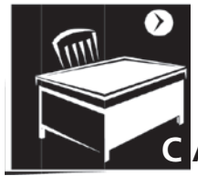

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

ANTHROPOLOGY WORKS

A monthly column from the AAA Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA)

Food Security from a Practitioner Perspective

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Food security is a very broad domain that encompasses all aspects of production, access and utilization of food, as well as its equitable distribution within communities and households. In short, it refers to food's relationship to people's survival and well-being. The elements of this relationship vary tremendously across different human groups. Anthropologists have the training and experience to link food issues to the specific cultural, traditional, social and economic requirements and constraints of particular populations. Robert Hahn (Centers for Disease Control) notes that from the public health perspective, food security also includes issues of food contamination. Anthropologists are also involved with food security in light of conflict and environmental disasters, to provide culturally sensitive humanitarian assistance and food relief. Typically, anthropologists work on food security in direct collaboration with a range of other scientists including biologists, physicians, agronomists, economists, policymakers and many others.

Where Anthropologists Tackle Food Insecurity

The history of anthropological work on food systems goes back to Sol Katz (U Pennsylvania) and Rebecca Huss-Ashmore's (U Pennsylvania) task force on African famine in 1985. Other early innovators include William Torry (West Virginia U) in the field of hazard research, with his work on a project that evolved into the Famine Early Warning System. Frank Johnston (U Pennsylvania) was an early research specialist in the growth and development of children in Latin America in relation to nutritional status and health.

Today, anthropologists are employed by food and agriculture policy organizations such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). USAID has long employed anthropologists to design, implement and evaluate food security interventions and develop policy. Anthropologist Tom Marchione (George Mason U) was an evaluation officer and nutrition advisor to the Bureau for Humanitarian Responses at USAID where he evaluated assistance programs and advised on aspects of nutrition and food security. For over 18 years he was intimately connected with shaping food security and nutrition policies and programs. Shirley Fiske (U Maryland) spent 16 years with the executive branch of NOAA managing research and outreach affecting ocean and coastal resources and communities, including seafood safety issues. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has published the work of anthropologists Ellen Messer and Marc Cohen, whose essays focus on illuminating and breaking the links between hunger and conflict.

In the field of food and humanitarian assistance, anthropologists have worked for the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), International Relief and Development (IRD) and other international relief organizations. Adam Koons is the Director of Relief and Humanitarian Assistance at IRD, where he aims to ensure that victims of disasters and violence not only improve their food security but do so in locally appropriate ways. Angela Raven-Roberts is the director of the Displacement and Social Change Initiatives program at the Feinstein International Famine Center. She was formerly Senior Project Officer in the Policy Unit of UNICEF's Office of Emergency Programmes. Alex de Waal is a fellow of the Global Equity Initiative, working as a researcher, writer and activist on African issues.

Many practicing anthropologists are employed or consult as food, agriculture and nutrition program evaluators. Antoinette Brown has worked as both an external and internal evaluator of a variety of food security programs including women's agricultural programs, child health and nutrition programs and community-based nutrition interventions. LTG Associates, Inc was founded and is led by anthropologists Nathaniel Tashima and Cathleen Crain. It is the oldest and largest anthropology-based consulting firm in North America.

Several academic anthropologists researching food security issues are also active practitioners in this area. David Pelletier (Cornell U) has long been involved in the formulation and evaluation of nutrition policy, with a special interest in innovative approaches to policy analysis and development. Penny Van Esterik (York U) is a noted expert in the food and nutrition of Southeast Asia as well as a researcher at the forefront of breastfeeding promotion and other issues surrounding risk and infant feeding.

Our discipline is beginning to recognize the great contributions that anthropologists can make to research and policy discourse in food security. For example, Gretel Pelto (Cornell U) works in the areas of infant and young child feeding and household management of illness in infants and children. From 1992 to 1999 she was in charge of behavioral research in the Division of Child Health at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. She was awarded fellow status in the American Society for Nutrition in 2005 and was presented with the Malinowski Award at the 67th annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in 2007.

***Antoinette Brown** is a consulting program evaluator in North Carolina. She has worked at the interface of child health and economic development in Latin America, West Africa and the Commonwealth of Independent States.*

***Adam Koons**, of International Relief and Development, Inc, has been working on international food security and poverty reduction issues for 25 years for NGOs, UN agencies and the US government, primarily in developing countries of Africa and elsewhere.*

***Susan Squires**, of the Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology, is guest editor for this column. **Shirley Fiske** is contributing editor of Anthropology Works. She can be contacted at sjfiske@yahoo.com.*

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