EATING IN AND FOOD WASTE IN BANGALORE

INTERVIEW WITH MARLYNE SAHAKIAN
Project co-coordinator and lead researcher

1. **The film suggests that food waste is less in Bangalore than in Western cities, is this the case?**

Generally, food waste is said to occur mostly upstream from consumers in developing countries and emerging economies. Much of the wastage happens in production, storage and transportation, with less waste occurring downstream from consumers, so at the level of households. We wanted to deflect attention away from the idea that individuals are solely responsible for food waste in the home. What we show in this film is that wastage has to do with many factors, like how often you buy produce, how you manage your "stock", but also notions around what makes for a tasty meal.

2. **You compare the inside of two refrigerators, Geneva and Bangalore. Can you explain those images further?**

One great output from this project was that looking into people's refrigerators in Bangalore made us reflect back on how we are managing food waste back home, so for me, in Geneva, Switzerland. My fridge appears in this film and it's packed with stuff. I may have forgotten all about the eggplant at the back of the fridge and I would absolutely hate to waste any food, probably most people feel the same way, but that eggplant may end up not being eaten. I also don't buy produce on a daily basis, like many people in Europe I integrate shopping into my busy week schedule. I also don't have a person dedicated to food management in my home – as is the case in Bangalore and Metro Manila with the employment of domestic helpers. As you heard in this film, the (mostly women) who help prepare food around the home are really good managers of the household food stock. It's almost a full time job! Time is a precious resource and managing time is an issue, in relation to food waste.

3. **Domestic helpers can play a role in reducing food waste, but what else plays a role?**

We see a woman engaged as a cook telling us about how she uses peelings to make a type of vegetable dish, she learned this through a television show. These kinds of demonstrations can be useful, to get people to use foods that would otherwise go to waste. The notion of a tasty meal is also very much tied to notions of freshness in Bangalore: people will not keep produce lying around for days on end in the back of a refrigerator. Fresh produce is bought daily, cooked and eaten daily. You will often find a pot of prepared food in a Bangalore refrigerator, which would be consumed the next day. But in Bangalore, people can access fresh produce at all times of day and night, it's available "right outside the gate" as one woman put it in this interview, or even delivered to your doorstep. Food provisioning and availability therefore also plays a role in how waste is managed.

4. You mention patterns of consumption, did you also measure food consumption and waste?

We attempted to measure food flows, considering the home as part of a Material Flow Analysis – a tool drawn from industrial ecology approaches. In Metro Manila, we asked about thirty household members to consider what they had eaten in the past week. This is what's called a memory recall method, used for example in national surveys. We were able to get at quantities and weights, but these estimates are only proxies for actual measurements. In Bangalore, we did engage with several households to actually measure the food going in and out of the home. It's a resource intensive process and also relies on households who are willing to go along. Most importantly, in both cases, we found that it was important to keep a reflexive stance between the qualitative and quantitative research: you can get measurements, but what do they mean and how do they come about? You can describe practices, but are they significant when it comes to environmental impact?

Additional resources:
The following publication, from this research project, could be useful for further reading on this topic:

Leray, L., M. Sahakian and S. Erkman (In press). "Understanding household food metabolism: relating micro-level material flow analysis to consumption practices." Journal of Cleaner Production.