



# Farmers' adaptive strategies in agricultural commercialization and food and nutrition security in Myanmar

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## Background

Food systems in South-East Asia undergo rapid transitions. Existing supply chains are adapting to economic, environmental, market, governance and dietary changes. This study aimed to capture farm household sense-making processes relating to food system transitions in Myanmar, taking into account the implications for food and nutrition security at the farm household level as well as farm business decision-making. The main research question: *What emergent opportunities can be identified linking agricultural commercialisation processes to food and nutrition security among smallholder farming households in Myanmar?*

## Theoretical orientation: 3 pillars

1) Salutogenesis to explore what contributes to health and well-being; 2) Positive deviance to explore how successful farmers realise sustainable livelihoods in an environment where others fail; 3) Social innovation theory to explore collective dynamics and interactions among actors, policies and interventions for innovative actions.



## Methods

A desk review to describe major developments in Myanmar's agricultural transition, and to identify the zone for fieldwork: the Dry Zone in central Myanmar. In-depth interviews were done using a life course perspective with farming households (n=14). Purposive sampling was used to select smallholder households (<5 acres) in four villages. Transcripts were analysed using open coding.

## Results

- ❑ 'Silo mentality' investments in agriculture happen apart from those in food or nutrition; farmers prefer organic food to eat, while production meant for the market can have much more fertilizer/ pesticide treatment
- ❑ Knowledge gap when it comes to research on in decision making patterns for food choices, intra-household food allocation and cultural determinants of malnutrition.
- ❑ Individuals developed adaptive strategies to provide a stable income to their family, increase their yields, deal with unexpected events and guarantee a healthy diet to their family members.

## Acknowledgements

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## Life course interviews

- ❑ Farmers dealing with commercialisation intentionally diversified their livelihood strategies in order to enhance their opportunities to deal with stressors and become more resilient;
- ❑ Strong importance was attributed to the leveraging role of the family relating to land ownership.

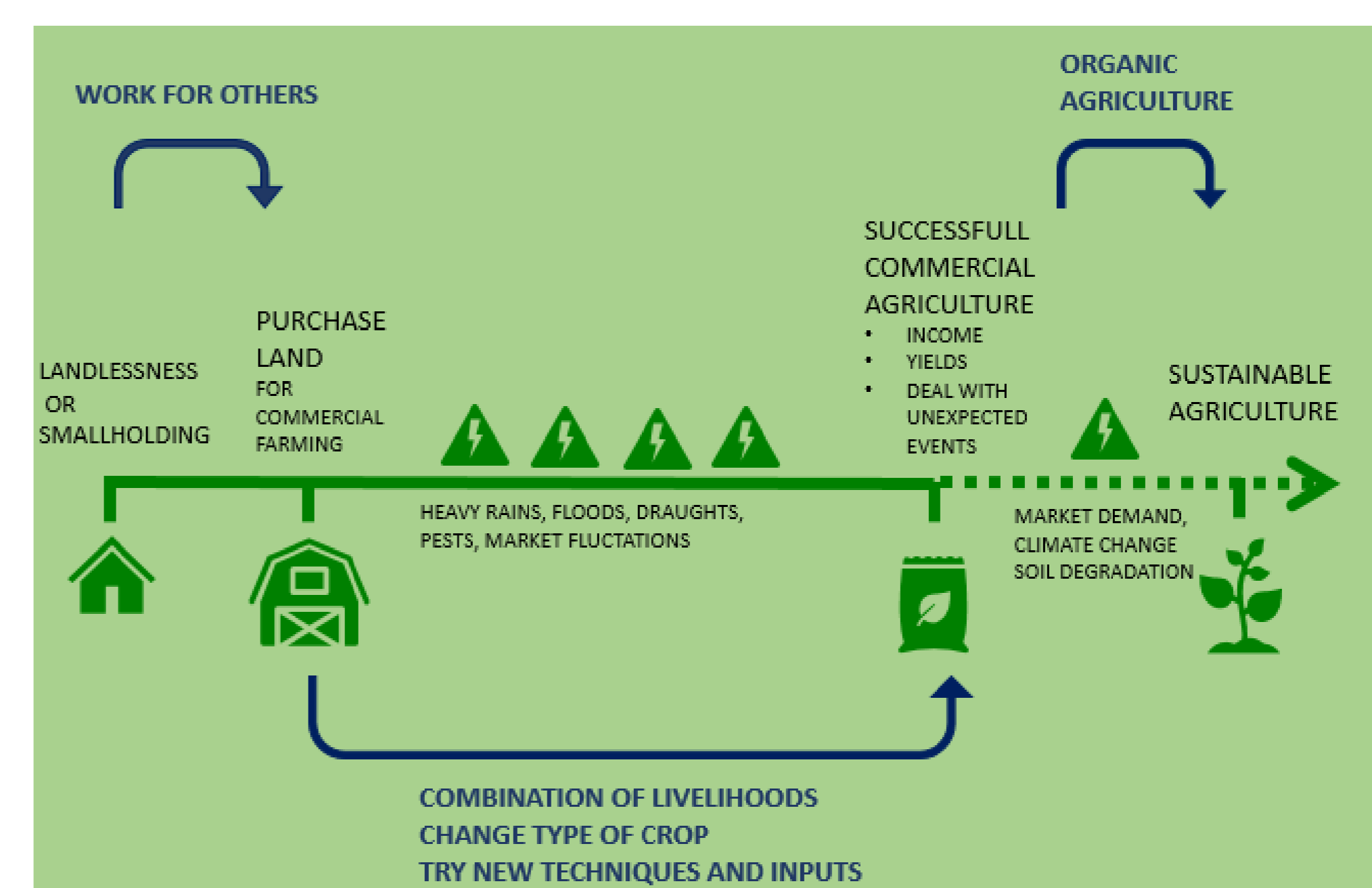


Figure 1. Farmers' adaptive strategies in response of agricultural related events

- ❑ Food and nutrition security goals at household level related to affordability of certain kinds of food (meat, fish) and access to organic food (usually phrased as 'food free from contaminants').
- ❑ Healthy diet considerations did not seem to guide respondents' food production or consumption choices.

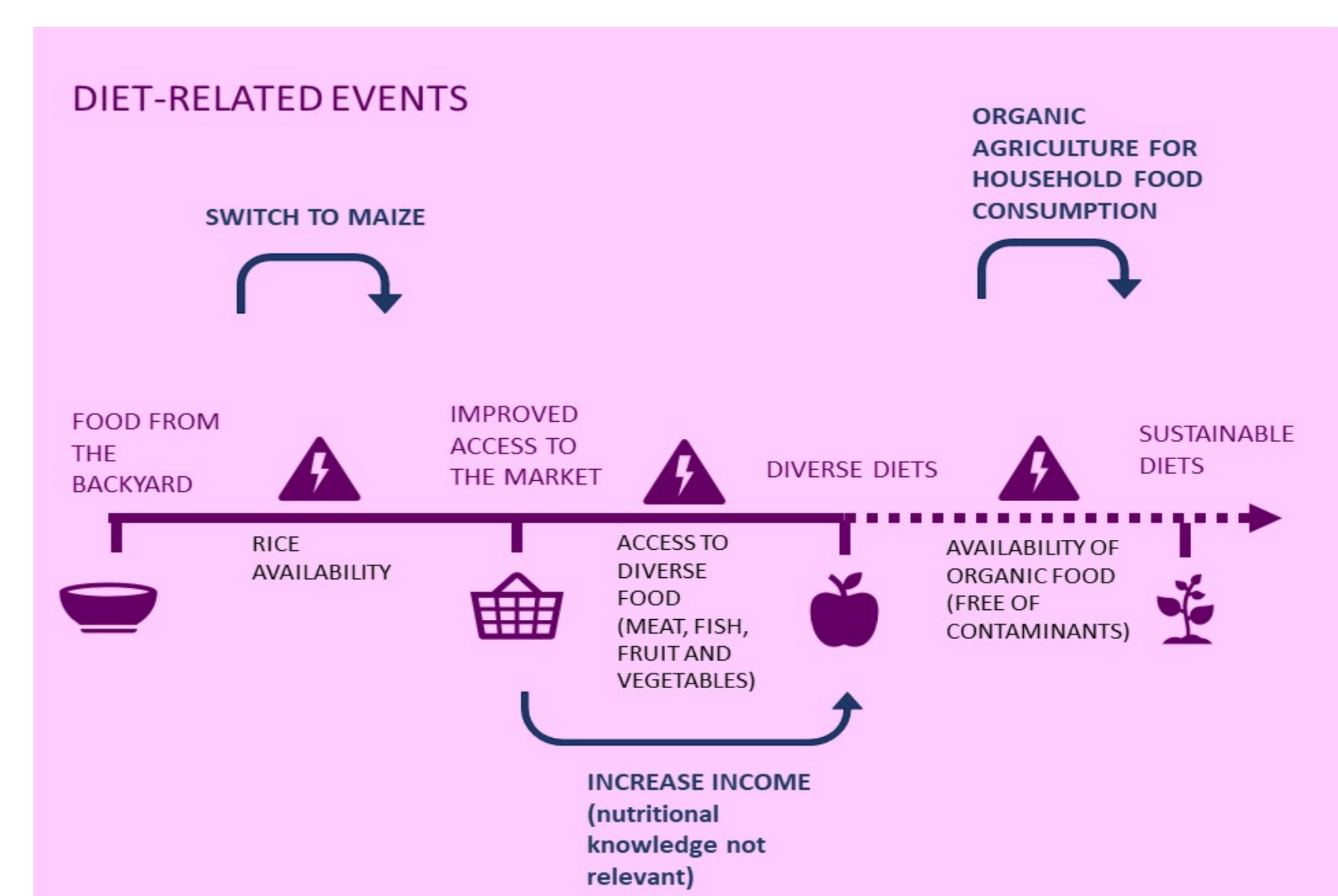


Figure 2. Farmers' adaptive strategies in response of diet related events

## Conclusions

- ❑ In order to monitor the impact of the food system transition in Myanmar, there is a need for a nationwide system of data collection to inform farmers, policy makers, development actors and the private sector.
- ❑ Diversification of livelihood strategies and socio-emotional support throughout the life course play a major role in successful farming and food and nutrition security outcomes.
- ❑ Livelihood diversification as a key strategy challenges the general tendency towards specialisation in production used by agri-businesses, and also the mono-directional livelihood solutions used by NGOs.
- ❑ The salutogenic approach holds potential to capture adaptive strategies for health and well-being, thus contributing to deeper understanding of farm household resilience.

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