

Professors assess food security in winning paper

July 29, 2016 11:15 AM Barri Bronston

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Together, Tulane University professors Nathan [Morrow](#) and Nancy [Mock](#), both affiliated with the [School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#), have more than a half century of experience evaluating and monitoring food security, humanitarian response and emergent resilience strategies. They have traveled around the world to develop and assess ways that food security and nutrition data is collected, especially in areas affected by war or disaster.

An exciting new initiative is mVAM – mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping – a project of the World Food Programme, which uses mobile technologies to collect food security information remotely with the aim of ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to sufficient, affordable and nutritious food.

Earlier this summer, their work was recognized with a “Best Paper” award at the Humanitarian Technology 2016 Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their award-winning research grew out of a longstanding relationship between Tulane and the United Nations World Food Programme in Rome, where Morrow and Mock have taken Tulane students to study food security and humanitarian action for the past 10 years.

“Information is at a premium at the early stages of an emergency, especially from hard-to-reach areas,” Mock said. “This specific research looks at ways technology can support humanitarian action with the most vulnerable people in some of the most complex emergencies around the world.”

During the Ebola crisis in Africa, for example, mVam set up an SMS (short message service) survey in a matter of weeks, giving field managers vital information about food security conditions, despite widespread quarantines and restrictions on the movement of humanitarian staff.

Despite the technology’s success, further research is needed to better understand the dynamics of mobile data collection. Still, researchers conclude, mVam is timelier, less expensive and often more reliable than other modes of communication. Continuous monitoring by cell phone also enables policy and program managers to detect changes in food security dynamics in time to launch needed interventions to build resilience among vulnerable populations.

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Nancy Mock