, political parties hand out things to convince people to vote for them in this electoral year.¹⁵¹ *“So projects of education are not really valued.”¹⁵²* He does not measure the success of his organization by the small changes in the mind, because realizes that the families do not see those. *“They think our project changes nothing.”¹⁵³*

MFF seems to have a clear and straightforward goal: reduce food insecurity.¹⁵⁴ The leaders of MFF decided to divide the strategies over two persons working in the community. *“The educator is mostly a woman, because she has to educate the women about household stuff.”¹⁵⁵* Adam, a closely involved peace corps member, has a great overview on how MFF operates. By household stuff he means knowledge about nutritional value and hygiene practices.¹⁵⁶ *“Further, the engineer, most often a man, educates on topics like irrigation and*

¹⁴⁷ Translation: Fruit juices

¹⁴⁸ Interview Lilia 02-04-2019

¹⁴⁹ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

¹⁵⁰ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

¹⁵¹ Fieldnotes 01-04-2019

¹⁵² Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

¹⁵³ Interview Antonio 04-04-2019

¹⁵⁴ Interview Sofia 12-03-2019

¹⁵⁵ Interview Adam 03-04-2019

¹⁵⁶ Interview Maria 03-04-2019

agriculture.”¹⁵⁷ These strategies are mainly focused on improving the availability of food and nutritional value of the diets.

However, before MFF can educate a group of people, it has to win the trust of the community. “*Often they expect that just another political party is trying to convince them to vote. Even if they realize the organization is not a political party, people think that they cannot rely on the projects of the government and that their promises will be failed.*”¹⁵⁸ The problem of MFF Adam expresses is fought by having a lot of patience and really getting to know the people of the community. This also became clear in the long time Sofia took to talk politely with some women from the community, even though we were in the middle of our interview. Around Santa Cruz del Quiché, this lack of efficiency means that they are only involved in one third of the communities they should actually work in.

The pastor teaches capacities through his masses on Sunday, an obligated 8-month study and through private classes with couples like Mario and Petronella. I already met Petronella a few times when she starts to cry. Only now, feeling comfortable in her own living room, she tells me the reason why she and her husband are so active in the ministry of compassion of the church: they know how it feels to not have food. Mario supports his wife by putting his arm around her. “*I am just so chaotic in doing my finances*”.¹⁵⁹ He smiles while he admits it, but surprisingly enough the one laughing the loudest is Petronella. When I ask who is doing the finances right now, she tells me that she still is not involved in it because of her not working. Although they do not seem to tell me about this with pride, the gratitude is visible in their eyes when they admit they receive private classes of their ‘brother’, the pastor, to read the bible and organize their finances.¹⁶⁰

The pastor sees great importance in capacitating his church-members on topics like finances. “*I basically tell them they have to save money or food when they have much, for times when they have less. I teach them to be good administrators, to regulate their money, food and time.*”¹⁶¹ He hopes people can take better care of themselves and have a stable economical access to food. In doing this, he challenges the traditional idea that women, like Petronella, should not know about the financial situation. In the 8 month study he also discusses the

¹⁵⁷ Interview Adam 03-04-2019

¹⁵⁸ Interview Adam 03-04-2019

¹⁵⁹ Interview Mario and Petronella 28-03-2019

¹⁶⁰ Interview Mario and Petronella 28-03-2019

¹⁶¹ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

traditional idea that women should not work and that men can have multiple women. *“If men have 2 or 3 women and a lot of children, they will be poor. So machismo affects a lot.”*¹⁶² Not all church-members react the same to the strategies of the pastor: *“Some women are scared to work or study, because their husband can dismiss them from their house. It costs some effort to teach.”*¹⁶³

Besides the capacity trainings, the ministry of Compassion also hands out food directly to the ten families who need it the most.¹⁶⁴ In this way, the church diversifies over long-term and short-term strategies. When new people enter the church they have an interview with the pastor in which their economical situation is discussed. *“We have a list of families, around 20 families are our priority. Those are the families of which we know that they live in poverty.”*¹⁶⁵ By doing this the pastor uses the income or job people have as the first predictor of poverty and food insecurity, which is only a part of the financial capital and neglecting the relativity of poverty. Even though Petronella recognizes donating food is only a short-term help, they feel like they are obligated to contribute in this way: *“We have to serve God, and thus help others where we can.”*¹⁶⁶ Although the motivation may be different for the different organizations and the measurable impact may be small, all organizations showed me a spark of hope, longing for a better future.

5.2 Coping strategies by households

Romy

These three organizations are just some of the many different ones which are trying to help people to decrease the high rate of food insecurity in Santa Cruz del Quiché. First, it is interesting to look at the livelihood strategies the households themselves use to cope with this insecurity and after that we will look at how the people see the projects of organizations.

Changing a diet is a livelihood strategy which is often used to cope with insecurity on short term. There are three changes that take place within the diet of people in Santa Cruz del Quiché. First, people eat smaller portions during their meals, so they can still eat various times a day. Second, people, like Luiza, start to eat less times a day: *“Lunch is the most important*

¹⁶² Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

¹⁶³ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

¹⁶⁴ Fieldnotes 28-03-2019 / 14-04-2019

¹⁶⁵ Interview Pastor 28-03-2019

¹⁶⁶ Interview Mario and Petronella 28-03-2019

meal of the day for us, so when we do not have enough food for three meals a day we eat nothing in the evening."¹⁶⁷ In this way, she also eats less food in a day, which can save money, but lacks the variety during a day. Third, people, like Inez, change the products that they eat: "*I only buy meat when I know that we can afford it. If there is a period with a lot of insecurity, I do not buy meat. We just eat vegetables then.*"¹⁶⁸ So, when she does not have a lot of money she starts buying the cheaper food to save money.

These three strategies are specific about the food choices people make to still have food every day. Livelihood strategies are the ways in which families respond to change or all kinds of activities they undertake to fulfil the daily needs of the household members such as food, clothing, health and security (Groenewald 2012, 74). The strategies that people use depend on the different kinds of capitals they have. So, the shortcoming of all kinds of capitals is one of the reasons why many people lack opportunities to find a solution and thus live in poverty and in a situation of food insecurity.

Looking at all kind of capitals that have been explained, households find different ways to improve their situation. Thomas his solution for the shortcoming of water in dry periods is an example of this. "*When it rains, we try to collect the water in tons to save it for dry periods when we really need it.*"¹⁶⁹ In this way, he tries to improve his natural capital. Another example is that people within communities, like the one of Anna, start working together and improve the roads by themselves to improve accessibility since the government does not help them.¹⁷⁰ As mentioned, some inhabitants of Santa Cruz argue that there are insufficient jobs available. The point is that there are sufficient jobs, but some are just not willing to work in a different sector. So, these people lack an income, whilst there are other opportunities for them. Improving their education and finishing school are ways to improve their chance on getting a good job, in possibly a complete different sector. That is why people like Diego start to improve their knowledge.¹⁷¹ His eagerness to learn becomes clear during our talk on a sweaty afternoon. I am sitting in a busy café close to the park with Diego when he tells me; "*When I was younger I did not see the positive side of going to school. I preferred working and earning money. I wish I knew then what I know now. It would have been so much easier for me to find a job now. That*

¹⁶⁷ Interview Luiza 21-03-2019

¹⁶⁸ Interview Inez 19-03-2019

¹⁶⁹ Interview Thomas 26-03-2019

¹⁷⁰ Fieldnotes 13-03-2019 + Interview Anna 08-04-2019

¹⁷¹ Interview Diego 04-04-2019

is why I will continue with improving myself from now on."¹⁷² For Diego, improving his education is an option, but there are many people who would like to improve their knowledge, but it is not an option since the family needs their income to survive.

There is a diversity of ways of earning money next to their standard income, that families in Santa Cruz use in times of need. A first strategy is that they start selling things like prepared food or their chickens¹⁷³, which Scoones (1998, 9) within his sustainable livelihood framework defines as 'combining different ways of gaining a living'. Borrowing money is another way some families use to get money to survive. This is not an option for everyone unfortunately, since the banks do not lend money to everyone.¹⁷⁴ These two options of getting money are both temporary, which means that in order to get more money on the long run they must find another solution. The man moving to the United States for work is a solution for this, which corresponds to Scoones' 'migration as a livelihood strategy' (1998, 10). Many families, like Anna's, make this choice, because there are more opportunities and a higher minimum loan in the United States.¹⁷⁵ Yet, the family splits up over two countries which is why there are also some families, like Sofia's, not willing to make this choice.¹⁷⁶

Asking help from their social network is another strategy some households use to cope with their situation. That is why it is important to have a good solid social position. So, that when it is necessary they have people on whom they can count and they will receive help from.¹⁷⁷ Yet, households do not only have to look for solutions themselves, since there are also possibilities to receive help. In the last paragraph three organizations, who strive to improve food security by giving help in different ways, were elaborated. I spoke to many family-members about receiving help and what their opinion was about this. Daniela was one of the many people who told me that she is very happy that there are possibilities to receive help without having to ask, since there is a taboo on asking for help.¹⁷⁸ She feels ashamed to ask for help from people who she is not personally close to. "*I do not want to ask help from people who do not know me. They get the idea that I am poor and I am not able to save myself. I do not want that. I want to be someone to whom others can look up, not someone they can laugh*

¹⁷² Interview Diego 04-04-2019

¹⁷³ Multiple Interviews 06-03-2019/08-04-2019

¹⁷⁴ Interview Isabel 06-03-2019

¹⁷⁵ Interview Anna 08-04-2019

¹⁷⁶ Interview Sofia 01-04-2019

¹⁷⁷ Interview Luiza 21-03-2019

¹⁷⁸ Fieldnotes 11-03-2019

about.”¹⁷⁹ So, having to ask for help to strangers can put scars on someone’s self-worth, because it shows that they are not able to take care of themselves.

There are also households who are not that about receiving help. For example, Alba argues during our conversation that there is no impact at all.¹⁸⁰ I am sitting on the ground with her next to me. We are having a conversation about improving her situation and the help she receives. *“Right now, I am not receiving any help. The help only goes to people who do not even need the help desperately, but they happen to know someone in the board. In Guatemala, everything is corrupt and it makes me so sad. Organizations should go and look by themselves in the aldeas¹⁸¹ who needs their help the most. Their way of working right now is never going to make the changes they aim for, like decreasing the food insecurity.”*¹⁸² So, she wants to receive help, but does not have faith in organizations and argues that the help does not end up with the people who need it the most.

Besides, some are not even open for changes in their lives, which becomes clear during an open day at a big organization who tries to improve the harvest of farmers by selling strong, but expensive seeds. I have a conversation with a local farmer. *“I am happy where I am right now. Changing something, like spending my money on expensive seeds, can have a very negative impact on my whole family. What if it does not work out and my situation only gets worse? No, I am not willing to risk that. I was just curious to see what they have to offer.”*¹⁸³ His mindset is not unusual, since many of my participants argued as well that they are afraid to invest in a better future because of the risk.¹⁸⁴ They do not know what will happen, since they do not receive something concrete straight away, and they are too afraid that it will turn out the wrong way and make their lives even more difficult.

In short, organizations try to capacitate people as they think that it is the most important strategy to use against food insecurity. Even though all organizations use a different focus, for all of them difficulties arise. Often household members do not see much value in the capacity trainings as they do not see instant results or changes. They do use livelihood strategies specific to food, but also try to improve their general livelihood in ways which seem less risky to them.

¹⁷⁹ Interview Daniela 03-04-2019

¹⁸⁰ Interview Alba 12-03-2019

¹⁸¹ Translation: rural communities

¹⁸² Interview Alba 12-03-2019

¹⁸³ Fielnotes 15-03-2019

¹⁸⁴ Fieldnotes 15-03-2019

With this thesis, we contribute to the body of knowledge on food insecurity and strategies aiming to improve livelihoods and the situation of food insecurity. We investigated this in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala. Actions by non-governmental and governmental organizations form the public action-taking, while the private level focuses on the coping strategies which are used by families. By conducting research on two levels, new insights are gained on the topics of poverty, food insecurity and coping strategies. The specific research question which was answered is: *'How do people give meaning to and cope with food insecurity in a framework of poverty in Santa Cruz del Quiché on both household and organizational level?'* In this paragraph, we will first compare each other's findings, link those to the literature and then summarize the answer to the main question.

Both household members and the employees of MFF, IYP and the church see Santa Cruz del Quiché as an area in which many people deal with poverty. Within organizations, the fulfilling of basic needs was interpreted as the most important indicator of poverty, including both material things and wellbeing, like education, as important (D. Green 2012, 7). They measured poverty against the standards of Guatemalan society, which makes poverty a social relation with a notion of relativity (Ravallion 2017, 3). For example, the standard regarding clothing is that women buy relatively expensive dresses when a special occasion takes place. If not possible, a lack in basic needs is experienced. From this mindset became clear that 'these shortcomings' are very relative. People base their own position on the position and opportunities of others, which increases the urge to get what others have. So, people experience poverty when comparing to others who can afford products of better quality or in bigger quantity. The goal of many is to become like 'the rich ones', which becomes an unrealistic goal and makes them feel hopeless for improvement. Not only these people themselves show frustration, but employees of the organizations as well. They argue that people should not feel poor because of comparing. Within those feelings of frustration people find ways to declare why many people struggle in Santa Cruz del Quiché and end up blaming 'the other'. Due to these different views on life, there still appeared to be a space of tension between *ladinos* and people who identify as Indigenous.

Many households have difficulties to fulfill their basic needs and thus live in a vulnerable situation. Poverty resulted in many households being unable or struggling to cope

with stresses and live in vulnerability (Green 2012, 167). To understand how this vulnerability is established, we elaborated different kind of capitals; human, financial, natural, physical and social capital. Whereas the network people have, thus their social capital, can help them in times of need, the shortage of people on whom they can count can result in a difficult situation. The same goes for the level of education, thus human capital, people in Santa Cruz del Quiché have. A high education puts people in a situation with opportunities, while people who lack education lack these opportunities.

Capitals are not only culturally determined, but also politically determined, which puts many persons in a difficult situation since the Guatemalan government is extremely corrupt. This corruption results in the fact that only people who know someone within a leading position receive help, or get access till all kinds of things and the others lack the prospect of change.

Food, as one of the basic needs that people struggle to fulfill, has been an insightful lens to make an analysis of poverty in Santa Cruz del Quiche. As became clear with the empirical examples, food is a useful construct to see how people organize and relate to a society (Counihan & Esterik 2013, 585). The classifications that people themselves made in food were divided in price, quality and symbolism. The choices people make with the food they eat, can include or exclude them from class or other social positions. Being able to buy and eat meat everyday of the week makes you part of the 'rich' households and thus your social status is higher than the ones who are not able to buy it that often.

There are two messages behind food that became clear during our research, namely solidarity and separation. Sharing food with others shows that you can buy more food than necessary and you are able to help others, which puts you in a higher social position. While not being able to buy 'expensive' products separates you from a certain group or class. Thus, it leaves scars on people's self-esteem and self-worth, reinforced by not feeling respected and feeling excluded through 'othering' (Lister 2008, 113). So, the meaning behind food and what people buy because of these underlying thoughts can influence the perception of themselves and their appearance to others.

In short, the meaning people give to food determines the food they buy and even though they might not have a lot of options to buy it, they will buy it anyway. This results in a feeling of being food insecure, while there are possibilities to buy cheaper food, but with less symbolism. For example, many people in Santa Cruz del Quiché are forgetting the tradition of eating native plants which are widely available. They feel food insecure, claiming that there is

not enough food available for them. Therefore, availability does not only depend on the objective of natural capital, but on people's interpretation of this capital, which is different for employees and the households themselves. The people who lack availability or access to food were recognized as the first group of insecure people by organizations and by Romy based on her experiences at the households.

The responsibility of economic access is mainly in the hands of the families' fathers. *Machismo* leads to vulnerable families. On one hand, families stay dependent on one source of income as women are not allowed to work. On the other hand, they depend on the goodwill of the father to give sufficient money to his wife to buy food. This shows how the space of vulnerability is not only politically but also culturally determined (Leatherman 2005, 54). The women then traditionally go to the market to buy food, depending on physical capital like roads and public transport to get there. In bargaining, women use their human and social capital to buy products for the lowest price possible, thus they try to optimize her economic access. Besides that, she decides the diversification and healthiness of the diet of the family by buying certain foods, where again human capital in the form of knowledge is used. In the eyes of employees, the lack of knowledge on nutrients and health, results in deficiency of certain nutrients, which forms the second group of food insecure people. Many people only get knowledge through the help of medicals when there is a health problem already or they get their knowledge through their mothers. Because their mothers have told them what is healthy to eat and what not, and the help of medicals is only there when there is a problem already and not beforehand to prevent, makes this second group of food insecure people most of the time unaware of their food insecurity.

IYP, MFF and the church all take on different strategies based on their opinion on what should have the priority in poverty and food insecurity reduction. A general recognition is pointed to the importance of capacity building of food insecure people. Whereas IYP argues it is important to focus on a broad spectrum of capacities and soft skills, MFF specializes around the topics of agriculture and improving the diet. On the other hand, the church follows the topics and teachings of the bible. Hereby not only the focusses differ, but the target groups as well.

In teaching capacities, they recognized that cultural values have to be taken into account. Ideas of *machismo* and paternalism, as well as trust issues regarding the government due to the turbulent history of Guatemala, challenge the road to a positive impact. The organizations are conscious about these challenges, but knowledge and fixed strategies on how to overcome those did not come to the surface. They do try to listen to the needs of participants by offering some

options on topics to discuss (MFF) or by conducting interviews on their expectations (IYP), but they were only flexible within the framework of their settled projects. The pastor does keep in mind that there is a 'taboo' on asking for help, and therefore makes his eight-month long study obligated for all church-members. He also created a standard procedure to become a member in which he conducts an interview to gather knowledge on their economic situation. In this way, he overcomes the problem that people do not dare to ask for help. Most of the households are happy with organizations offering help without them having to ask, while other households argue that all that has to do with the government is corrupt, and that because of this the help of organizations does not end up where it is needed the most. MFF recognizes this distrust towards them as a governmental organization, but does not know how to overcome this issue besides being patient.

These examples show a clash of approaches on food insecurity by food-insecure groups and approaches on it by agencies (Pottier 1999, 16). Thus, it is important to keep in mind, while incorporating these adapting strategies, what the response of the food-insecure group of people will be and what their view on the situation is (Davies 1993, 66). Employees of the three organizations admit that they find the impact they make low and feel frustrated about that. Nevertheless, they are still motivated and feel satisfaction in their trying.

Households themselves use livelihood strategies to cope with their vulnerable situation (Scoones 1998, 10). Specified on food choices there are three different strategies that people use in Santa Cruz del Quiché. Firstly, they start eating smaller portions during their meals, in order to need less food a day. Secondly, they start eating less often during a day, again in order to need less food a day. Thirdly, they start eating cheaper food in order to spend less money on their food. When these three strategies are not sufficient, they start combining different ways of gaining a living to get an 'extra' income. Selling stuff, like their domestic animals, is one of these strategies to get this money on top of their daily income. Finding ways to get a loan is another strategy some families use, but is for most families impossible. Fathers migrating to the United States in order to secure an income is the last strategy which became clear. However, the Indigenous Youth Program receives a fund from USAID to prevent too many young people from migrating.

Besides these strategies that some people start to implement in their lives, there are still many people too afraid to invest in a better future and make changes. They are too afraid that they will make their situation worse, since they do not know what will happen in the future. So,

even though that there are people willing to make changes, there is also still a group of people who is too scared to take risks.

In short, we found that poverty in Santa Cruz del Quiché is a multi-dimensional social relation with a notion of relativeness. We found people perceive themselves as poor by comparing to others, which leads to frustration of employees of organizations. Within this framework of poverty, many people deal with a lack of the specific basic need of food security. Some experience a lack of availability or access. This partly is a consequence of factors on which they do not have an influence like climate change. On the other hand, there is the influence of their culturally determined livelihood strategies and their interpretation of food. Where some food is not worth adding to their diet, while others are perceived as necessary, since they communicate a high social status.

Households are not always conscious about their food insecurity, as some lack nutrients without them knowing, which makes them part of the second group of people being food insecure. However, organizations are conscious about both groups of food insecure people and diversify their capacity trainings on improving both knowledge on a healthy diet and skills on how to increase availability and access. The emphasis on broad capacity building by organizations does clash with the wish for concrete, visible and short-term help households want. Besides, households value their traditions greatly and feel a fear to take a risk, often necessary to make changes. This is recognized by organizations, but they still try to overcome some traditional values like machismo.

The goal of our research was to put food security in the local context of Santa Cruz del Quiché. All aspects in the practice of feeding a household were influenced by this specific context. As Leatherman (2005, 54) argued that the space of vulnerability could only be explored by taking the local specific, historical and political context into account. So, in the analysis of the meaning people give to food insecurity, food was of ultimate importance, being inseparable from the emotion and meaning of people in Santa Cruz del Quiché (Anderson 2005).

We do recognize factors which could have been of influence on the findings just presented. First, the time span in which the research was conducted was only three months, which is relatively small. Besides, during the research we came to know about the all-inclusiveness and complexity of the experience of poverty and food insecurity, basically being influenced by all possible aspects of life. Because of this we would suggest that further research would focus on only one part of food insecurity, for example the influence of *machismo* on it

or the often-used strategy of migration to the United States. We are confident our research provides a valid overview of the situation, but that more in depth studies could lead to more specific insights and therefore can further contribute to the body of knowledge on food insecurity. We hope local organizations and people experiencing food insecurity will improve their communication and keep good hope that via multiple coping strategies the situation will change positively.

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Appendix



Appendix 1: Spanish Resumen

Romy, Milou

Santa Cruz del Quiché es un área que conoce mucho la pobreza. Al hablar sobre el significado de pobreza, lo que la gente más dice es la falta de necesidades básicas, como comida, vestimenta, una casa, salud y educación. De esta manera, no solamente cosas materiales son recogido como importantes pero también aspectos de bienestar. Las necesidades son medí a los estándares de la sociedad de Guatemala. Por ejemplo, la ropa tradicional es muy cara, pero interpretado como una necesidad básica. Estas necesidades básicas son interpretado relativo también: le siente pobre cuando compara con otros que tienen más oportunidades. De esta manera, mucha gente se siente sin esperanza de un futuro mejor. Muchos hogares tienen dificultades de cumplir sus necesidades básicas y son vulnerables. Esta vulnerabilidad significa que es difícil para una familia poder sobrellevar alguna emergencia no esperada como un miembro de la familia que está enfermo o una sequía. La vulnerabilidad se aclara en diferentes capitales: capital humano, financiado, natural, fiscal y social.

Comida, como uno de los necesidades básicas que falta suficiencia y calidad en muchos hogares en Santa Cruz del Quiché, es una lente a través del cual es posible analizar la situación de pobreza. Por eso nuestra pregunta central es; *Cómo le dan significado y tratan con la inseguridad alimentaria en un área de pobreza, tanto en un nivel de hogares como en un nivel organizativo?*

Mucha gente hace una clasificación dentro el espectro de comida: en precio, calidad y simbolismo. Además, las elecciones que la gente hace pueden incluirla en o excluirla de una clase social. Cuando una familia compra carne cada día, muestra que es rica y tiene una posición social alta. De este manera, la comida ayuda la gente a organizar su sociedad. Comida no solamente puede incluir o excluir pero también puede tener un mensaje de solidaridad y separación. Cuando la gente comparte su comida, ellos irradian que tienen más que necesario y entonces tienen un posición social alta, mientras una familia que no puede comprar productos más caros son excluidos de ciertos grupos. Aquí comida tiene una influencia en la confianza en su mismo.

La manera en que la gente da significado a la comida determina cuál comida compra, aunque las posibilidades económicas. Debido a esto, mucha gente cree que tiene inseguridad alimentaria, mientras es posible comer y comprar otra comida a la cual sí tiene disponibilidad y acceso, pero menos simbolismo, como plantas nativas.

Hay dos grupos que tienen inseguridad alimentaria. Un grupo no tiene acceso a los productos y por eso ellos no pueden comprar nada. El otro grupo tiene acceso a los productos pero no tiene conocimiento de nutrientes. La responsabilidad del acceso económico está principalmente en las manos de los padres de la familia. El machismo conduce a familias vulnerables, manteniéndose dependientes de una fuente de ingresos, ya que a las mujeres no se les permite trabajar y la buena voluntad del padre da la mayor parte del dinero a su esposa para comprar alimentos en el mercado. Dependiendo del capital físico, como las carreteras y el transporte público, algunas mujeres van al mercado a comprar alimentos

El Proyecto de Jóvenes Indígenas (Indigenous Youth Project, IYP), el Ministerio de Agricultura y Comida (Ministry of Farming and Food, MFF) y la Iglesia 'Jesús es la Esperanza' son tres organizaciones activas en Santa Cruz del Quiché, que usan diferentes estrategias para reducir pobreza e inseguridad alimentaria. Las tres recogen mucha importancia en mejorar las capacitaciones de la gente. En la opinión de IYP, las capacitaciones tienen que ser ampliamente orientadas y en combinación con *soft skills*, como expresar sus emociones. La iglesia también está enseñando capacitaciones que puede usar en toda la vida, de acuerdo a los principios de la biblia. MFF está enfocando directamente en capacitaciones alrededor el tema de agricultura y la dieta y quiere medir sus éxitos en por ejemplo cuanto huertos familiares una comunidad tiene, para hacer los resultados más concretos que solamente capacitación. Durante los proyectos los empleados toman en cuenta los valores culturales. El machismo, paternalismo, discriminación y cuestiones de confianza en organizaciones y el gobierno son factores de dificultad. Entre otras cosas, estas son la causa de resultados moderados y frustración de los empleados.

Los hogares utilizan estrategias de subsistencia para tratar su situación vulnerable. Comienzan a combinar diferentes formas de ganarse la vida; vendiendo cosas aparte de sus ingresos normales, encontrando formas de obtener un préstamo o los padres emigran a los Estados Unidos para obtener un ingreso. Sin embargo, no solo tienen sus estrategias, también organizaciones como IYP, MFP y la iglesia ofrecen ayuda. Dado que hay un "tabú" en pedir ayuda a otros, muchas personas están felices con oportunidades como estas. Lo único es que, debido a la corrupción en Guatemala, la ayuda no llega a las personas que más lo necesitan. Además de eso, muchas personas todavía tienen miedo de invertir en un futuro mejor y hacer cambios, ya que no saben qué sucederá en el futuro.