Measuring Food Consumption: Questionnaire Design

LECTURE 6
Where we are

- Lecture 5 covered the **foundational choices** that a questionnaire design team must make:
  - whether to record food consumption or acquisition
  - picking between recall or diary approach
  - setting the optimal reference period
- This lecture will go into the **details** of how to design the food module.
Questionnaire design challenges for food module

1. Acquisition vs. consumption
2. Recall vs. diary and length of reference period
3. List of food items
4. Meal participation  today
5. Timing of visits
6. Food away from home
7. Non-standard measurement units
3. List of food items
What is the food list?

- **Interview-based surveys** (recall): food items are pre-defined and listed, to help respondents accurately remember which foods were acquired or consumed.

- **Diary surveys**: food items may be listed or not, list may be open-ended (respondent can add to it).
Length of the food list

- Designing the food list in all of its details is a daunting task:
  - How many different foods should be included?
  - Should some items be grouped together? Which ones?
  - Should all foods be listed, including “difficult” items like prepared foods?
  - ...

- Answers to these questions determine the length of the food list, which in turn influences final results (evidence in next slides)
Comprehensiveness vs. specificity

The length of the food list is actually the result of two distinct design choices:

1. **Comprehensiveness**
   Whether or not all types of foods and beverages that make up the diet of the surveyed population are represented in the food list

2. **Specificity**
   The degree of detail and disaggregation of the food list
Comprehensiveness

- It is considered good practice that the food list be as comprehensive as possible
- By definition, excluding entire categories of foods leads to underestimation of consumption
- How to evaluate comprehensiveness?
Criteria for comprehensiveness

Smith et al. (2014) set three criteria:

1. Are all **14 food groups** represented?
2. Are **processed foods** include? (importance in diet increases over time, list to be updated regularly)
3. Is there **food exclusivity**? *i.e.* are food items listed separately from non-food items? (“alcohol and tobacco” is not food-exclusive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major food groups</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cereals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roots, tubers and plantains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pulses, nuts and seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Meat, poultry, and offal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fish and seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Milk and milk products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Oils and fats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and sweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Condiments, spices and baking agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Non-alcoholic beverages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Alcoholic beverages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current practice for comprehensiveness
% of surveys meeting food list comprehensiveness criteria

Source: Smith et al. (2014)
Specificity

- A **detailed food list** should help respondents remember consumption more completely and accurately; a certain level of detail is also required to obtain accurate nutritional data (difficult to estimate calorie intakes from heterogeneous food aggregates)

- But the food list can be **too detailed**, and risk increasing respondent and enumerator fatigue

- Unlike comprehensiveness, specificity involves **trade-offs**: it is not always true that the more specific the food list, the higher the quality of the data
Empirical evidence on specificity

- **Pros**
  
  highly aggregated food lists are linked to underreporting of consumption
  

- **Cons**
  
  longer food lists push enumerators and respondents to reduce compliance
  
### Aggregated 24-item list
### Detailed 97-item list

#### Table 4: Total Household Consumption 
Comparison of the Short- and Long-Questionnaire Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile</th>
<th>Short Questionnaire Consumption</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Long Questionnaire Consumption</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Difference (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10(^{th})</td>
<td>98.5 (5.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>141.0 (11.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20(^{th})</td>
<td>137.7 (7.27)</td>
<td></td>
<td>179.0 (10.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30(^{th})</td>
<td>172.6 (6.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td>219.8 (11.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40(^{th})</td>
<td>204.2 (7.67)</td>
<td></td>
<td>257.2 (16.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50(^{th}) (median)</td>
<td>245.2 (8.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>310.8 (20.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60(^{th})</td>
<td>295.1 (10.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>375.6 (29.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70(^{th})</td>
<td>352.3 (15.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>478.7 (34.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80(^{th})</td>
<td>452.6 (16.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>609.0 (34.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90(^{th})</td>
<td>619.2 (24.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>869.0 (63.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidence from Tanzania
Beegle et al. (2012)

- Comparison of instruments with same recall period, but different food list: long (57 items), or collapsed into 17 coarse aggregates
- 24% drop in average consumption
- Short list only saved 8 min of interview time on average
Recap

- **Comprehensiveness**
  It is required for the production of reliable data. The literature offers some criteria to check that food categories are adequately represented in the food list.

- **Specificity**
  There is a widely acknowledged trade-off involving the level of detail of the food list, but the optimal balance depends on the local context. The literature offers some general rules that guide the compromise.
Recommendations

Comprehensiveness

1. **All major food groups** should be represented

2. There should be adequate representation of **processed foods** (including prepared meals), when these are part of the population’s diet

3. List should be kept **up to date**, to take into account changing dietary habits
Recommendations

Specificity

4. It is useful to build the food list based on national food composition tables, to ease later matching between consumption data and nutritional information.

5. Food items other than prepared dishes should not span multiple food groups (e.g. “eggs or milk products”), as this would impede accurate computation of nutrient intakes.
Recommendations

Specificity

6. Food items that are the object of product-specific government subsidization programs must be listed separately (to allow for repricing)

7. Foods that are fortified, or have the potential to be (e.g. iodized salt, fortified flour or cooking oil) should be listed separately

8. Micronutrient (e.g. vitamin-A or iron) rich foods should be listed individually
Recommendations

Specificity

9. After a reasonable number of items to be listed for each food group has been selected, a residual category (e.g. “other fruit”, “other vegetables”) may be added if relevant; it is important that such categories remain marginal, as they do not allow the collection of data on quantities or the computation of nutrient intakes.

10. Adoption of a food classification system can help in meeting all previous criteria. For many of the basic purposes of household consumption and expenditure surveys, the recommended standard of classification is COICOP.
4. Meal participation
Meal participation

- **Partakers**
  people who participate in the household’s meals

- Number of partakers and **household size** may differ:
  - People other than household members may take part in meals (employees, guests, visitors...)
  - Household members may be absent for meals
Why it matters

- “The adequacy of the consumption of the household’s food can be divided into two issues: how much food is being consumed and who is consuming it.” (Fiedler and Mwangi, 2016: 47)

- **Per capita** measures of food consumption should be based on the number of people sharing meals

\[
\text{per capita consumption} = \frac{\text{household total consumption}}{\text{household size} - \text{absent members} + \text{additional partakers}}
\]
Evidence on the impact of partakers

- Accounting for partakers reduces inequality of consumption.

- Bouis, Haddad, and Kennedy (1992) and Bouis (1994) show that the difference between mean calorie intakes of the poorest and richest quartiles is much lower when partakers are accounted for (Kenya and the Philippines).

Accounting for partakers reduces inequality
Gibson and Rozelle (2002)

% difference per capita kcal intake after accounting for partakers, by expenditure quartile

- Q1 (poorest): 3.0%
- Q2: 1.9%
- Q3: -3.1%
- Q4 (richest): -6.8%
Current practice

- Assessment of 81 recent surveys by Fiedler and Mwangi (2016)
- Most commonly, surveys do not collect information on meal partakers
- When they do, approaches are heterogeneous
- Lack of research to tell us what works
Some examples

SECTION 15: FOOD CONSUMPTION IN LAST 7 DAYS

15.1 How many household members were resident and ate at least dinner regularly in the household during the last 7 days?

_____ people

15.2 How many meals were eaten by guests from the household cooking pot in the last 7 days? (Put 0 if no guests ate in the house in the last 7 days)

_____ person-meals

Afghanistan 2007
Did any visitor stay here with your household for the last month? Number

(Specify number of visitors)

How many days? person/day

(Number of visitors multiple by days stayed here)
On average, how many people were present in the last 7 days? In this section children are defined as less than 18 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Members</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male adults</td>
<td>Male adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female adults</td>
<td>Female adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male children</td>
<td>Male children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female children</td>
<td>Female children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: meals taken within the household housing unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTRUCTIONS:</strong> Every day and for each individual tick &quot;x&quot; in the column corresponding to the meal taken by an individual outside the household housing unit: 1 - breakfast, 2 - lunch or 3 - dinner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUAL CODE</strong></td>
<td><strong>DATE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1205</td>
<td>1206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAY #1</strong></td>
<td><strong>DAY #2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BREAKFAST</strong></td>
<td><strong>LUNCH</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COPY THE NAMES OF THE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS FROM THE**

**Interviewer:**
## Table 2: Number of participants other than the household members in meals within the household

Each day, write the number of people that shared every meal. Do not include household members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY NUMBER</th>
<th>1212</th>
<th>1213</th>
<th>1214</th>
<th>1215</th>
<th>1216</th>
<th>1217</th>
<th>1218</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPE OF MEAL</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of individuals other than household members sharing meals within the household expenditure.
Heterogeneity of approaches
Smith et al. (2014: 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percent of Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data are collected on the presence and/or household meal consumption of</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-household members during the recall period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected on the number of visitors in the household</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected on visitors' length of stay</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected on the number of meals consumed by visitors/guests</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected by type of meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected on the age of visitors/guests</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected on the sex of visitors/guests</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=100 surveys.
A typology of approaches
FAO and WB (2018: 55)

A. **Food consumer**: count the number of people usually partaking to household’s meals, and divide total household consumption by this number.

   **Limitation**: Counting heads of partakers is not precise. The method has difficulties to account for situations in which people do participate only at some meals per day, e.g. employees.

B. **Meal partakers**: requires an exact accounting of the number of meals taken by household members and non-household members over the same reference period as that for which food data is collected.

   **Limitation**: difficult to implement.
Recommendations
FAO and WB (2018: 55-56)

1. The addition of an individual household member-based meal module should be considered for all surveys that do not yet have it.

2. The ‘meal partakers’ approach should be favored (i.e. module should collect information on meal partakers for each meal event during reference period, not just on individuals ‘usually’ sharing in the household’s food resources)

3. If the entire individual household member-based meal module cannot be added, survey design teams should consider adding questions to a proxy respondent, that center on the number of meals taken at home by household members and others, during the reference period
5. Timing of visits
Temporal fluctuations

- Fluctuations in consumption and expenditure within the year are common.

- Variation between months, also called seasonality:
  - Agricultural season(s), cyclical food production cycles, festivals and holidays.

- But there is also cyclical variation within months and weeks:
  - Payday for wage workers, market day, transfer-day’ for households receiving cash transfers, Friday, Saturday, Sunday (depending on culture) consumption may differ from ‘usual’.
Seasonality matters

- Survey objective is usually to mirror *typical consumption throughout the year*
- If variables of interest fluctuate during the year, the *timing of the interview* is not neutral
- Seasonality and higher-frequency fluctuations usually involve:
  1. *Quantities* of food acquired and consumed
  2. *Dietary patterns*
  3. *Food prices*
- These variations are common, although their extent depends on the country
The case of Afghanistan
Afghanistan Poverty Assessment (2010)

Data by quarter revealed massive variation in poverty, due to seasonality and food price shocks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Poverty rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fall-harvest 2007</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Winter 2007/08</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Summer 2008</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The case of Mongolia – I/III
Troubat and Grunberger (2017: 136)

- Weekday effects
- Higher consumption on Tuesdays and Fridays
- “Even if all weekdays are well represented in the MSES, these results point to a general advice in survey fieldwork organization to distribute enumeration equally between weekdays”
The case of Mongolia – II/III
Troubat and Grunberger (2017: 136)

- **Day-of-the-month effects**
- Usually there are variations in consumption due to regular payment of income or any other kind of incoming payments
- Lowest between 25th and 28th of the month, but small difference
The case of Mongolia – III/III
Troubat and Grunberger (2017: 136)

- Seasonal effects
- Peak in December (might be associated to celebration of the Independence Day, 29th of December, or New Year), lowest in June
Failing to account for seasonality

A survey carried out at one single time in the year may be:

1. **Unrepresentative** of typical consumption across the year

2. **Not comparable internationally** (what if country A conducts survey in lean season, and country B in harvest season?)

3. **Not comparable within the same country over time** (what if a major event correlated with consumption patterns moves in or out of the survey period? Think of Ramadan, or harvest periods delayed by weather events)
Accounting for seasonality

- In theory, increasing recall periods would help to approach “usual consumption”
- But longer recall periods come with another problem: measurement error (see lecture 5)
- In practice, seasonality is accounted for by spreading interviews over time in various ways
- The usual month approach does not work (see lecture 5)
Common approaches to data collection
Smith et al. (2014)

A. **Repeated visits to the same households** throughout the year. Households are interviewed repeatedly throughout the year (typically 2-4 times, in different seasons)

B. **Multiple interview rounds distributed by survey subsets.** The sample is split into subsets (usually 12), which are surveyed over 12 months. Subsamples are nationally representative by quarter

C. A single interview round, taking place over no more than a few months. This approach **fails to account for seasonality**
Current practices
Smith et al. (2014)

- Repeated visits: 11%
- Survey subsets: 47%
- Single round (seasonality not accounted for): 42%
Pros and cons of common approaches

A. Repeated visits
   ▲ Pros: seasonal variation captured for all individual households; useful when survey objectives include collecting data on agricultural activities
   ▼ Cons: highest cost, logistical challenges, respondent burden, sample size

B. Survey subsets
   ▲ Pros: cheaper, easier to organize, lower respondent burden than A
   ▼ Cons: seasonal variation captured only on average

C. Single round
   ▲ Pros: easiest
   ▼ Cons: seasonal variation not captured, therefore measurement error
Recommendations
FAO and World Bank (2018: 52-53)

Two options to consider, in order of preference:

1. Spread the sample over 12 months of fieldwork, with sample stratified (e.g. quarterly nationally representative subsamples)

2. Conduct two visits per household, where the timing of the visits is scheduled to capture seasonal variations

Whatever the solution chosen:

- Ensure enumeration is equally spread throughout the days of the week and the month
- Be mindful of changes in timing of holidays, festivals, to ensure comparability between survey waves
Lessons learned

- This lecture has explored **specific choices** in the design of the food module:
  - How to determine the length and degree of detail of the **list of food items**?
  - Why and how to account for **meal participation**?
  - Why and how to account for **seasonality**?
- The way the survey design team answers these questions is crucial for minimizing **measurement error**.
- Literature helps to balance trade-offs.
References

Required readings


Suggested readings


Thank you for your attention
Homework
Exercise 1 – Engaging with the literature

- The increased risk of interviewer cheating is among the likely consequences of adopting an overly detailed food module.
- Finn and Ranchhod (2017) study the implications of data fabrication.
- Read the paper and summarize its main methods and findings.
Exercise 1 – Engaging with the literature

- Pradhan (2009) provides empirical evidence on the implications of the level of aggregation of item lists in consumption surveys.
- Read the paper and summarize its experimental setup and findings.
Exercise 2 – Food module, international comparisons

- Go to [http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/lsms](http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/lsms) and download the questionnaire(s) of 5 surveys of your choice

- In the section related to food expenditure find the total number of food items included in the survey food list (sometimes the information can be found in the final report)

- Based upon the recommendations in Smith et al. (2014) (section 3.4 3.5) comment on your findings
Exercise 3 – Meal participation

- Examine the following examples of meal partaker modules from recent household consumption and expenditure survey questionnaires.
- For each example, determine whether the ‘food consumer’ or ‘meal partakers’ approach can be implemented to compute a measure of per capita food consumption.
Example 1

## Module A: Individual (Roster)

### A02 NAME

(Confirm that household head here is same as household head listed on cover.)

### A03 Household Presence

How many days over the last 7 days has [Name] eaten in a shared household meal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select 1-7 days</th>
<th>1: Male</th>
<th>2: Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Head of household</td>
<td>2: Wife or husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Son or daughter (include adopted)</td>
<td>3: Son or daughter-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grandson or granddaughter</td>
<td>4: Father or mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Father or mother-in-law</td>
<td>5: Brother or sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>6: Other relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Servant or servant’s relative</td>
<td>7: Other relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14: Lodge or lodger’s relative</td>
<td>8: Other non-relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15: Other (Specify)</td>
<td>9: Skipped</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A04 Sex

What is [Name's] sex?

- Male
- Female

### A05 Relationship to Head of Household

What is [Name’s] relationship to the head of household?

- 1: Head of household
- 2: Wife or husband
- 3: Son or daughter (include adopted)
- 4: Grandson or granddaughter
- 5: Son or daughter-in-law
- 6: Father or mother
- 7: Brother or sister
- 8: Father or mother-in-law
- 9: Other relative
- 10: Servant or servant’s relative
- 11: Lodge or lodger’s relative
- 12: Other non-relatives
- 13: Other (Specify)

### A06 Age

How old is [Name]?

- Years and months only if under 5 years
- Years and months if 5 years or older
- Years
- Select 1-86
- 86: 96 years and greater
- 87: Don’t know or refused

### A07 Marital Status

What is [Name]’s present marital status?

- 1: Monogamous married
- 2: Polygamous married
- 3: Separated
- 4: Divorced
- 5: Widow or widower
- 6: Never married (single)

If more than 12 individuals, use second questionnaire. Make sure to mark box on first page of both.
Example 2

### FOOD, BEVERAGES AND TOBACCO CONSUMPTION (FOOD EATEN) AND NON-CONSUMPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSUMPTION AND NON-CONSUMPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HOUSEHOLD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **WRITE DOODS CONSUMED WITH THE QUANTITY AND THE UNIT OF MEASUREMENT.**
  - Examples:
    - 5 Tablespoons of sugar
    - 2 Tablespoons of Tea
    - 1 Kilogram of flour
    - PLEASE BE SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE
- **NAME OF FOOD, DRINK OR TOBACCO CONSUMED OR GIVEN AWAY**
- **QUANTITY EATEN OR DISPOSED OF**
- **SOURCE**
  - where was good consumed or eaten came from
  - Examples:
    - From the market
    - From the garden
    - Own Produce
    - From relatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD UNIT OF MEASUREMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOURCE CODE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QNTY IN STANDARD UNIT OF MEASUREMENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>