

Somali Democratic Republic  
**Ministry of Agriculture**

Directorate of Planning and Statistics / Food Security Project

Changes in Urban Maize  
Consumption Patterns

By  
Yassin & Furrhana Wehelie

Working Paper No. 2  
February 1987

**Working Paper Series**

DIRECTORATE OF PLANNING & STATISTICS (MOA)

Working Paper

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Abukar Osman Abikar  
Director  
Directorate of Planning & Statistics  
Ministry of Agriculture

### Acknowledgements

The Directorate of Planning and Statistics is undertaking collaborative research in the food security area with the Department of Agricultural Economics at Michigan State University. We wish to acknowledge the financial and substantive support of the Ministry of Agriculture of Somalia and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Mogadishu in the food security research area. Researchers from the Africa Bureau and the Bureau of Science and Technology of USAID/Washington have made it possible for Michigan State University researchers to participate in this research, and to help conduct field research in Somalia.

Abukar Osman Abikar  
Director of Planning and Statistics Directorate,  
Ministry of Agriculture.

Michael T. Weber  
Director of Food Security in Africa  
Cooperative Agreement,  
Department of Agricultural Economics,  
Michigan State University.

TEAM MEMBERS

Food Security Research Project

1. Abukar Osman Adikar, Director of Planning & Statistics  
Directorate and Research Coordinator
2. Nur Hagi Dhere, Central Agricultural Research Station  
Research Associate
3. Mohamud Ibrahim Asser, Somali National University  
Research Associate
4. Hussein Iman, Director NES, AFMET Project  
Research Associate
5. Yassin Jeyte Wehelie, Michigan State University  
Senior Researcher
6. John M. Holtzman, Michigan State University  
Short term participation
7. Michael T. Weber, Michigan State University  
Short term participation
8. Kurt Reintsma and Ken Swanberg, USAID/Washington  
Food Security in Africa Project Managers
9. Ray Fox, USAID/Mogadishu Agricultural Economist

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for wheat products and rice in Somalia has increased over the years, particularly in Mogadishu and other urban areas. A significant proportion of the population is now shifting from consuming locally produced cereals such as maize and sorghum to imported pasta, rice, and wheat flour even though some pasta and rice are currently produced in country. The rapidly changing preferences and tastes of the urban consumer may be attributed to the following factors:

- 1) Locally produced cereals, i.e., maize and sorghum are currently available in the market to consumers generally in an unprocessed form. Processing of these cereals in order to prepare traditional dishes (i.e. Anjeero, Muufo, Soor), therefore involves more time and labor input by the urban consumer.
- 2) The opportunity cost of the time required by the urban consumer to make a trip to the neighborhood grain-mill has increased due to the following factors: a) Shortage of labor which derives from the fact that more families are now interested in education their children; consequently more children are at school resulting in labor drain in the urban household setting and b) the Cost of transportation to the mill has doubly increased for those urban families who hire maids to perform this chore.

- 3) Pasta, rice, and wheat bread are increasingly being preferred for taste and are thus becoming the "preferred urban dishes" in an increasing number of households.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The research and study of maize consumption patterns in urban households stemmed from the need to investigate and understand more fully changing consumer preferences and its' impact on the demand for maize. This research is a part of a larger study concerning Somali women and their Social and economic networks and urban households in Mogadishu.

The main objective of the consumption section of the study was to assess the changes in the quantity of maize consumed by urban households over the years, and to evaluate what that change, if any, would mean for the country's food security and food self-sufficiency. In this context, an increase in the consumption of imported cereals and cereal products implies reduced self-sufficiency in cereals for the country. Furthermore, an increasing shift in preference for pasta and rice by the urban consumer results in a decrease in the demand for locally produced cereals such as maize.

### 3. THE SURVEY

Data concerning the change in the quantity of maize consumed by urban households were collected through formal interviews with women in five districts of Mogadishu. The five districts of Hodan, Xamarweyne, Wadajir, Wardhigley and Yaqshiid were purposively selected in order to collect information across various economic strata and the social structure of the urban households. A random sample of seventy one households was selected, consisting of eight upper income, thirty-one middle income, and thirty-two poor households. The economic status of the households divided into "poor", "middle", and "upper" income was based on an observation of physical characteristics eg., structure of the building, furnishing, availability of electricity and running water, and the monthly income of the household. The monthly income was based on the earnings of the head of the household as well as other family members' income generating activities. The contributions made to the household by individual (immediate) family members living away from the household were also included in calculating the monthly income.

Data concerning the above were collected during the period, October 1986 to December 1986. Questions specifically concerning consumption of maize versus other foods are:

- 1) Whether the members of the household consumed maize,
- 2) The changing pattern of maize consumption over the years (increased, decreased, no change),
- 3) Reasons explaining the change in the quantity of maize consumed, and
- 4) If maize consumption changed, what the preferred substitutes comprised.

#### 4. MAIN RESULTS

Results of the survey illustrate the following features and patterns of consumption of urban households. Virtually all the households in Mogadishu consume maize on a daily basis, at least for breakfast in the form of Anjeero. Sixty-nine of the 71 households (or 97% of the total number of the households interviewed) thus consume maize. Seventy-six percent of the households indicated that their consumption of maize declined over the years. A small fraction (four percent) stated that their consumption of maize has increased while twenty percent showed no change in the quantity of maize consumed.

The survey illustrates that the consumption of maize over the years by urban households varied across different income groups. More specifically, the reduction in maize consumption by poorer households was not as high as the higher income households. Two of the three households whose maize consumption has "increased" and all of the fourteen households that reported

"no change" were from the poor income group. In contrast, all upper income households reduced their consumption of maize over the years. Indeed it is clear that imported wheat products and rice are more readily available to higher income households who poses more purchasing power.

Table 1.

Consuming Less Maize, More Pasta & Rice

Maize Consumption Changes	No. of Households	Percent
1. Yes, declined	54	76%
2. Yes, increased	3	4%
3. No Change	14	20%
Total	71	100%

The reason most often cited for the decline in maize consumption is the time and labor needed in processing. Sixty-five percent of the women reported the drudgery and time involved in processing maize as the main reason for the shift towards "ready-to-cook" pasta and rice.

Table 2.  
Rich Eat Less Maize

Maize Consumption Change	Household Income Level		
	Upper Income	Middle Income	Lower Income
1. Yes, declined	8	30	16
2. Yes, increased	-	1	2
3. No, change	-	-	14
Total	8	31	32

Ten percent of the households cited taste as the influential factor. A rather interesting feature reported by many households is that the younger generation prefer eating pasta and rice. Poor households indicated that they eat pasta and rice as often as money could buy. It has been empirically established in other parts of the world that consumption patterns change with level of income. As people and nations grow wealthier over time, their consumption of foods changes from consuming "inferior" grains (ie., millet and sorghum) to "superior grains" (i.e. wheat and

rice), and to consuming more meat, vegetables, and processed foods that require less time in preparation and cooking.

It is important to note that the value placed on time by urban women may in fact be changing as more women are getting involved in work outside the home as well as spending a great proportion of their time completing household chores. Considered in this light the time constraint placed on women no doubt indicates that they would shift to easily prepared foods, i.e. pasta and rice.

#### 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A policy implication of such a drastic shift from locally produced maize to mostly imported rice and pasta is the increased foreign exchange requirement to satisfy the increased demand. An increase in the food import bill exacerbates the balance of payment situation. It also implies using scarce foreign exchange for rice and pasta imports rather than spending it on much needed capital investment goods which contribute to the country's overall economic development. Moreover, increased consumption of rice and pasta reduce the potential demand for maize. Such a reduction in the demand for maize may result in a lowering of its price, and thus the farmers' incentive for further expanding maize production.

It is recommended, therefore, to closely monitor these changes in consumer tastes and consumption patterns and initiate ways of potentially reversing the present trend. Such steps would hopefully make domestic consumption patterns more in harmony with domestic production patterns.

Furthermore, ways need to be devised to make a fuller use of the existing public grain-mills that are currently idle or operating under capacity. Certainly, maize consumption could be increased significantly if it is processed and made available to consumers in a more readily easy-to-cook form.