Interviews of Food loss and waste experts – highlights

In total, six different expert interviews were conducted. Interviewees were Mr. Bruno Tran (Natural Resources Insitute), Ms. Carola Fabi (FAO), Mr. Charlie Moosmann (GIZ), Mr. Julian Parfitt (Anthesis Group), Ms. Kai Robertson (WRI) and Ms. Leigh Prezkop (WWF). The interviews focussed on developed methods on food loss and waste, and ways to do food loss measurements in the field.

Several tools and methodologies were developed on food loss and waste. However, the majority of the projects on food loss is for staple crops instead of perishables. Differences between staple crops and perishables is that the storage time of perishables is shorter, perishables are less frequently monitored (since staples are more important for food security or higher value for country) and characteristics on how losses occur are different between staple crops and perishables. This influences the measurement methods or sample designs used. Methodologies developed are for project management and not for measuring. For example, the Food Loss and Waste (FLW) standard can be used for the process of writing up case studies.

Furthermore, tools are developed for measuring food loss and waste. For example, APHLIS is a tool available for grains to calculate and estimate losses. It is an approach for statistics and a methodology for farm surveys, so it is based on interviews. Also, a manual is available on their website for when you want to do objective measurement on food loss, like the use of a visual scale. The tools used in the surveys are a mixture of survey and objective measurement. Besides APHLIS, also other tools make use of interviews, like CISC. CISC is developing a metric on food waste in the US. They are doing this by combining questions asked in the field, the measurements of a research institute and implementing the FLW standard. Their goal is to develop an uniform subsistence way for farmers to measure food loss.

Interviews are useful but rather inaccurate and can be biased, since farmers commonly underreport the problem. The first best way to measure food loss is sample surveys, but surveys alone are not enough since farmers tend not to know the amount of losses. It is important to integrate the survey in national statistics to increase its representativeness. However, only measuring the portion of loss is also not interesting. However, when combining this with causes of this loss and the economic value, it becomes more interesting.

Data is mainly collected in case studies, but the representativeness of case studies is low. It is difficult to get comparable data and to generalize data due to different time frames, growing cycles, climatic conditions, etc between the case studies.

APHLIS also brings together a database for crop losses. The FLW standard is also working on developing a database to put all different studies on FLW together. A standard is useful to make data more easily comparable when using it concisely. Almost all experts agree that it is useful to have a template that works all over the world to put data in a database, which can be improved when more data arrives. The problem with this is that not all farmers want to measure

food loss and they do not want the data to be available for public. However, a database or tool to measure FLW is benefiting farmers to raise awareness and give insight, but also policy makers and retailers can benefit.

Conclusion

Most tools and methods make use of interviews and only a few use objective measurements. Data is mainly collected within case studies, but the problem is that these studies are not comparable due to production cycles, climatic conditions, etc. Although farmers often don't know how high their loss is, all used methods make use of interviews. This is the cheapest way to gather information on losses and the causes. Furthermore, case studies where they made use of objective measurements are incidental. Most tools do not suggest objective measurements that can be used.

There is a need of enough data that is reliable and comparable. Most important is to make sure the data is widely applicable and comparable. It is interesting to combine a tool with the FLW standard or other methodology like APHLIs, so that uniformity is created and data is comparable. Currently it is difficult to compare data of different case studies due to different methodologies used and the dependency of case studies on the case-specific circumstances.