

Gendered Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the DRC

Background

My field practicum placement was with the Redeeming Love Ministries organization in the village of Luhwindja in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The host institution was created by Julie Mapatano in 2012 in response to the continued strife in her home country of the DRC. Redeeming Love has many projects that they oversee, including supporting orphans of the Congolese war by finding them homes with widows and families in the community and providing them with a monthly food stipend, paying school tuition and providing supplies, monthly medical exams, and clothes. In addition to this, they also run a community garden that the village can use as a source of extra food and for instruction on farming techniques, have a relatively new micro-finance program with the families involving rearing pigs, and occasionally build homes for poorer members of the local community that are destroyed in the rainy season.

Objectives

The final report of my field practicum was an evaluation of the current state of the programs that they are running and their plans for the future. Although RLM pays a monthly cost per child for educational tuition, medical care, and food, a thorough analysis of the quality of education, medical care, and nutrition received by the RLM sponsored children is needed. I did a program evaluation and will be provided this analysis to the organization. I also evaluated and monitored the microfinance component of the organization, as well as the efficacy of the community garden.

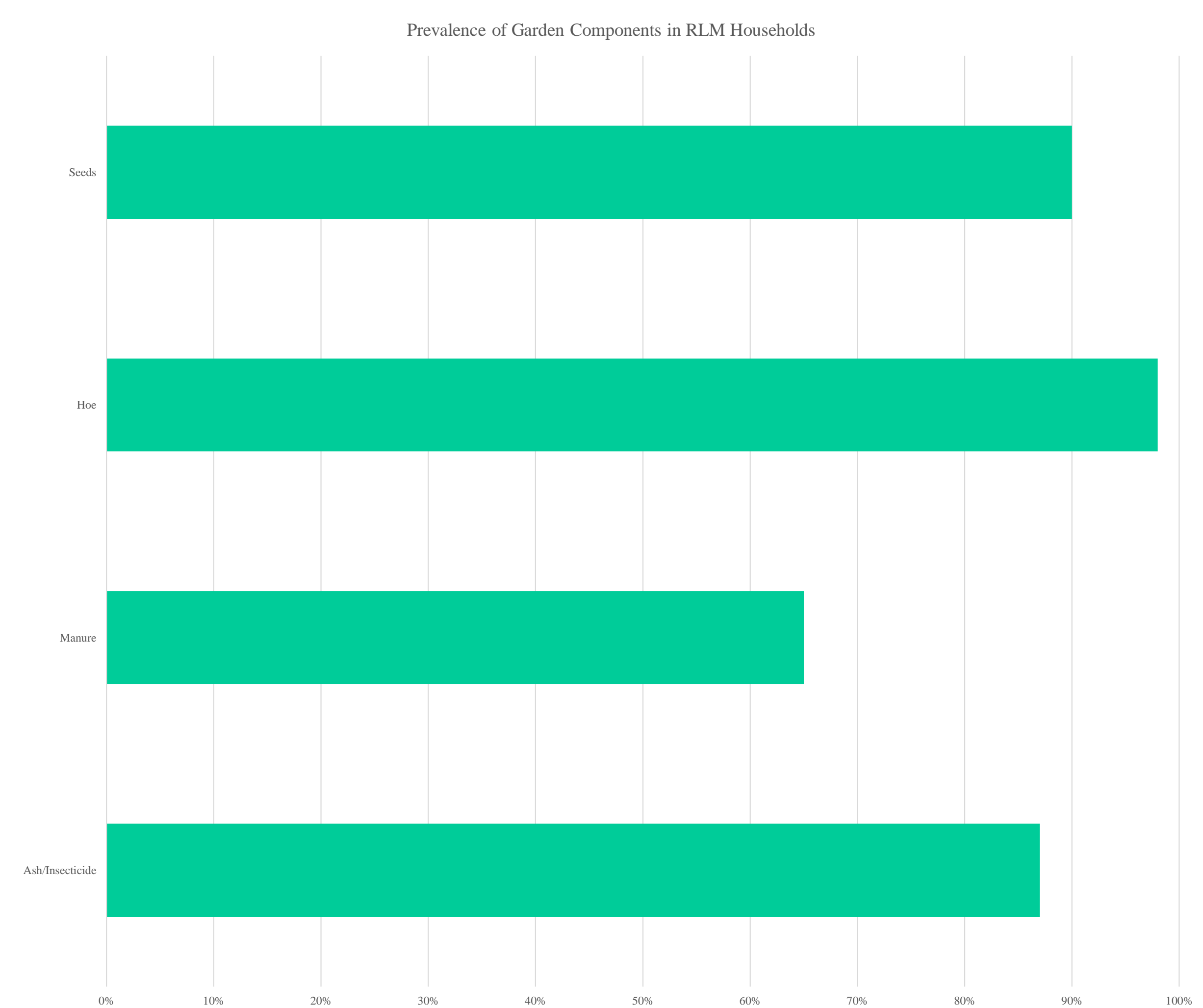
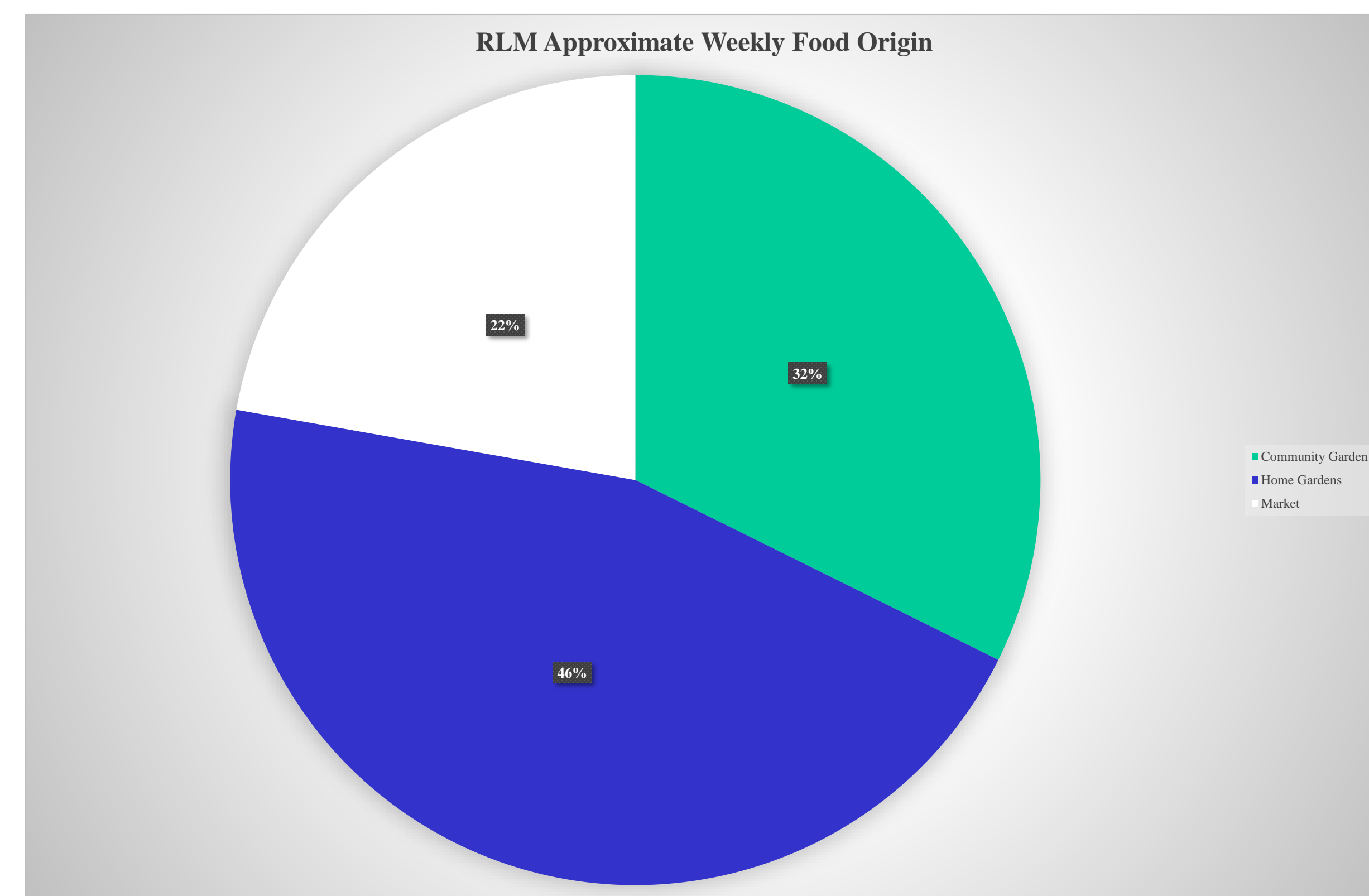


Methods

There are over 100 children spread between roughly 80 households in the RLM focus population. In order to make sure that the program is working as intended, I looked at the quality of the incentives and their efficacy on helping the target population: the children of widowed families.

I conducted interviews and observed the community garden, medical care facilities, schools, and the pig microfinance process from an outside perspective to determine how well it is working and what some of the areas for improvement may be.

The main part of my practicum was the gathering of information from the surveys that I did with each household and in the community garden.



Analysis/Results

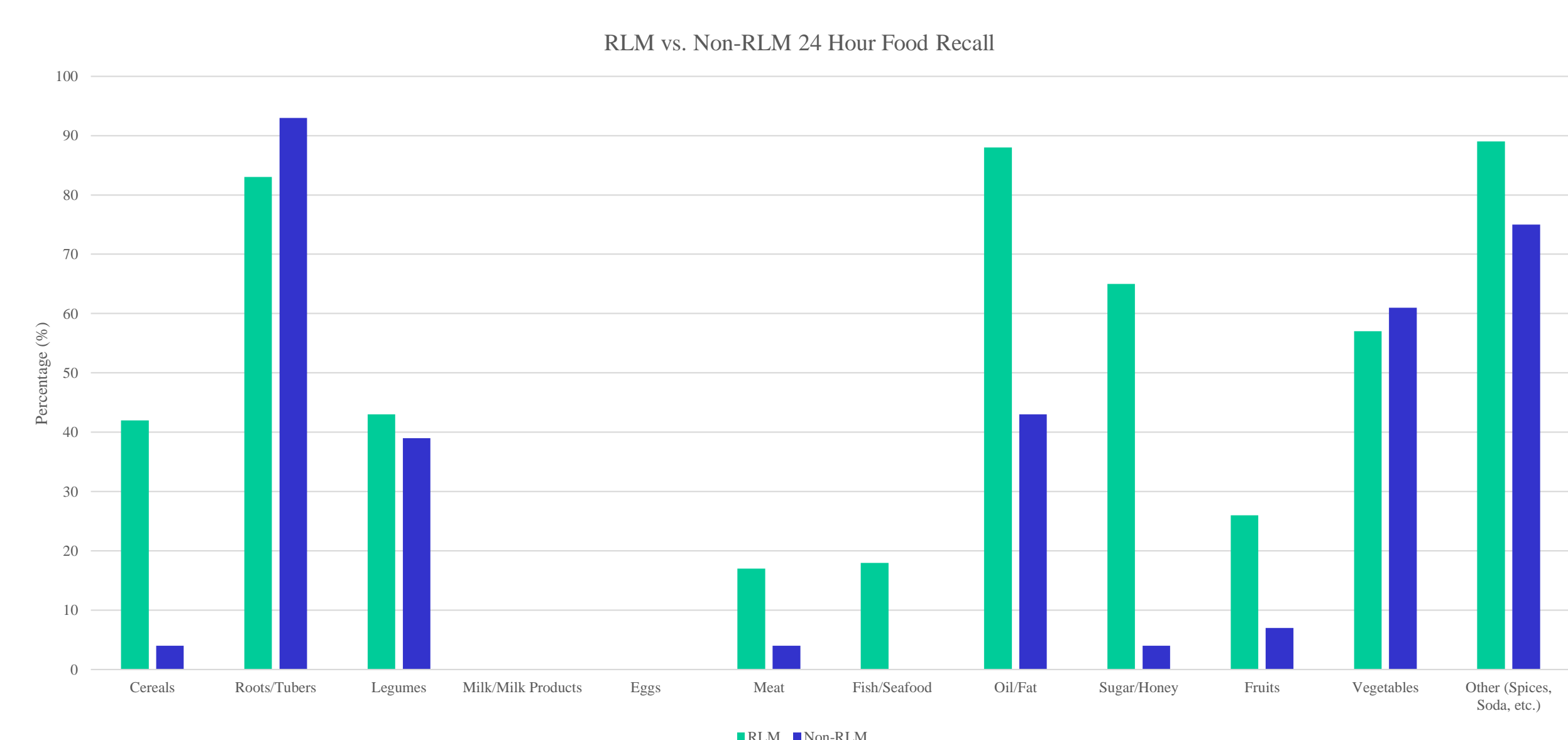
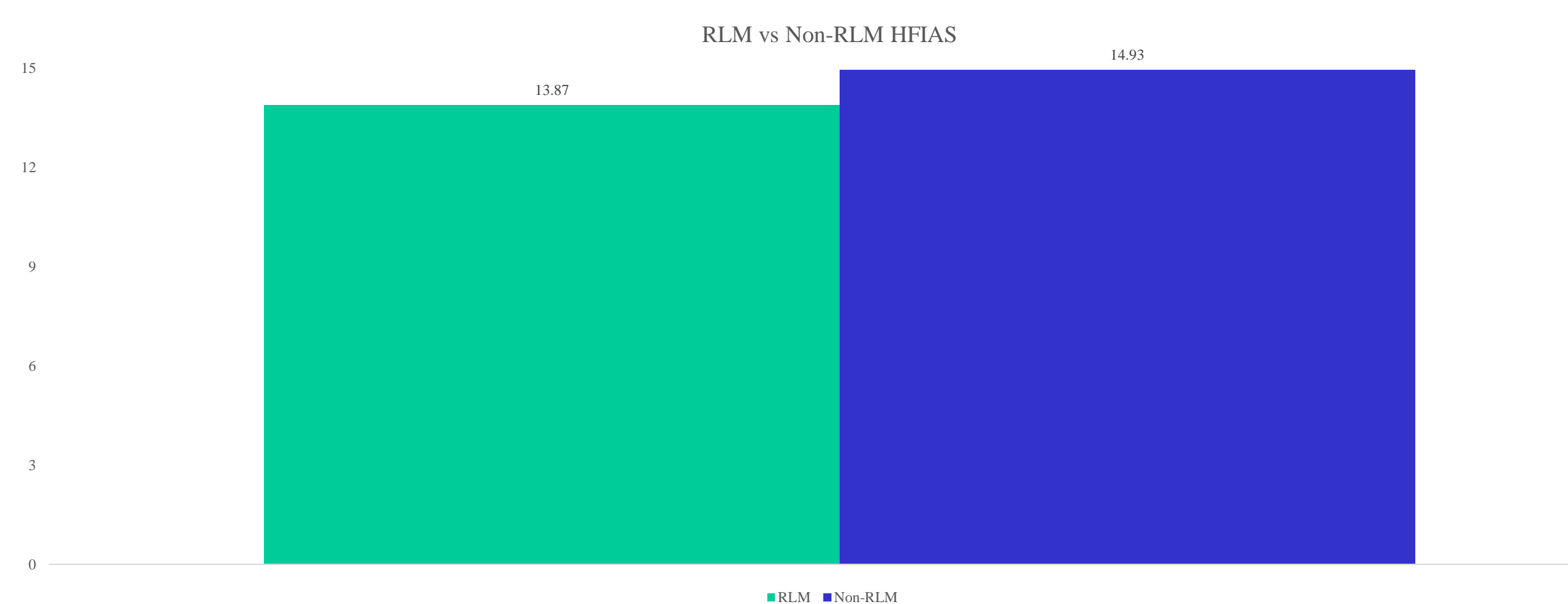
The general results of the field practicum showed that families in RLM were not necessarily eating more quantities of food, but they were eating more categories of food. There was also an almost doubling of visits from other households, pointing to increased social bonds in the village for the RLM women.

There were also perceptions by the families that after RLM it was markedly easier to feed their families and provide for the educational costs of their children. Children not provided for by RLM had a much harder time paying school fees and as a result went to school much less often.

The community garden was important for the education the families received about growing food and farming, as the average amount known about gardening techniques increased after being involved in the program. It was also an important source of extra food for many of the families. The majority of the women had all the things they needed for a successful garden with the exception of a stable source of manure.

The pig microfinance program was recently ravaged by disease and as a result there have been little if any positive ramifications of the program.

Education was generally shown, through interviews with secondary school children, to help the children meet the goals they have for themselves.



Conclusions

The conclusions that I can draw from my practicum evaluation are that the RLM food distribution is useful for increasing the broad categories of food that the families eat. While it may not be making a drastic impact on nutritional quantity, it is making a difference in nutritional quality.

The community garden was extremely useful for communicating nutritional information and teaching the women gardening techniques. It was also useful for disseminating seeds and manure for home gardens, and acted as a supplement to the food intake of many of the families. I would recommend expanding the program to account for more growth.

The pig microfinance project did not make as large of an impact as a similar program could be making. I would recommend the program focus on one or two local pig farmers who can grow pigs and give manure to the program for the gardens of the women. Perhaps goats or chickens are a better substitute for a separate but similar program.

Acknowledgments

Julie Mapatano

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