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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and  
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# **Mae La Ma Luang Refugee Camp: Access to Food Entitlements Under Restrictive Encampment**

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Chad Ellingson  
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Uppsala, Sweden

## List of Abbreviations

<b>CBO</b>	community based organization
<b>CCSDPT</b>	Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand
<b>COERR</b>	Catholic Organization of Emergency Relief and Refugees
<b>CSI</b>	coping strategy index
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
<b>FCS</b>	food consumption score
<b>FGD</b>	focus-group discussion
<b>IDI</b>	in-depth interview
<b>Kcal</b>	kilo-calories
<b>MOI</b>	Royal Thai Government's Ministry of the Interior
<b>NGO</b>	non-government organization
<b>TBBC</b>	Thailand-Burma Border Consortium
<b>TBBC CAN</b>	TBBC Community Agriculture and Nutrition Programme
<b>THB</b>	Thai Baht
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

## Glossary of Terms and Units of Measure

<b>Cool season</b>	While there are some differences in how this is reported likely due to seasonal variability, the cool season is commonly from November to January
<b>Homestead</b>	The yard or compound of a household
<b>Hot season</b>	While there are some differences in how this is reported likely due to possible seasonal variability, the hot season is commonly from February to April
<b>Household</b>	A family unit, who share common resources for cooking and eating
<b>Lean Period</b>	While there are some differences in how this is reported likely due to possible seasonal variability, the lean period is commonly from December through April and peaks March and April. During the lean period a low demand for day labor (agricultural)- both inside and outside the camp limits access to food, and lack of water inside MLML limits the availability of own-production foods
<b>Rainy season</b>	While there are some differences in how this is reported likely due to possible seasonal variability, the rainy season is commonly from May to October
 1 \$US =	 30.9 Baht (14 May 2012)

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## I. Introduction

The central theme for this study is household food security and the impact that the rules regulating refugees in Thailand have on access to fresh foods for the residents of Mae La Ma Luang refugee Camp (MLML). Food security is multidimensional and includes aspects of food availability, food access, food utilization and stability. Table 1 summarizes each of these important pillars using FAO definitions. Food availability in MLML is in part satisfied through NGO-supported food distribution systems. However, to achieve a nutritional diet households must also seek fresh foods to supplement the basic dry-food aid. For the purpose of this study data on food availability at the household level was collected and is reflected in diet diversity and the food consumption score. Food access refers to a household's ability to secure adequate resources to acquire nutritious foods. Among other things, access depends on income available to the household; for this study, individual freedoms to access food entitlements while abiding to the rules regulating refugees in Thailand is a focal point. Information on aspects related to household economics that provide insight into issues of food access was obtained largely from secondary sources, and in some instances as primary data through focus group discussions (FGDs).

**Table 1: FAO pillars of food security**

<b>Availability</b>	The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid).
<b>Access</b>	Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources). Access depends on income available to the household, on the distribution of income within the household, and on the price of food.
<b>Utilization</b>	Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.
<b>Stability</b>	To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis), cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity) or unreasonable political/legal obstacles (e.g. paying excess bribes). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security

Socio-economic, cultural and political factors such as adverse policies, social exclusion, inadequate social services and infrastructure, lack of rights and access to important resources, especially natural resources such as land and water, can intensify household food insecurity in MLML. While this study holds household food security as a central theme, the assessment design also incorporates key aspects of entitlement to resources and considerations around individual freedoms to take decisions related to acquisition of food access. Issues such as access into and out of the camp, access to and availability of

natural resources (including water, wild foods and forest products), and the availability of agricultural land in proximity to MLML are all important factors that account for an individual's ability to access adequate resources for acquiring foods. In addition, how the local Thai authorities interpret and enforce rules regulating refugees also plays an important role.

The current study analyzes the findings from quantitative methods and complemented by findings from qualitative methods to better understand overall household food security and freedom of access to food entitlements within the context of restrictive encampment. This study was conducted during a time of adjustment to significant food ration reductions coupled by an annual lean period of food scarcity. The study's research questions are as follows:

- What is the situation of food availability and food access within MLML? To what extent do MLML households depend on rationed foods to maintain an adequate diet?
- What ramifications do the January 2012 cuts to food rations have on access to fresh foods (non-rationed foods)?
- In MLML, how do the rules regulating refugees residing in Thailand influence individual freedoms to use his or her resources to obtain access to fresh foods (non-rationed foods)?
- Are individuals living in MLML suffering from a failure of food entitlement? As to say, without food rations could an individual utilize his or her resources to obtain enough food to escape nutritional deprivation?



## II. Background

### ***Burmese Refugees in Thailand***

The paragraphs that follow in this section outline the conditions in which Burmese refugees reside in Thailand, providing context for the key findings of this thesis. This section discusses issues of protection, demographics, Thai involvement, and management and assistance within the refugee camps.

Burmese refugees, living in camps strung along the Thai side of the Thailand-Burma border (see Figure 1), officially numbered a total population of around 136,000 in February 2012. The vast majority of the total encamped Burmese refugee population is Karen. Thailand also hosts a large number of illegal immigrants from Burma, with estimates ranging from 1.2 million (IRIN 2008) to 2 million (ILO 2002:28). These immigrants work in domestic environments and in the sex, construction and manufacturing industries, and are responsible for producing the majority of the estimated 6 percent of Thailand's GDP produced by foreign workers (IRIN 2008). Due to the general homogenous ethnic makeup that has evolved in the camps, the dividing line between 'illegal immigrant' (outside) and 'refugee' (inside) can often be blurred. Cases are often times determined by an individual's ethnicity, place of origin and/or existing connections in Thailand, so that if one is 'Karen' or 'Karenni' he or she is more likely to end up in a refugee camp than those Lahu or Akha migrants who may have left Burma for similar reason but find themselves in Thailand illegally. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that amongst the Burmese illegal immigrants in Thailand, around 200,000 Shan, plus 50,000 of other ethnicities originating from Burma, fit the category 'refugees and asylum seekers'. Adding those figures to the number of refugees living in camps, amounts to an estimated total of 396,700 Burmese refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand (USCRI 2008).

Although Thailand is not party to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or to that Convention's 1967 Protocol, the Thai government still has an obligation of non-refoulement under customary international law. For decades, the UNHCR had no mandate to work with refugees in any of the border camps. Likewise, the Thai authorities had relatively little involvement in the oversight of the camps. In 1998 the Thai government formally requested UNHCR involvement, and since the UNHCR has taken on a role specifically focused on protection. Today, the Royal Thai Government's Ministry of the Interior (MOI) also plays a more direct role, with a local MOI district officer assigned as Camp Commander for each camp.

Prior to 2005 residents of the Thailand-Burma border camps were regarded by the UNHCR as *prima facie* refugees, considered collectively to be people displaced from their homes by conflict and regarded as 'refugees' at a group level but not formally, individually registered. In 2005 UNHCR and MOI registered all individuals residing in the camps, extending to those with a legitimate claim to asylum refugee status under UNHCR stipulation. Although the mentioned process documented each person on individual terms, the Thai government does not recognize any individuals inside the camps as refugees, instead

**Figure 1: Location of Burmese refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border**



referring to the refugees as 'temporary visitors'. Those who have arrived in the camps following the 2005 UNHCR/MOI screening have yet to be formally registered by UNHCR, and consequently often hold no official documentation of status.

Starting in mid-2005, the UNHCR has been undertaking the world's largest refugee resettlement programme, in terms of numbers resettled. By the end of 2011, nearly 74,000 individuals with verified claim to individual refugee status have departed from the border sites for third countries (TBBC 2012:8). Indeed, political developments inside Burma during the later part of 2011 have raised the possibility of reconciliation after decades of conflict in Burma's border regions. The eventual voluntary repatriation of Burmese refugees when the situation allows safe and dignified return to Burma is for the first time being discussed as a viable possibility amongst an array of stakeholders. Despite these external developments, life within the camps is increasingly problematic. Large numbers of refugees have now lived there for twenty or more years and, since the late 1990s, have been generally unable to move outside the camps in pursuit of livelihood opportunities.

Confinement has become much stricter since the late 1990s, it is now unlawful to travel outside the camps for work, and can result in arrest by Thai authorities. To compound this control, refugees have been aware for some years now of the increasingly less sympathetic Thai attitudes towards their plight. Such attitudes evidenced by the repeated statements from Thai government officials around early 2011 wishing to repatriate all the refugees currently on Thai soil (*The Independent* 2011). In recent years, the standard of refugee protection in Thailand has continued to deteriorate, with ongoing incidents of forced return and prevented entry (HRW 2008, USCRI 2008).

Prior to the 1998 shift in rules regulating refugees residing in Thailand, which resulted in stricter regulations on refugee movement outside the camps, relations with local Thai communities were of importance for their potential to provide an opportunity to earn money outside the camps and the possibility of access to local resources. Today, refugees may not seek employment outside the camps – although UNHCR has for years urged the Thai authorities to consider this option (Shah 2007).

Refugees receive food, medical assistance and other aid from mostly foreign (not Thai) agencies. Coordination between agencies is structured around monthly meetings of the Coordinating Committee for Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), held in Bangkok. Under the CCSDPT umbrella is the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). The camps along the border now receive food aid (rice, yellow beans, fish paste, salt, vegetable oil) and other items (blankets, mosquito nets, cooking pans and shelter supplies) from the TBBC. In recent years TBBC and the Catholic Organization of Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) have established agricultural programmes, in all camps along the border, aimed at lessening refugee dependency on food aid by promoting homestead gardens to supplement dry-food rations. At time of writing, TBBC and COERR were both negotiating with Thai authorities and land owners for permission to purchase private land adjacent to the refugee camps, in the hopes of expanding refugee agriculture programmes beyond the present-day restrictive confines of the camps (Brown 2012).

## ***Mae La Ma Luang Refugee Camp***

Mae La Ma Luang refugee camp was the field site for this study. In comparison to other camps along the Thailand-Burma border, MLML is a unique subject area due to the remote geographical location of the encampment. The nearest village being a 4 hours walk time and nearest market a 4-8 hour drive (depending on road conditions), with the sole road accessing MLML often impassible during rain season. Internal MLML shops are dependent on once-a-week deliveries of fresh foods from markets outside MLML, with goods often delayed due to impassible roads (Naing 2012). The mentioned geographical isolation of MLML is useful to improving understanding of how Burmese refugees living in isolated and restrictive encampment utilize resources to access food.

MLML is positioned opposite Manerplaw, Burma – the old headquarters of the Karen resistance, and home to many of the pro-democracy groups that fled crackdowns following the demonstrations throughout Burma in 1988. This area is now occupied by Burmese Army troops, but there is little fighting or military operations in this specific part of the borderlands.

MLML was first set up in February 1995, following the fall of Manerplaw. Initially, a large number of the people living in areas around Manerplaw fled to Mae Taw La village on the Thai side. Upon agreement with Thai authorities and local landowners, they were allowed to relocate to the present site.

**Table 2: MLML Demographics**

<b>Demographics</b>				
<b>Population</b>	16,163* (February 2012)			
<b>Breakdown by age</b>	<b>&lt; 5 Yrs</b>	<b>5 – 17 Yrs</b>	<b>18 – 59 Yrs</b>	<b>&gt; 59 Yrs</b>
	14%	36%	46%	4%
<b>Breakdown by Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>		
	49%	51%		
<b>Breakdown by Ethnicity</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Other</b>		
	99%	1%		

\*includes all persons verified as living in the camps and eligible for rations, UNHCR registered or not.  
(source: TBBC)

The initial population of MLML was about 4,000. However, in February/March 1998 during the consolidation of the Salween camps to the north, there was a further influx of about 2,300 refugees who did not want to relocate to the consolidated camps of Ban Sala and Mae Khong Kha. The camp extended southwards to accommodate these new residents to where the Mae La Ma Luang river flows into the larger Mae Yuam (see Figure 4). This new part of the camp became Section 6, and straddles the provincial boundary between Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces. In March 1995, Section 1 of the camp was attacked by Burmese Army troops, but since this time there have been no further security incidents.

## ***The Karen & the Natural Environment***

The land surrounding MLML is rich in biodiversity. Traditionally, for the Karen, the natural environment has provided their basic needs such as food, water and shelter. Additional attributes of the immediate environment are medicine, natural protection from invasion, and irrigation (TBBC 2008).

For the Karen, the natural environment is a home, integrated with the community's daily life. The Karen calendar is based on signs from nature – a bird or frog call or the arrival of insects. Nature is also deeply linked to Karen spirituality, and cultural taboos have contributed to the preservation of the environment. Practices such as mixed cropping for pest control and gathering diverse seed varieties have promoted biodiversity and the preservation of ecosystems (BEWG 2011:15).

**“Mo Seet Ger Daw Khu A Klee, Pa Seet Ger Daw Nweh A Klee Ger Daw May Bweh Tor ther Hsee, Ta Kah Na Khay Per Der Thee” - Karen poem**

*“The mother advised us to save the seed of the taro, the father advised us to save the seed of the yam. If we save up to thirty kinds of seeds, our lives will be sustained in times of crisis.”*

The above poem, which has been passed through generations by the Karen places emphases on preservation of biodiversity. The verse explains the importance of a variety of seeds to sustain life during emergencies.

Traditional Karen institutions have ensured a village the rights to a defined area of land that surrounds it. The designated land includes defined areas for grazing, agriculture, and rituals. These areas provide space for all village needs. Land between designated village areas is common-space. Inside Burma there was little need for common land to be used due to village areas being large enough to provide livelihood opportunities for its people (Committee 2000).

The displacement experienced by Karen refugees, residing in MLML, has forced these individuals to live with much restriction of access to the natural environment. Availability of agricultural land is limited to the homestead, which in MLML averages about 20 square meters (Brown 2012), and accessing land adjacent to MLML risks arrest or deportation. MLML inhabitants are restricted to a densely populated land area, and thus an environment not conducive to the practice of traditional Karen land entitlements or to use land management knowledge passed through generations of Karen (Thra 2012).

## ***The Provided Food Basket (Rations)***

In recent years the donor community that supports the Burmese refugees residing along the Thailand-Burma border have challenged the desirability and sustainability of confining the refugees to camps and indicated their unwillingness to support the status quo with ever-increasing funding. Up to 2010, the TBBC was consistently able to generate enough financial support to supply an adequate food basket, which lasted the duration of the 30-day ration distribution cycle and provided sufficient caloric intake for all eligible refugees. Over the past several years, however, the cost of service delivery (e.g., price of food

and charcoal, housing materials, etc.) has risen, exchange rates have deteriorated, whilst overall funding levels in Thai baht terms have been more or less leveled (Brown 2012).

Since 2006 there have been numerous ration reductions, albeit until recently minimal in adjustment. In January 2012, due to rising food costs the monthly dry-food ration provided to eligible individuals residing in MLML was dramatically reduced to its lowest daily caloric intake per person since 1986 (Gardner 2010:74). The current food basket provides an average of 1,640 kcals / person / day, 22% below the international minimum standard of 2,100 kcals / person / day (Brown 2012).

**Table 3: January 2012 TBBC food ration reduction, adjusted Kcals provided**

Item	Provided since August 2008	Adjustment for January 2012	% Reduction (Adult)
Rice	16 kg/ adult: 7.5 kg/ child < 5 years	12 kg/ adult & older child: 6 kg/ young child.	25%
Fortified flour (AsiaREMix)	0.25 kg/ adult: 1 kg/ child < 5 years	None provided to adults: 1 kg/ young and older child	100%
Fishpaste	0.75 kg/ person	500 gms/ person	33%
Iodised Salt	330 gm/ person	150 gms/ person	55%
Yellow beans	1 kg/ adult: 500 gms/ child < 5 years	1 kg/ adult: 500 gms/ child < 5 years	No reduction
Cooking oil	1 ltr/ adult: 500 ml/ child < 5 years	0.5 ltr/ person	50%
Dry chilies	40 gm/ person	None provided	100%
Sugar	125gm/ adult: 250 gm/ child < 5years	None provided	100%
<b>Adjusted Kcals Provided</b>			
6 mos - <5 years	1042kcal (needs = 585-1510)		
5 - <18 years	1810 (needs = 1710-2485)		
18+ years	1675 (needs = 2542 kcal)		
<b>Average</b>	<b>1640</b> (needs = 2100)		

A nutritional review of TBBC's food basket prior to 2010 confirmed high carbohydrate content and poor quality of the available protein (primarily from rice) coupled with an insufficient quantity of beans to complement and complete this poor quality protein. In addition, due to the low level of fortified blended food (FBF), the ration is low in micronutrients, particularly for beneficiaries over age 5. The level of sodium in all rations is high due to the high provision of iodized salt on top of the sodium rich fish paste provided as a condiment. The soybean oil provided is not fortified with vitamin A and D and is higher than the amount usually provided by WFP. The white rice provided is also not fortified (Gardner 2010:16).

A 2008 nutritional survey conducted by the CCSDPT found the child population (<5) of MLML suffers from very high levels of both acute malnutrition and of chronic malnutrition and underweight (CCSDPT 2008:10). An alarming 40 percent of children are stunted by age 5 in MLML. Stunting contributes to

poorer survival and learning capacity in children and to the increased risk of chronic disease and obesity in adults. It correlates closely with poverty and is caused by poor quality diets, repeated illness and micronutrient deficiencies. Micronutrient malnutrition, such as, iron-deficiency anemia is also a problem in the camps that appears to be worsening. Vitamin A, vitamin D, calcium and zinc coverage all fall below daily minimum standards. Micronutrient deficiencies are considered a silent emergency and recently have gained attention in the protracted refugee context (Nutrition 2010:16).

Nutrition related health problems inside MLML are chronic. The dry-food rations are distributed to provide a basic diet and have always fallen short of sufficient nutrient and quality protein levels. Since the January 2012 ration reduction, the rations fail to even meet minimum standards of daily caloric intake. Due to the known shortcomings of the rations inside MLML, attainment of food security depends on household ability to generate food supplements (foods not included in the ration) through access to resources used for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.

MLML residents face an annual lean period in terms of food scarcity, identified as December through April and peaking during March and April (Cardo 2009:44). During the lean period MLML households are impacted by seasonal factors including a low demand for day labor- both inside and outside the camp adversely impacting access to food, and a lack of water for agricultural purposes negatively impacting the availability of own-production foods for supplementing the basic dry-food ration (Nutrition 2010:26).

### ***Livelihoods of MLML***

Economic security is an important component of food security. It determines whether or not households have adequate food access – the means to acquire food when it is available. Although a significant portion of the food basket is provided to households it is clear from collected diet data that households do purchase food, particularly snacks and fresh foods which complement rationed foods.

Finding from a 2009 livelihood assessment in MLML found 69% of the respondents did not have any income, while 31% had some earnings (Cardo 2009). Inside MLML, there are a limited number of stipend jobs working for NGOs. Outside these few stipend jobs, MLML residents generate income inside the camp through weaving of textiles and sales of outputs from homestead gardens and animal rearing. However, because of such limited internal livelihood opportunities, many venture outside MLML seeking additional income where they are subject to arrest and deportation back to Burma.

We have little money. I sell watercress grown in our garden to neighbors. My husband used to travel outside MLML for work, cutting grass for Thai people, but he was arrested. It took him four days to get out of jail, so now he does not dare to leave the camp. (interview with refugee in MLML, 13/03/2012).

Male members of the household often temporarily or permanently leave MLML in search of work, leading to internal remittances from urban or rural Thai areas (Cardo 2009). The most common job outside MLML is casual labor in agriculture. The remoteness of MLML requires agricultural laborers to travel over long distances to work sites requiring extended trips outside the camp, lasting around 10-12 days.

Payment varies according to demand: MLML's isolation from settlements fosters little demand for agricultural outputs, resulting, in part, to low wages of around THB 50 a day (ibid.). Refugees in Thailand are treated as 'illegal migrants' once they are outside camp, and as a result are highly vulnerable to exploitation and are in no position to demand the minimum wage in Thailand. Minimum wage, for 'legal-workers', differs by province and the lowest rate per day is THB 145 (TDRI, 2006).

Thailand is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1951 concerning the Status of Refugees. However, in agreement with the international obligation of non-refoulement, refugees in Thailand are entitled to protection and services in the camps, as long as the conditions in Burma do not allow safe and dignified repatriation. In Thailand in the meantime, no permanent structures can be built in the camps (reinforcing 'temporary' status of individuals) and people are not allowed to leave the encampments. Anyone caught outside the camps is considered an illegal migrant and is subject to arrest or deportation (often unofficial), regardless of whether or not they carry a UNHCR registration card. The consequence of this policy and the protracted conflict in Burma is a MLML population that has been warehoused for over 17 years.



### III. Theoretical Frameworks

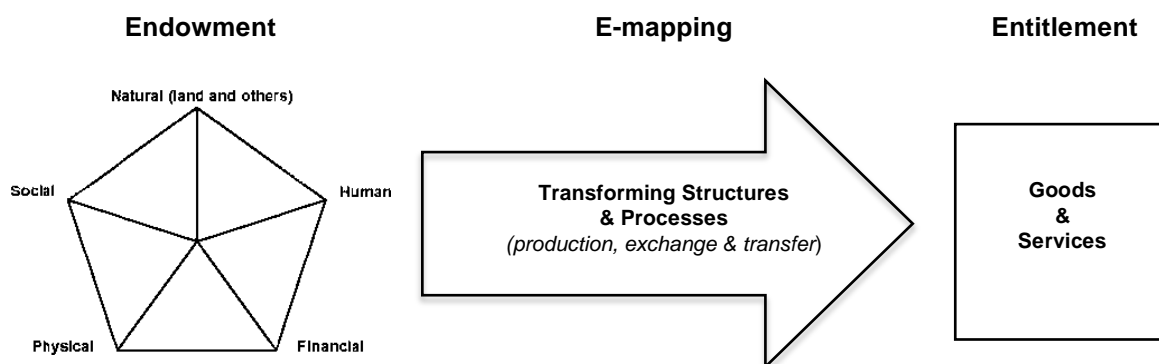
The design of this study is rooted in two intersecting theoretical frameworks: Amartya Sen's 'entitlement approach' to hunger that emerged from his essay 'Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation' (Sen 1981), and Sen's 'capability approach' (Sen 1993) offering characterization of fundamental freedoms and human rights that takes to account forms of deprivation and impoverishment.

#### ***Entitlement Approach***

At the time *Poverty and Famines* was written, popular belief was most famines were created by food shortages. Sen argues, to the contrary, that although harvest failures, reductions in food imports, droughts, etc. are often contributing factors to hunger, more important are the social systems that determine how a society's food is accessed. Situations of an insufficiency of food to feed everyone, or absolute scarcity, within a society are extremely rare. A much more common occurrence is for adequate supplies of food to be beyond the reach of the individuals and households who are in most need, a situation when adequate resources facilitating the acquisition of appropriate foods are impeded. Sen advocates to readdress questions away from food availability to queries investigating distribution of foods, scrutinizing the social systems that guide food distribution. Sen concludes, hunger is a case of people not having enough food to eat, but not necessarily one of not being enough food to go around.

The entitlement approach is built upon three conceptual categories, namely, the endowment set, the entitlement set, and the entitlement mapping. The *endowment set* is defined as the combination of all resources owned by a person legally. 'Legally' referring to established social norms and practices as well as to what is sanctioned by the state. These resources include both tangible assets (land, equipment, animals, etc.) and intangibles (knowledge, skill, labor power, or membership of a particular community).

**Figure 2: Relationship between the concepts of the entitlement approach**



The *entitlement set* is defined as the set of all possible combinations of goods and services that a person can legally obtain by using the resources of his endowment set. The use of the resources to get final

goods and services may be either in the form of production, exchange or transfer.

The *entitlement mapping*, called E-mapping, is the relationship between endowment set and entitlement set. It is the rate at which the resources of the endowment set can be converted into goods and services included in the entitlement set (Osmani 1993:4).

Deriving from the three basic concepts and playing a crucial role in the analysis of hunger and famine is the concept of *entitlement failure*. A person is said to suffer from the failure of food entitlement when “her entitlement set does not contain enough food to enable her to avoid starvation in the absence of non-entitlement transfers, such as charity” (Osmani 1993:5). In other words, that no matter how an individual may reallocate resources to obtain the food he or she wants, the individual cannot get the minimum amount needed to escape starvation.

One can identify four distinct sources of entitlement failure. These are: endowment loss, production failure, exchange failure, and transfer failure. For those who do not rely primarily on exchange to obtain their staple food entitlement failure could occur through either endowment loss and/or production loss. This case is described by Sen as *direct entitlement failure* (Osmani 1993:6). When exchange is involved to obtain food, then endowment loss, production failure or exchange failure may act as the channel of entitlement failure. In scenarios involving exchange, a *trade entitlement failure* will have occurred.

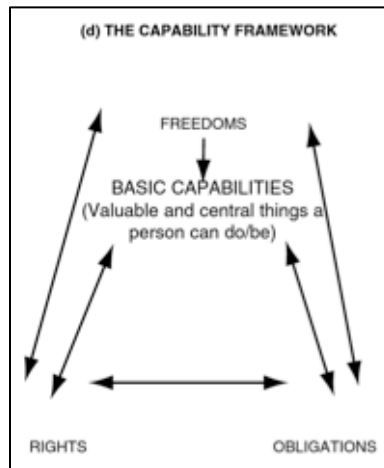
## **Capabilities Approach**

In Sen's ‘capability approach’ he characterizes freedom as a pluralist concept involving complex elements that relate to:

1. The process aspect of freedom, which is concerned with whether or not a person is free to take decisions himself or herself, taking note of
  - Immunity from interference by others;
  - The scope of autonomy in individual choices.
2. The opportunity aspect of freedom, which focuses on the actual freedom a person has to achieve things that he or she has reasons to value and want, taking note of
  - The nature and scope of the opportunities offered;
  - Their relation to individual objectives and goals.

The ‘capability approach’ provides an explanation of an individual's opportunity aspect of freedom. The term ‘capability’ refers to the opportunity to achieve valuable combinations of human functioning. An individual's ‘capability set’ represents the different combinations of activities that are within a person's reach and over which a person has freedom of effective choice. The term ‘functioning’ refers to aspects of the states of being and doing that a person ranging from elementary personal states (such as achieving adequate nutrition) to complex personal states (such as participating in the community). The ‘capability-freedoms’ focuses on a set of freedoms relating to the things that a person is able to do and be (Vizard 2006).

**Figure 3: The capability framework**



In this study, Sen's 'entitlement approach' and 'capabilities approach' are used as a lens through which to investigate factors influencing household food security amongst Burmese refugees living in MLML. Often, food insecurity has been conceptualized, simply, as an insufficient quantity of food available; the study of hunger has since evolved to focus, in part; to the ability individuals have to access the adequate resources (entitlements) used for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet (WFP, 2008). Furthermore, Sen's perspectives are used to better understand if Burmese refugees in MLML are free to take decisions that influence acquisition of things the individual values and wants. The current study aims to utilize Sen's entitlement and capabilities approach, in the context MLM and the rules regulating refugees in Thailand, to analyze an individuals' ability to access food entitlements, and ultimately, determine if an individual has the freedom of choice to avoid a *failure of food entitlement*.

## IV. Methodology

Initially a desk review of key historical documents related to livelihoods, nutrition and food security within MLML, as well as current reports and documents was conducted. In addition the researcher visited Thailand for a period of three months, in close proximity to MLML near the Thailand-Burma border. A two-week period was spent residing inside MLML. Both settings, inside and outside MLML, allowed for interviews, meetings and focus group discussions (FGDs) to be carried out with individual refugees, refugee committees, community-based organizations (CBOs) and their headquarter staff, COERR and TBBC's CAN staff. Home visits for surveying through household questionnaire and participatory observation with refugee families was conducted while residing inside MLML. Food distribution, food warehouses, Supplemental Feeding Programs, Nursery School lunch/snack programs and CAN training and demonstration sites were observed; and their staffs and beneficiaries interviewed. Two FGDs were held, one with female participants the other made up of only male attendees.

### ***Participants***

The sampling approach for the household survey was formulated to include, within the limits of the study, respondents from the entire area of MLML through consideration of the political and organizational framework of MLML. MLML households are divided into 6 continuous sections extending over a 2-kilometer strand, each section bisected by the Mae La Ma Luang River (see Figure 4). MLML political structure is such to facilitate each section in electing one male and one female 'Section Leader' to represent his/her section to the Camp Committee (located in section 5) that oversees MLML in its entirety. The sampling size was 20 households, with an emphasis on surveying households spread throughout the 6 sections. Three households were surveyed from sections 1, 2, 5 and 6. Four households were surveyed from sections 3 and 4, as these sections towards MLML's geographical center are the most densely populated.

One Focus group discussion made up of only female participants and one FGD of only male participants took place. The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) helped to organize the female FGD which included the six Section Leaders from each section of MLML. The men's FGD included eight men employed by the two agricultural programmes (TBBC CAN & COERR Self-Sustainability) operating in MLML. During the male FGD not all sections were represented, in terms of participant household location. However, each participant had worked in and with households from all sections of MLML when establishing camp-wide agricultural programs.

**Figure 4: Map of sections 1-6 of Mae La Ma Luang\***



\*created during men's FGD (March 2012)

### ***Household Survey Design***

For the purpose of understanding food security at the household level the study depends largely on data collected through household questionnaire within MLML. A sample size of 20 households, made up of randomly selected households from each of the six sections, was surveyed through questionnaire. The surveying focused on the following themes, findings were later analyzed with the aim of better understanding food security and coping behaviors within MLML:

- **Household Characteristics** – age, elements of household demographics, registration documents, education, disabilities, primary and secondary occupations
- **Household Food Security** – food consumption, months of sufficient food, household hunger, household food access, food sources, coping strategies
- **Agriculture and livestock** – access to land, gardening, animal rearing
- **Food basket utilization** – use of food items and charcoal distributed by aid organizations

**Table 4: Outcomes through analysis of household survey data**

<b>Household survey</b>	Survey distributed to households from each camp section; 1 facilitator; 1 note taker/observer/translator.
<b>Food Consumption Score (FCS)</b>	Respondents are asked how many days in the past week the household consumed, pre-determined, food groups. The maximum number of days is seven. A FCS for each household is calculated by multiplying the frequency of consumption times the weight (based on nutrient content) for each food group, then summing all of the food groups together.
<b>Months of Insufficient Food</b>	In the survey, respondents are asked about their household food supplies during different months of the year; i.e., in what months of the year did the family have enough food to meet its perceived food needs.
<b>Coping Strategy Index (CSI)</b>	Respondents are asked how many days in the past week the household has had to employ coping behaviors, ranging from 'never' to 'daily'. Each coping behavior is weighted according to its severity.
<b>Household Hunger Scale (HHS)</b>	Respondents are asked three key questions related to household hunger; i.e. household food access & availability. Data collected on the three questions are used to calculate the HHS, measuring whether or not household are actually experiencing hunger.

### ***Focus Group and In-Depth Interview Design***

This study included focus group discussion (FGDs), in-depth interviews (IDIs) and the researcher engaged in participatory observation to provide qualitative interpretation to the quantitative findings of the household questionnaire.

**Table 5: Surveying methods during FGDs & IDIs**

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Focus group discussions format (FGD)</b>	Conduct two FGDs, one male one female, with 6-8 individuals representing the various sections of MLML; 1 facilitator; 1 note taker/observer/translator.
<b>Daily activity mapping (M/F)</b>	The focus of the technique is to get an insight into daily household/livelihood activities and allocation of time to these activities, and how this changes over time; to understand differences in daily activities of women and men. Separate male (8) and female (6) groups.
<b>Seasonal calendar (F)</b>	Seasonal calendars are very useful means of generating information about seasonal trends within the community and identifying periods of particular stress and vulnerability. Best undertaken in the context of a group discussion (to help verify the information obtained), A whole series of seasonal variables can be included in one calendar to give an overview of the situation throughout the year. These variables can include: rainfall, crop sequences, labor demand, availability of paid employment, out-migration, incidence of human diseases, expenditure levels, and various types of livelihood activities and so on.

<b>Ration use (F)</b>	Participants in female groups only were questioned in depth about the use of rations received from TBBC. This included the following questions for each ration item: last time received, main use of item, number of days that the ration lasted, and what the HH did if/when the ration ran out. In addition, the sale/trade of rations will also be discussed.
<b>Main food source diagram (F)</b>	Participants in female groups only were questioned in depth about the main sources of food to their household. Diagram asked respondents to identify sources, weight how much of food supply comes from each source and identify what foods come from this source.
<b>In-depth interviews (IDI)</b>	Semi-structured interviews with 1-2 participants maximum; mixed if possible; 1 facilitator; 1 note taker/observer/translator; extensive probing.
<b>Interviews with heads of household within MLML (mixed)</b>	Separate interviews with heads of household from MLML. Engaged in participatory observation of livelihood daily activities with MLML households with an emphasis placed on selecting households with varying circumstances.
<b>Interview with key informants involved in livelihood/food security within MLML</b>	Within MLML interview with staff involved in food distribution, food warehouses, Supplemental Feeding Programs, Nursery School lunch/snack programs and CAN training and demonstration sites. Additional interviews with TBBC and COERR staff.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

It is important to stress the exploratory nature of this study and its limitations. First, the study only covers 1 refugee camp along the Thailand-Burma border, such that the results may not apply directly to all the encampments in the region. Second, the researcher often had difficulty gathering some of the information necessary to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the MLM-wide and household economics, and as a result most of the economic information is a product of secondary sources. Third, because of the limited time inside MLML, the majority of information gathered is quantitative with limited opportunity for gathering qualitative data for interpretation of quantitative findings. Additionally, due to restrictions of time and resources the sample size for the household questionnaire was limited to 20 households, a larger sample would be conducive to better understanding of MLML food security. Lastly, the researcher was limited to communication with subjects through an interpreter for the duration of field-study, inevitably some qualitative details were confused in the process.

Overall, while the study is useful in gaining an understanding of the household food security within MLML, it is clear that further studies, including a larger sample should be undertaken. The need for continuous assessment of household food security to be undertaken at this time of further rations reductions and a continued policy of restrictive encampment is crucial.

## Key Findings

### *Household Economics*

In 2009 a livelihood assessments was conducted inside MLML. Economic security information was obtained during the 2009 assessment from a sample size of 177 households and includes information on livelihood activities, household income and expenditures, assets, debt and savings<sup>1</sup>. The particular circumstances associated with refugee camps makes interpretation of this economic data different than in non-camp settings. Refugee households are much more restricted in their livelihood options due to issues of mobility, land availability and resident status.

In MLML about 6 percent of households have a member working within the camp for a stipend. The advantage of being a stipend worker is that the person receives a regular salary. This brings additional benefits like being able to borrow money from friends/family/neighbors more easily because they know that there is future income, or getting store credit. Other advantages mentioned by respondents are that the workplace is located conveniently close to their homes, they save transportation costs and there is no need to break the law by leaving the camp. Respondents from FGDs indicated that stipend workers commonly work with NGOs on things like food distribution, health, livelihood and housing. Their wages are low but this is, in many cases, the only way they can earn money. Other households depend largely on occasional wage opportunities in agriculture or engage in small trade within the camp.

**Table 6: Most common livelihood activities for adults 18 years of age and older (figures only given for those with a livelihood activity).**

Livelihood Activities (Proportion)								
Income generating					Non-income generating			
Small business owner	Stipend worker	Raising/selling vegetables	Casual labor (agriculture)	Crafts/weaving	Student	Housewife	Other	No Livelihood Activity
7.2	5.9	5.3	3.9	2.0	42.9	3.9	28.9	69.0

(source: Cardno Agrisystems Limited)

The top 5 income-generating livelihood activities for residents of MLML are listed in Table 6, the most common of which is small business owner, followed by stipend worker. This includes working with an

<sup>1</sup> For more information see “Livelihoods Vulnerability Analysis in Burmese Refugee Camps in Thailand, 2009”



NGO, as a teacher or nurse, or in an official capacity like camp committee member. The salaries for employees of NGOs vary depending on the trade and experience. Teachers earn, on average, THB 500 a month, teacher trainers THB 1200, social workers from THB 0 to THB 700 and medical personnel in hospitals from THB 1620 to THB 3000. People working for camp management, such as a section leader or a security guard, make between THB 400 and THB 800, while people in CBOs, such as the Karen Women's Organization, are often unpaid (Cardno 2009). Other mentioned jobs in MLML are: shop keeping (THB 50-120 a day), weaving/sewing (THB 220 for a blanket, THB 200 for a lungyi, THB 63 for a Karen shirt), or housework (unpaid). Additional sources of income generation include vegetable growing in homestead gardens, animal rearing and (illegal) foraging, fishing and hunting outside camp. It is important to note the strong seasonality component to the agricultural based livelihood activities in MLML, which make-up nearly half of all income generating activities inside the camp. Findings from FGD indicate agricultural-based income generating activities, both inside and outside MLML, decreases drastically during the annual lean season.

## Survey Results

### Food Consumption Score

There is no single way to measure food security, but ideally one would measure individual household members portions over a range of meals and convert the results to kilocalories. However, this is both very time-consuming for surveyors and subjects, and unrealistic given the constraints of this study. There are a number of other useful yet simpler indicators that have been validated through various studies, ranging from a simple measure of diet diversity, or the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale, to the Food Consumption Score (FCS).

Household dietary diversity and food frequency are easy to collect and are proven reliable proxies indicators of diet quality and quantity. Data were collected on seven-day recall of frequency of consumption of food groups at the household level. These data were used to construct a FCS and classify household diets according to their food consumption as poor, borderline or acceptable. The FCS forms an integral part of WFP's Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (WFP 2008).

While the FCS is not useful for specifically estimating caloric intake (because there is no measurement of portion sizes), it is useful in assessing generally how well households are eating. A household FCS is derived from weighting various food groups based on their protein and micronutrient values and assigning a score for each food group consumed by the household during the recall period.

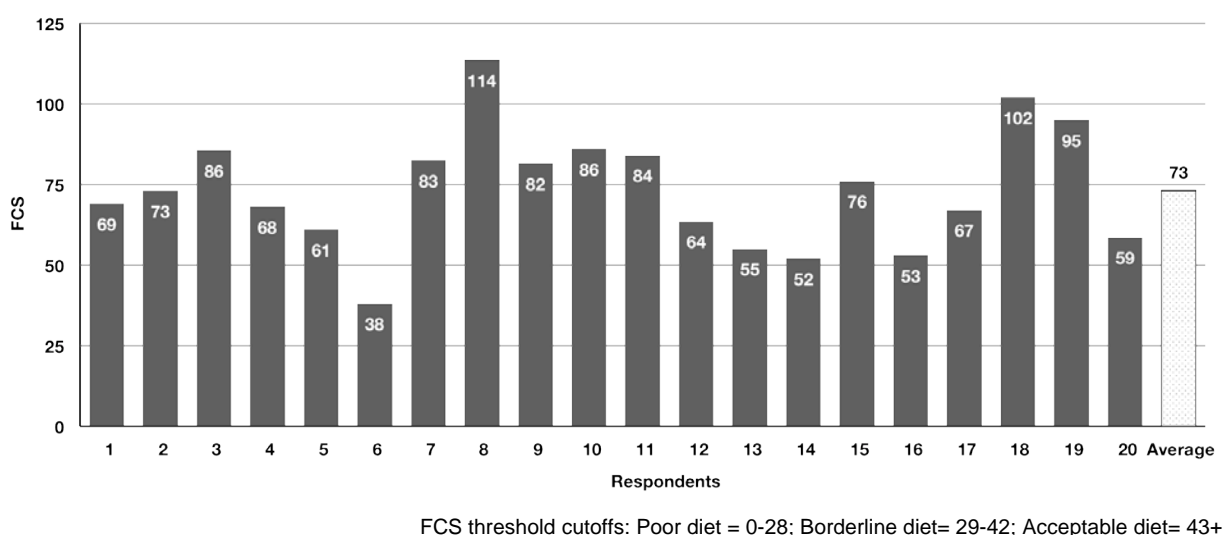
Respondents are asked how many days in the past week each item was consumed in the household. The maximum number of days is seven. A FCS for each household is calculated by multiplying the frequency of consumption times its weight (based on nutritional content), then summing all of the food groups together. The maximum possible score is 248.5, unlikely achieved because it would require a household to consume all food groups every day (the maximum FCS for this survey was 124).

**Table 7: FCS food group categories and respective weightings**

Food Group	Score	Food Groups	Score
Cereals:	2 points	Eggs:	4 points
Pumpkin, squash, carrots:	3 points	Fresh or dried fish/shellfish:	4 points
Tubers:	2 points	Legumes/pulses:	3 points
Dark green leafy vegetables:	3 points	Milk/dairy:	4 points
Other vegetables:	1 point	Oil/fats:	0.5 points
Papayas, mangoes:	3 points	Sugar/honey:	0.5 points
Other fruits:	1 point	Condiments:	0.5 points
Meats:	4 points		
Total Possible Points per Day:			35.5
Total Possible Points for 7 Days:			248.5

Figure 5 shows the FCS values in MLML for each household surveyed, as well as the overall mean value for all respondents. Note that the average daily FCS is only about 10.5. In the context of a refugee camp food availability is a limiting factor, as households are dependent on what food items are being sold, grown or collected within the camp. The availability of fresh foods from outside MLML is particularly limited as the nearest village is a 3-4 hour walk, and a refugee risks arrest if they leave the camp. The nearest market is a 4-8 hour drive (dependent on road conditions). During heavy rains linkages to outside markets can be severed completely due to impassible river and poor road conditions. Thus, households have few opportunities to seek other food items that may be available outside MLML. Food access is also problematic, particularly during the lean months when the limited livelihood opportunity, income generating activities and water for agricultural purposes becomes even more restricted (Cardno 2009).

**Figure 5: Food Consumption Score, by household**



The next two tables (tables 8 & 9) show the proportion of households who reported consuming a particular food group over the 7 days prior to surveying, and the average number of days each food group is consumed. Responses show that all households consumed 'cereals' and fish paste everyday- cereals usually comprised solely of rice. Both rice and fish paste is included in the ration. Findings from both the survey and FGD indicate that rationed rice runs out towards the end of the ration cycle (rice ration lasted an average of 21.3 days in February 2012), in which mentioned coping strategies were to borrow the staple food from family or friends (to be repaid later from the next ration) or to purchase extra rice from shops inside the camp.

Second to cereals and fish paste, in frequency consumed, were yellow/orange vegetables, legumes/pulses and fats/oils. Surveyed households consumed these food groups at least once per week. Consumption frequency of these three food groups is aided by the fact fats/oils and legumes/pulses are

included in the ration, in the form of vegetable oil and yellow beans. Yellow/orange vegetables, one of the most nutritious of the food groups are consumed by 100% of households, and on average, over 4 days per week. Yellow/orange vegetables are not included in the ration, thus must be acquired through own production or purchase through market/shops inside the camp. Fish, another of the most nutritious food items was consumed by 90% of households on an average of 2.5 days per week. This relatively high level of fish consumption, though not a ration food, is likely partly attributed to the timing of data collection, which was taken at a time when water levels of the two rivers adjacent to MLML were dropping, and fish catch and drying was relatively high.

Meat constituted part of diet for 75% of surveyed households, and consumed on average about one day per week, while leafy greens are also consumed by 75% of households, 1.8 times a week. Other good sources of vitamin A, such as mangoes or papayas (consumed by 60% of households nearly 2 times a week) or carrots, pumpkins or squash (consumed by 100% of households 4.3 times a week) indicating that a majority of households consume vitamin A rich fruits and vegetables at least 5 times per week. Animal food sources of vitamin A, such as, dairy products (rarely consumed, only 15% of households) and eggs (55%, 1.7 times per week), which are more bioactive, than other vitamin A sources, may not be consumed in sufficient frequency and quantity to satisfy adequate vitamin A intake and status.

**Table 8: Food frequency data (part 1)**

Food Group (Proportion (%)/Frequency*)							
Cereals	Yellow/Orange Vegetables	Roots/Tubers	GLVegetables	Other Vegetables	Vit-A-Fruits	Other Fruits	Legumes/Pulses
100/7.0	100/4.3	45/0.9	75/1.8	90/3.2	60/1.8	35/0.7	100/3.1

\*average # of days consumed over 7 day period

The proportion of households consuming protein and nutrient rich food groups not included in the ration, such as, meat (75%) and fish (90%) are relatively high suggesting that food availability in MLML is not a serious problem. However, the frequency of consumption is relatively low for these nutrient rich foods such as meat (1.1/week), fish (2.5/week) and dairy (0.5/week), suggesting that food access (the ability to purchase food) is the larger issue.

Rationed foods included in the survey (rice, vegetable oil, yellow beans and fish paste) are consumed on a weekly basis by all respondents. Of interest to note is that yellow beans are consumed with far less frequency (3.1 times/week) than other rationed foods, of which are consumed nearly everyday (avg. 6.9/week). This could reflect households consuming large portions of yellow beans at mealtime. It may

also reflect the mentioned practice during FGDs of households stockpiling yellow beans for later consumption. Yellow beans were the only rationed food to not be reduced in January 2012 and quantities are shown in both quantitative and qualitative findings to last the duration of the distribution cycle. This abundance coupled with a mentioned preference towards consuming other foods until households must consume yellow beans enable stockpiling. During the rain season (May to November) the often poor condition of the single road linking MLML to outside markets transforms MLML into a poor accessibility location, at times inaccessible. During a FGD it was mentioned that stockpiling yellow beans during the lean period (January to April) was common practice in preparation for the rain season, when availability of fresh food from outside markets dwindles.

**Table 9: Food frequency data (part 2)**

Food Group (Proportion (%)/Frequency*)							
Meat	Fish	Eggs	Dairy	Fats/Oils	Sugar/honey	Fish Paste	Condiments
75/1.1	90/2.5	55/1.0	85/0.5	100/6.1	40/0.7	100/7.0	95/5.3

\*average # of days consumed over 7 day period

The FCS can be used to identify poor, borderline and acceptable diets based on the weights of the food items and frequency of consumption. Table 10 shows that no households surveyed had a 'poor' diet and only 1 household had a 'borderline' diet. When analyzing the FCS of 20 surveyed households, 19 had 'acceptable' diets. This result of balanced diet amongst the majority of households is encouraging, however a limitation of FCS is an inability to measure portion size. Nutrient rich food groups, such as meat and fish, are not included in the ration and carry high prices in MLML markets. While these foods were reported as being consumed by a majority of households, the frequency, and likely, portion sizes of these expensive foods are minimal.

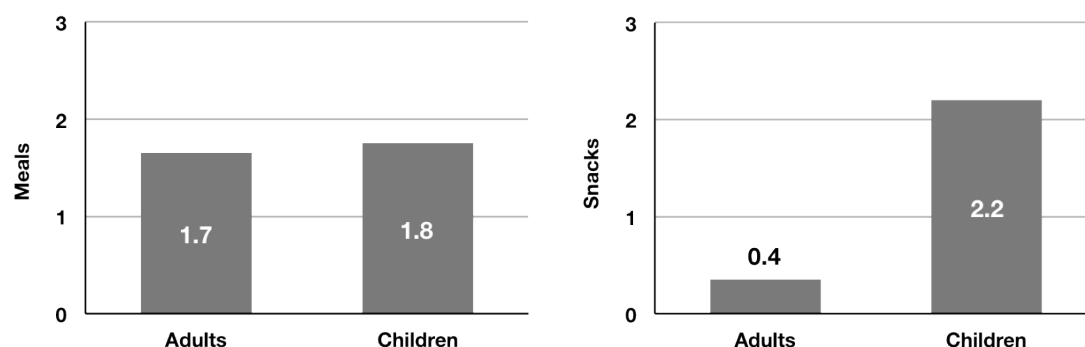
**Table 10: Adequacy of household diet**

Adequacy of diet	
Poor	0
Borderline	1
Acceptable	19

Adults eat, on average, 1.7 meals per day while children eat 1.8 meals per day. It is interesting to note that qualitative findings show that participants included three meals per day in their daily patterns. This

could be explained by the timing of the survey, whereas people usually take three meals/day, and report it as normal routine, but start to reduce the number of meals as they enter, or are in midst of such as time of data collection, a period of food scarcity. This reduction in the number of meals consumed per day coincides with patterns of stockpiling rationed food during the lean period of food scarcity that was mentioned during FGDs.

**Figure 6: Mean number of meals & snacks consumed by adults & children per day**

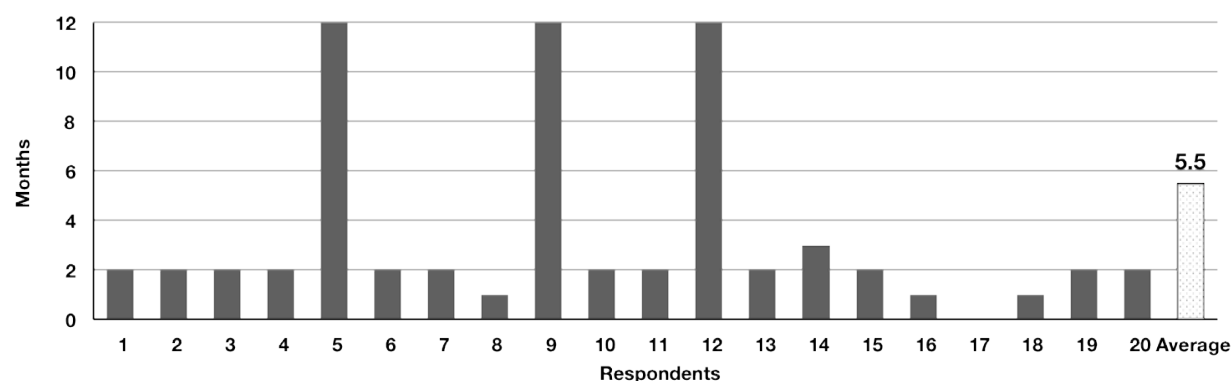


On average, adults consume a snack every-other-day. Children however eat over 2 snacks per day. Overall, snack consumption amongst children is relatively high considering the lack of income generation opportunities for residents of MLML and that all snacks were reported as being store bought. Although store-bought snacks are inexpensive; their consumption suggests an existence of disposable income, whereby 85 percent of households reported daily snack consumption. During a nutritional study in MLML during September 2010, a nutritionist while interviewing a family of newly arrived refugees, learned that the money from the sale of wild foods collected during migration to the camp would be used to purchase snacks for the children; this was the only need for cash identified. This indicates that emphasis parents place on providing purchased snacks for children. The impression left upon the researcher was that providing snacks to children was “equated with status and establishing normalcy for refugee families” (Gardner 2012).

### Months of insufficient food

In the survey, respondents were asked about their household food supplies during different months of the year; i.e., in what months of the past year did the family have enough food to fully meet its perceived food needs. Of surveyed households, 95 percent of respondents replied there were some months when food was not sufficient.

**Figure 7: Number of months households report insufficient food**



These findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of respondents perceive a food security problem. The average number of months of food insufficiency (as perceived by households who report a deficiency) is 5.5, as shown in figure 7. Note the considerable discrepancy amongst respondents regarding perceptions of the number of months when food was not sufficient. Most respondents reported food scarcity between 1 and 2 months of the year, however three respondents reported their household being food insecure through twelve months of the year. A single respondent perceived his/her household to be food secure year-round.

The proportion of respondents reporting insufficient food by month of the past year is provided in figure 8. It is important to note the dramatic peak commencing in December 2011 and the sudden drop in March 2012. The chart in figure 8 shows an overall pattern of one distinct lean period in terms of insufficient food, with the months of highest food insecurity occurring from December to February. The spike in January 2012 is likely a product of, and response to, the ration cuts that went into effect January 2012. Data collection took place in March 2012. An explanation for the gradual incline in respondents reporting insufficient food in December 2011 could be attributed to the known practice of stockpiling rations in anticipation of lean periods, in this case a response to the coming ration reductions and impending hot season.

Qualitative findings identify one lean period that correlates with the period of food scarcity identified in the quantitative findings. This lean period mainly occurs during the hot season with a peak in March-April, which is slightly later than in the quantitative findings. In the case of this discrepancy, the survey results indicating high food insecurity during January and February 2012 likely reflects a respondent comparison of the current rationed food basket to the larger quantities respondents received just two months prior<sup>2</sup>. FGD participants appeared to relate food scarcity to the availability of fresh vegetables. During FGDs participants indicated that food scarcity is lowest in the midst of the rain season and also during the cool

<sup>2</sup> The rice ration was cut by 25 percent and fish paste was reduced by 33 percent. The oil ration cut by half. The food ration basket went from providing, on average, 2,127 kcals/person/day in 2011 to providing 1,640 kcals/person/day, a 23 percent drop.

season (September to December) when camp production and wild foods are at their peak. FGD participants explained that August 2011 was an uncharacteristically difficult month in terms of food scarcity as heavy rains devastated MLML, adversely impacting camp production of fresh foods due to severe flooding and cutting-off of linkages to outside markets due to impassible roads. Survey respondent perception of food deficient months may have been influenced by the coupled stresses of ration cuts that went into place two months prior to data collection and being in the midst of the lean period.

**Figure 8: Lean months as reported by household**

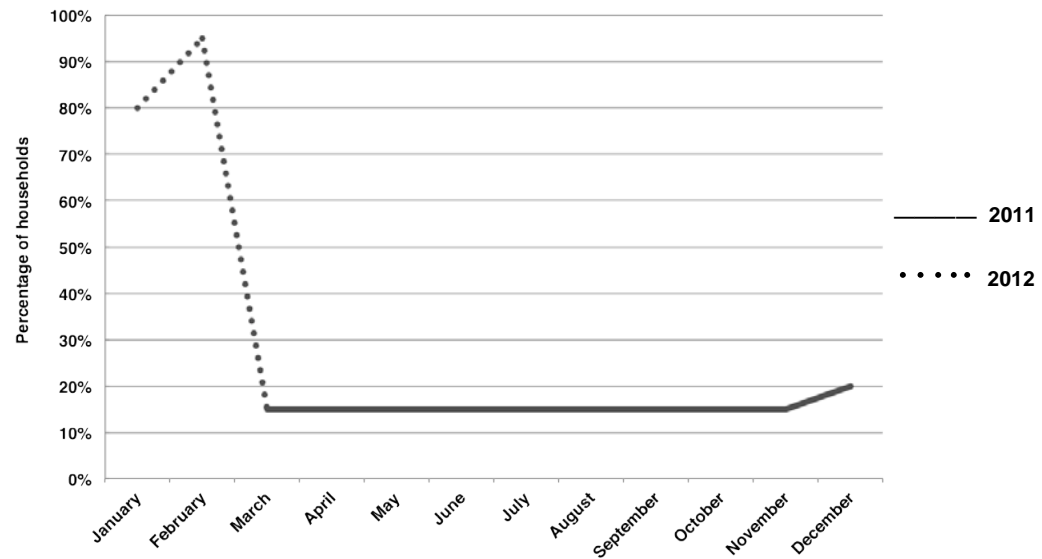




Figure 9: Household Profile 1- Htoo Htoo



## Coping Strategy Index

The Coping Strategy Index (CSI) is a tool used to measure behavior changes in household when access to adequate or preferred foods is difficult. As household resources decrease, food is the last basic need to go; likewise, as soon as household resources increase, food is the first need to be addressed. The CSI measures responses to the question: “What do you do when you don’t have enough food, and don’t have the resources to acquire it?” (Maxwell 2008). The various answers to this question comprise the basis of the CSI score.

There are a number of coping strategies associated with food security, most of which are universal. The specific coping behaviors probed for this study are listed and discussed (in the context of MLML) below. It is possible that some of the coping behaviors such as gathering wild foods are culturally determined. However, such behavior does influence food security and in the context of MLML has costs (i.e. arrest outside of camp), which qualifies it as an appropriate coping behavior to include in the CSI.

- 1) **Rely on less preferred and less expensive foods:** Some of the less expensive types of food are basic soups using local vegetables. Less expensive soup may also be prepared by making soup from eggs, wild vegetables, and tomatoes.
- 2) **Limit portion size at mealtimes:** A household may use a fixed quantity of rice over 3 days during lean times, when the same quantity is consumed over 2 days or less during food secure times, implying that the portion size will ultimately be smaller and consumed over a longer period.
- 3) **Reduce number of meals eaten in a day:** Households that are short of food or cash may eat twice or once rather than the cultural norm within MLML of eating three meals a day.
- 4) **Borrow food, or rely on help from a friend or relative:** Types of food that households would typically borrow vary from small items such as tea, sugar or salt. Sometimes households also borrow vegetables, rice or oil, usually from relatives, friends or neighbors.
- 5) **Purchase food on credit:** When short of money to buy food, purchasing food on credit from a local shopkeeper is a common coping behavior. Credit from shopkeepers has its limitations. It is often more expensive than paying cash.
- 6) **Gather wild foods:** There are households in MLML that gather wild vegetables. In the forests and open lands surrounding MLML, one can find wild fruits, tubers and vegetables, all edible and growing wild for anybody to pick.
- 7) **Sell ration food or charcoal to buy food:** Households may sell part of their ration in order to purchase more preferred foods.
- 8) **Send household members to eat elsewhere:** In desperate, some households may send family members to relatives or friends for meals.
- 9) **Restrict consumption by adults in order for small children to eat:** When food is scarce, adults often eat less so children can have more. Or, adults eat fewer meals so children can have the usual number of meals a day.

Each coping behavior is weighted according to its severity. Standard weights have been established over numerous studies<sup>3</sup>, and are included in table 11. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked how often they employed the various coping strategies, ranging from ‘never’ to ‘daily.’

Figure 10 provides coping index values for all respondents, and a mean CSI value of 16.1, which is quite low. This suggests that the provision of a food basket does what it is supposed to do, which is supply households with a basic diet, and that households are not using many behavioral options commonly found when diets are adjusted with very high frequency. In comparison, a food security survey conducted by the World Food Program in NE Bangladesh indicated a CSI average value of about 25 (WFP 2006:92). This was for generally poor households without any food basket support, unlike MLML where individuals do receive food assistance.

**Figure 10: Coping strategy index**

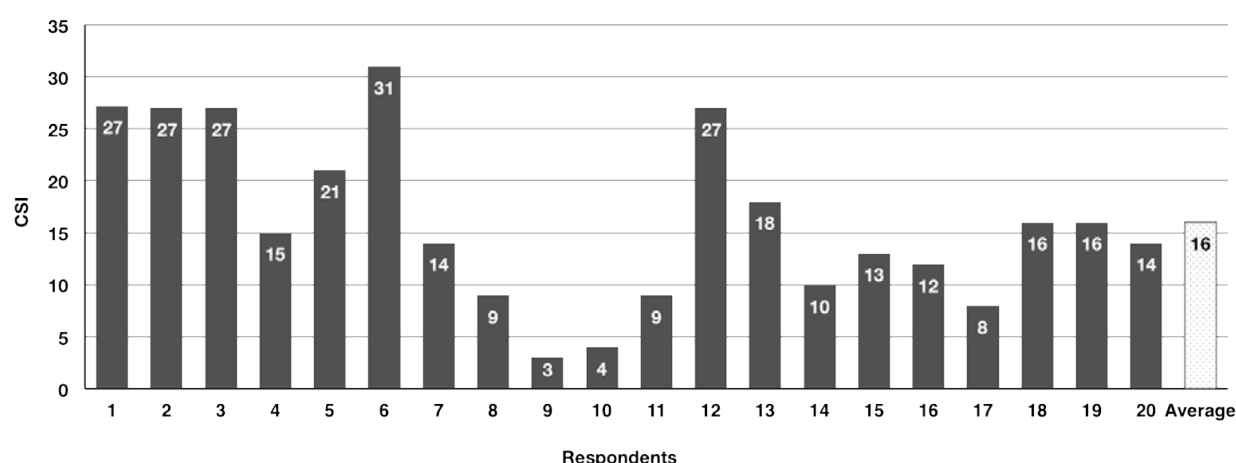


Table 11 provides data on the mean score per coping strategy and the proportion of households utilizing the various coping behaviors. What is of interest to note is that for most households the use of coping behaviors is relatively high. For example, 95 percent of households rely to some extent on less expensive or preferred foods. Over 75 percent of respondents reported reducing adult consumption, borrowing food, and reducing the number of meals consumed per day and/or limiting portions at mealtime during the month prior to data collection. However, the overall CSI values are relatively low. This is because the frequency of these behaviors is low (the CSI score is computed by multiplying the severity of a behavior (weight) by its frequency<sup>4</sup>). This suggests that households commonly make adjustments to satisfy their food needs, but the adjustments are not needed all the time, or the opportunity to make an adjustment does not present itself daily (e.g., gathering wild food may only occur when collecting wood from forests).

<sup>3</sup> For more information see “The Coping Strategies Index Field Methods Manual – Second Edition, January 2008”

<sup>4</sup> Respondents were asked to give a frequency score (1-4) for each behavior exhibited over 7 day periods, during the month of February 2012. Frequency representative scores were as follows: 0 = never, 1 = seldom (< 1 day/week), 2 = (3+ days/week) or 4 = daily.

**Table 11: Mean CSI value per coping behavior and proportion of households using**

<b>Coping Behavior</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Proportion</b>	<b>Frequency*</b>	<b>Mean CSI value</b>
<i>Limit portions at mealtime</i>	2.7	85	1.8	4.9
<i>Borrow food or rely on help from friends</i>	2.9	80	1.45	4.2
<i>Rely on less expensive or preferred foods</i>	1.8	95	2.2	4.0
<i>Reduce # meals/day</i>	2.5	80	1.5	3.8
<i>Reduce adult consumption</i>	2.5	75	1.15	2.9
<i>Gather wild foods</i>	2.3	65	1.2	2.8
<i>Have members eat elsewhere</i>	2.9	55	0.85	2.5
<i>Purchase food on credit</i>	2.6	15	0.2	0.5
<i>Sell ration food</i>	3.3	5	0.05	0.2

\*CSI frequency threshold cutoffs: 0.01-1.0 = < 1 day/week; 1.01-3 = 1-2 days/week

Qualitative findings from the FGD confirm the top coping strategies found in the household survey. It is clear that people in MLML consider their current diet to be inferior to their preferred diet and they make further compromises towards the later end of the 30-day ration distribution cycle, when rationed foods run low. FGDs further confirm the practice of reducing the portions and number of meals for adults during lean periods. Borrowing food or money to buy food from friends/family and neighbors was repeatedly mentioned as common practice, especially when rations run out. There was mention of this practice lessening since the January 2012 ration cuts, as households increasingly have less food to lend.

**Table 12: Use of ration foods over duration of 30-day distribution cycle**

# of Days Ration Foods Last	Respondents	
	Survey	FGD
# of days rice lasted	21.3	23
# of days AsiaREmix lasted	8.4	7
# of days cooking oil lasted	17.5	21
# of days yellow beans lasted	26.6	30
# of days salt lasted	10.5	14
# of days fish paste lasted	24.8	21
# of days charcoal lasted	15.4	14

FGDs indicate that the sale of rations does not happen; participants explained that households need the full rations for own consumption. In any case, quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that, if the sale of rations occurs at all, the practice is extremely rare. Some rationed foods namely rice, oil and fish paste, last about three-weeks of the 30-day ration distribution cycle. AsiaReMIX, a fortified blended food lasts around a week. The low quantity of AsiaReMIX provided in the ration (no distribution for adults; 1 kg/month for children) explains why it runs out so quickly. Yellow beans are reported to last the majority of the ration cycle.

FGD participants indicated that, while the practice is rare, trading of food items does occur. There was one mention of rice being traded from people living in MLML to hill tribes living outside the camp in exchange for access to private spring water in neighboring hill tribe villages, to be used for agricultural purposes.

### **Household Hunger Scale**

With the aim of further exploring household food security the survey asked respondents three key questions, all outlined in table 13. The first question was “In the last four weeks, was there a time when there was no food to eat of any kind in the house because of a lack of resourced to obtain food?” This question sheds light on household food access. The proportion of respondents that report this problem affecting their household was 40 percent. Those who responded yes were further asked how frequently this happened in the last month, with 1-10 occurrences termed ‘sometimes’ and more than 10 times termed ‘often’. All respondents who answered yes indicated that the situation occurs only sometimes.

The second question asked of instances when anyone in the household went to sleep hungry at night without eating anything at all because there was not enough food. The proportion of households impacted

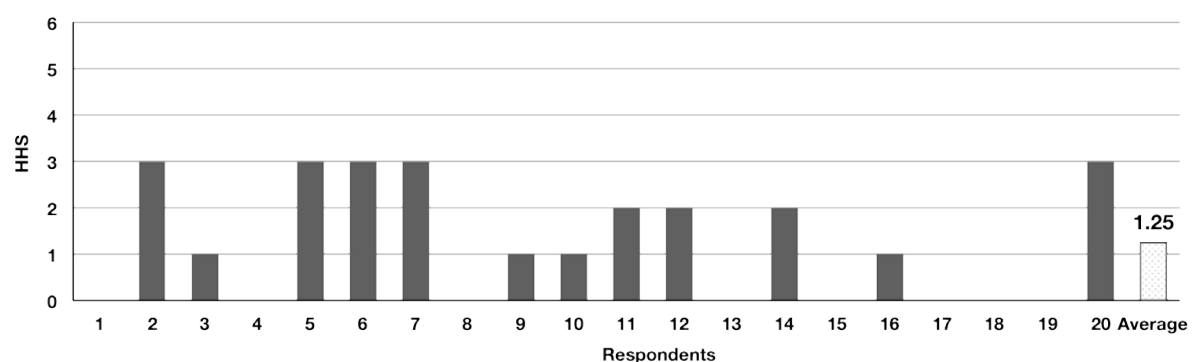
by this issue was 50 percent, even higher than that of the first question. The third question asked if any household member went an entire day and night without eating. Here the overall frequency was 35 percent of respondents.

**Table 13: Key household hunger indicators**

Food Security Indicator		Proportion
<b>Proportion of HHs with no food at any time in last 4 weeks</b>		40%
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	100%
	<i>Often</i>	0%
<b>Proportion of HHs w/ member going to sleep hungry at any time in last 4 weeks</b>		50%
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	100%
	<i>Often</i>	0%
<b>Proportion of HHs with w/ member skipping entire day eating in last 4 weeks</b>		35%
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	100%
	<i>Often</i>	0%

The data collected on the three questions were used to calculate the “Household Hunger Scale” (HHS). The HHS is a measure of whether or not households are experiencing hunger, and to what degree (FANTA 2011). To calculate a household HHS, the following point system is used: A “no” response received 0 points, “rarely or sometimes (1-10 times)” receives 1 point, and “often (more than 10 times)” receives 2 points. The frequency responses (0, 1 or 2) for the three questions are summed with a maximum score of 6. Based on the summed score, households are categorized as follows: 0-1 points is a household with little or no hunger in the past month; 2-3 points is a household with moderate hunger; and 4-6 points is a household with severe hunger in the previous month. As shown in figure 11 surveying revealed 40 percent of households experienced moderate hunger with no reported instances of severe hunger.

**Figure 11: Household Hunger Scale**



HHS threshold cutoffs: little/no hunger = 0-1; moderate hunger = 2-3; severe hunger = 4-6

This is reiterated by qualitative findings, which indicate that through a range of coping and income generating strategies, they are able to cope and are not experiencing severe hunger. For example, FGD participants indicated that severe hunger does not occur because the food rations. Problems occur when the ration deliveries are late, due to poor road conditions, because households manage their food basket based on determined ration distribution dates; late delivery disrupts food basket management. Food basket utilization is particularly crucial in MLML today due to the recent ration reductions of January 2012. When rations run thin towards the end of the distribution cycle households cope by borrowing food from family or neighbors, buying food from shops or eating only two meals a day.

Respondents report a variety of obstacles to accessing foods, each outlined in figure 12. All households perceive the quantity of food aid as not being enough to support an adequate diet. It is likely that this was reported by 100% of respondents because rice, the main staple of diet in MLML, was reduced in the ration by 25% two months prior to surveying. Other factors that impede food acquisition include not enough money to buy food (80%), food being expensive (65%) and not enough land for agriculture (55%).

**Figure 12: Main obstacles to accessing foods**

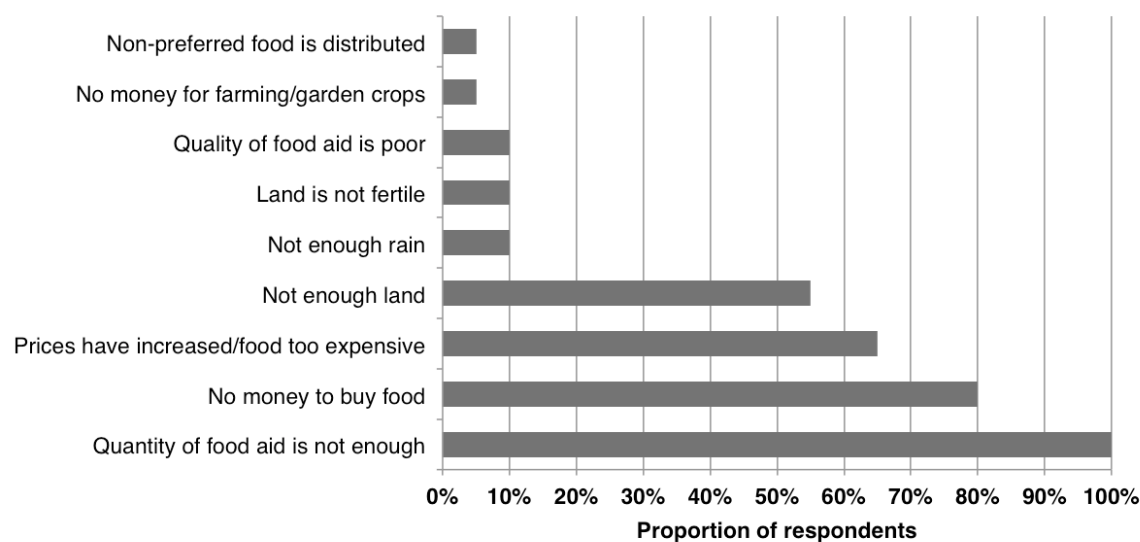


Figure 13 lists sources of staple foods comprising MLML diets. Of food varieties consumed, the majority (vegetables, meats, fish, eggs and fruits) can be sourced to MLML market/shops and household production. All households consuming fish acquire it from market/shops inside MLML. Of the other food groups mentioned above, on average, 23 percent originate from own production, while 92 percent are bought from market/shops inside MLML.

The sources of rice vary more so than other foods listed in the survey. Rice is included in the rations, thus all households reported receiving rice from this source. Another 65 percent of respondents list MLML market/shops as a source of rice. A third, and unique, source to rice is 'food aid from friends/relatives', mentioned by 45 percent of respondents. Considering the minimal opportunities for income generation, of interest to note, is the high proportion of households surveyed (89 percent) who named market/shops as a source of foods.

**Figure 13: Food sources, proportion of households reporting mentioned source**





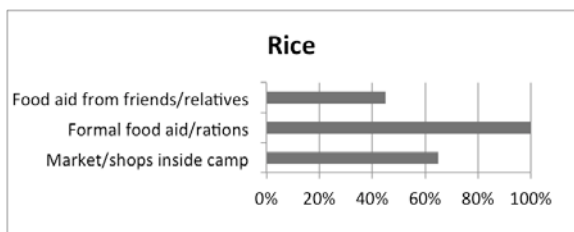
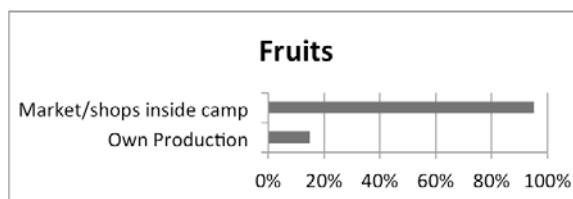
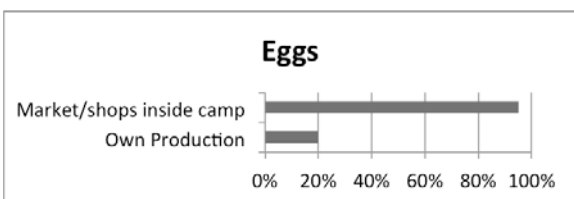
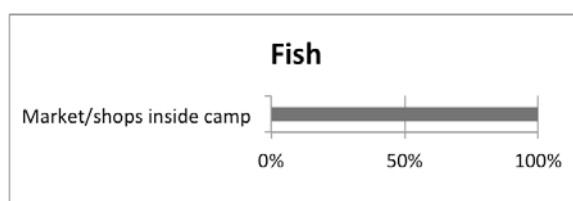
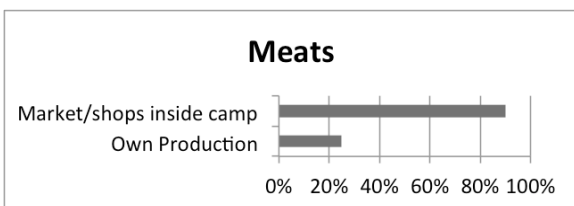


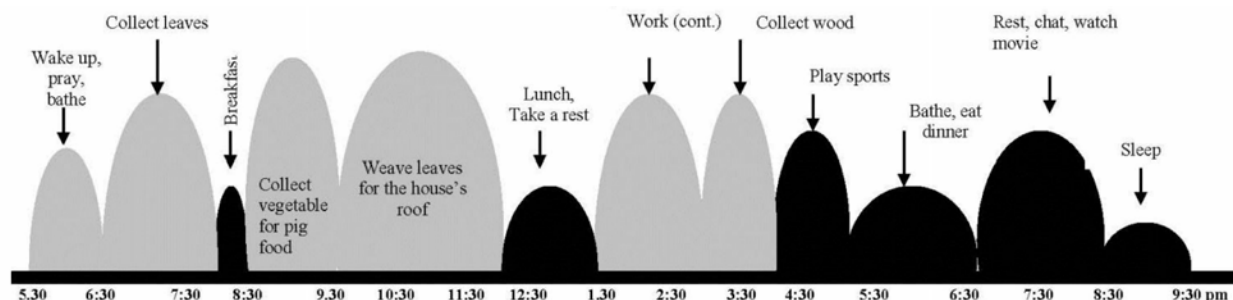
Figure 14: Household Profile 2- Lay Htoo



## Focus Group and In-Depth Interview Findings:

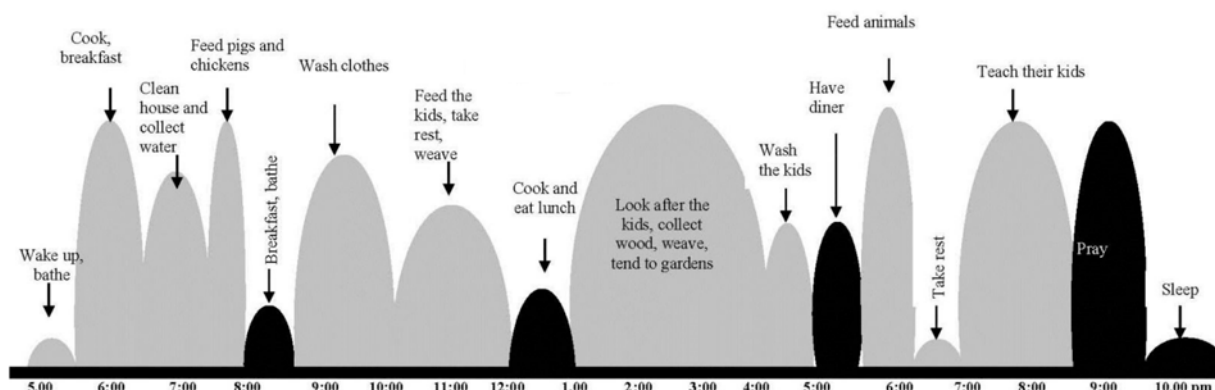
### Daily time use and level of effort

**Table 14: Daily time use and level of effort for men in MLML**



In MLML, the men get up at 5.30am, pray and wash. At 6.30am they go to the nearby forest outside the camp to collect Tong Ting leaves. They take breakfast at 8am and then collect vegetables for pig food. The rest of the morning is spent weaving Tong Ting leaves to repair the roof. At noon they take lunch and a short rest. They spend the afternoon continuing their work on repairing their roofs but some work as a paid volunteer for camp activities. At 3pm they collect wood and then usually play sports like football until they have wash up for dinner at 5pm. After dinner they boil water and then take rest of social time, including visiting friends, listening to music or watching TV. They go to bed at 8.30pm.

**Table 15: Daily time use and level of effort for women in MLML**



In MLML, the women wake up at 5am, wash and prepare breakfast. From 6.30-8am, they clean the house and feed the animals. They then take a bath and have breakfast at 8am. The women then wash the clothes, feed the children, weave and take rest before preparing and eating lunch at noon. In the afternoon, the women take care of the children, collect wood and vegetables, feed the animals, weave and garden. At 4pm they wash the children and have dinner together at 5pm. They then feed the animals and take some rest before helping the children with their homework until 8.30pm. They pray and go to sleep by 9.30pm.

## Seasonal calendar

**Table 16: Seasonal calendar in MLML**

Month	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Work inside camp	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦			♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦
Agriculture	♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦
Work outside camp	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦
Handicraft	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦
Animal raising	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦			♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦
Migration	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦
Income	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦
Poor health	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦
Food scarcity	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦				
Rainfall					♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦	
Natural disaster			♦	♦		♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦			
Household crisis	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦♦♦♦ ♦	♦	♦	♦	♦

### Seasonal trends

Work inside camp: Formal jobs (e.g. NGO stipend jobs) in the camp are very rare, but for those who do have such jobs the whole year is a busy time with the exception of April and May.

Agriculture: This refers primarily to vegetable growing. Vegetables are grown year-round, seasonality dictating yield. During the rainy season, many people grow vegetables in kitchen gardens. Some people have acquired land through NGO projects on the periphery of MLML allocated for growing vegetables,, these allotments are only active during rain season.

Work outside camp: August-December it is the peak season time for hiring workers to do agricultural day labor outside the camp. During the rest of the year, there is some hiring but not much.

Handicrafts: Handicrafts are done throughout the year. July-November is the peak period because people have higher income and there is a better market to sell the handicrafts in the camp.

Animal husbandry: In July-December, during the rainy season, there are many sources of food for animals such as pigs and poultry. April-May is too hot to raise animals, they get sick during this time.

Migration: During July-March, people migrate to Thai villages to do agricultural day labor.

Income: August-December is the peak period for income. There is a lot of agricultural day labor during this time, and people also earn income from selling forest products and doing handicrafts. It is even possible to save a little bit of money during these months, which can then be used in times of hardship.

Poor health: During July - February some of people in the camp, especially children, get the flu and dengue because of the rain, and mosquitoes this brings, and the cold.

Food scarcity: January to April is the time that the people face the most severe food scarcity. March-April is the peak of the hot season and growing is difficult – so less vegetables from kitchen gardens to supplement diet. During this time, there are few income earning opportunities and when their rations run out there is no money to buy additional food. August 2011 MLML was hit by flooding, no fresh foods from outside and people's gardens were destroyed.

Rainfall: It rains heavily during June-December

Natural disaster: Floods and landslides occur in July-September. Forest fires and man-made fires occur during March April.

Household crises: April is the time when household experience crisis the most, towards the end of the lean period. They have no work, lack of money and not enough food. This creates stress and tension among household members and neighbors.

## Food basket utilization

**Table 17: Ration use in the last month**

	Main use of ration item	Number of days that ration lasted	What did you do when this ration ran out?
<b>Rice</b>	Cooking	23 days	Borrow from someone they know well and return from new ration
<b>AsiaReMIX</b>	Make fried desserts	7 days	Borrow from someone they know well and return from new ration
<b>Cooking oil</b>	Make food and desserts	21 days	Buy if necessary
<b>Yellow beans</b>	Make food	30 days	Wait for new ration
<b>Salt</b>	Cooking	14 days	Borrow from someone they know well and return from new ration
<b>Fish paste</b>	Cooking	21 days	--
<b>Charcoal</b>	Cooking	14 days	Use wood instead

The female FGD participants stated that they never consider selling food rations, laughing at the suggestion, since they do not even have enough to feed their household and have to borrow food when things run out. There are occasions where they trade food rations for fresh food such as fish and vegetables, but this practice has lessened since recent cuts to food rations. The participants also stated that when food does run out this introduces stress and worry into the household, and there are a lot of arguments among the household members.



Figure 15: Household Profile 3- Aung Naing



## V. Discussion and Conclusion

The objectives of this study are to explore aspects of household food security inside MLML and to better understand how cuts to food rations influence access to fresh foods. Additionally, the study aims to understand how the rules regulating refugees residing in Thailand influence the individuals' freedom of access to food entitlements, and consequently if the conditions created under these policies contribute to a *failure of food entitlement*.

Study findings revealed that the food security of households inside MLML, overall, is adequate. No households reported experiencing severe hunger, and only 5 percent are experiencing moderate hunger (according to the Household Hunger Scale). While all surveyed households are using some types of coping behavior, virtually no households are in a situation where they must use coping behaviors regularly. FCS data suggests no households suffer from a poor diet. This is during a time of year when 95% of households report inadequate food; one would expect that outside the current perceived lean period for the quality of diet to maintain or, perhaps, increase.

Findings indicate that overall food availability inside MLML markets is adequate, but foods for purchase may be limited during the lean season. Findings further show food access issues that relate to food instability, such as ration cuts, late distribution of rations and rising food prices.

While the findings of the study suggests that overall food security inside MLML is adequate, food rations contribute significantly to maintaining the level of food security found in the study. This is based primarily on findings exposing income generating opportunities to be extremely limited but overall food security to be adequate. Households, despite extremely limited income generation are able to manage and sustain adequate diets. With food assistance, households do not have to spend more of their disposable income on food, allowing them to meet household food needs. However, it is likely that overtime ration cuts will impact household food security, both directly and indirectly, as individuals alter eating behaviors to cope.

Household access (ability to purchase, grow, borrow, be given, barter, etc.) affects the consumption of fresh food items since they are not included in the ration. Further, it appears that they are not generally perceived to be affordable within the limited economic means of MLML households. The recent cuts to all ration foods further jeopardizes households' access to fresh foods since households reported less trading of rations after the cuts and that this activity was done to diversify the diet--it generated cash to purchase fresh foods or it directly provided meat (or other animal foods) and fresh vegetables. How households are coping and will continue to compensate for the smaller quantities of all rations provided is not known, however, one could assume that additional food purchases for staple foods, such as, rice and oil may displace past purchases for fresh foods unless household incomes increase. The CSI data indicates that households regularly change their food intake when rations run low by limiting portion sizes and adults skipping meals. With household income earning stagnant, cuts to food rations may force individuals to, with more frequency,

decrease food intake, making it difficult to maintain the nutritional adequacy of their diets.

The findings from this study expose the existence of obstacles faced by MLML households in accessing food entitlements. These barriers to freedom to access food entitlements are rooted in the rules that control refugees residing in Thailand. MLML residents' capacity sets include agricultural skill and knowledge, which if allowed to be utilized outside MLML, could promote food access to those inside the camp. Instead Thai authorities interfere with utilization of these assets. The rules regulating refugees in Thailand restrict individual freedoms to access food entitlement. Restrictive encampment inside MLM has resulted in a population starved for resources, making internal access to food entitlements through production or exchange limited, and consequently has resulted in a majority being forced to seek opportunities for access to food entitlements ('illegally') outside the camp. Labor outside MLML is highly vulnerable to exploitation, and work is performed at a poor rate of labor exchange, given that refugees are treated as 'illegal migrants' once they are outside MLML the individual is in no position to demand the minimum wage in Thailand.

Study findings clearly point to a heavy dependence on non-entitlement transfers (rations) for maintaining adequate household diets. This reliance on *non-entitlement transfers*, due to restrictive confinement, indicates a situational *failure of food entitlement* amongst the MLML population. In other words, under the current rules regulating refugees in Thailand, and in the absence of food rations, individuals living in MLM would be unable to fend off nutritional deprivation. In MLML, food entitlement failure can be sourced to either *direct entitlement failure* or a *trade entitlement failure*. Consider that, due to restrictive confinement a skilled laborer from MLML loses the ability to utilize his labor power, in farming outside the camp (endowment loss) which will prevent him from gaining the income he needs to exchange for necessary foods; or alternatively he may decide to illegally leave MLML, risking arrest or deportation, in pursuit of income generating opportunities, but because of his vulnerable status as an 'illegal' is exploited by the farm-owner for undervalued labor (exchange failure); or he may decide to grow vegetables in MLML for sale, but due to policy confining him to his homestead, not allowing for expansion outside MLML, his yield is too inadequate (production failure) to be exchanged for the minimum amount of supplementary foods he needs. These realities inside MLML demonstrate how the restrictive encampment policy interfere with individual freedoms to make decisions of how to utilize ones' capability set promote a situational *failure of food entitlement*.

This study demonstrates the importance MLML households place on independent acquisition, despite the associated risks, of pursuing access to food entitlements. While the findings from this study confirm that, though heavily dependent on provided rations, the majority of MLM households maintain an adequate food basket. The study also acknowledges the need for an alternative strategy towards refugees in Thailand. A policy veering away from restrictive confinement, based in allowing individual freedom to access ones' capacity set, must be ratified before individuals can, with full realization, utilize resources to access food entitlements and independently be food secure.



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