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Press Release:

Title

Changing Consumption Patterns among Rural & Urban Households in Kenya

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Key messages

- Maize is still the dominant staple food consumed by over 80 percent of rural households in Kenya but declining in relative importance with rice, potato and plantain gaining prominence in the household food basket
- Sifted maize flour consumption on the rise among rural households while it is the most preferred flour among urban households for its taste, cooking quality and availability.
- Consumption of wheat, the second most important staple crop in the country, declining among rural households more so among the high income households.
- Prices for posho and sifted maize meal are not significantly different and the choice between the two is often based on other preference attributes such as health considerations, convenience and 'experience' with the product

The dominance of maize as the major staple food is on a downward trend with the rural households consuming straight-run posho declining to 78 percent in 2015 from 86 percent recorded in 2013. The average weekly consumption of Straight-run posho per household declined to 6.9 Kg in 2015 from 7.9 Kg in 2013. This decline is consistent with the fall in the national per capita maize consumption which was 83 Kg in 2009 and is currently estimated to be 55 – 78 Kg. Major consumption decline is observed among households in the High and Medium potential zones, traditionally known to be the main producers of maize; its flour a key feature in meals such as *ugali*.

Though increasing in prominence in the rural areas, Sifted maize flour is consumed by only 26 percent of the rural households, recording an 11 percentage point increase from that recorded in 2013. Wheat, the second most important staple food in Kenya shows mixed consumption patterns. Even though the proportion of households consuming wheat flour declined from 40 to 38 percent between 2013 and 2015, the quantities consumed per household per week remained relatively constant at 1.8 Kg. The decline in the proportion of households consuming wheat flour is mainly observed among high income households while the proportion of low and middle income households consuming wheat largely remaining constant between 2013 and 2015.

Food substitution is a common phenomenon among consumers and it is expected that other food staples will become important as maize loses ground. Our analysis reveals that Rice, Plantain and Potato are the alternative staple foods that continue to gain popularity among both rural and urban households. The proportion of households consuming these items increased from 54, 29 and 41 percent to 61, 34 and 44 percent respectively between 2013 and 2015. These increases are observed

across all income categories more so among high income households. This is not surprising as previous studies have found that food item availability and culture are among the major factors that determine choice and preference of dietary food items among Kenyan households (Ofwona, 2013). The analysis also finds price not to be a major consideration in the discrimination between posho and sifted maize meal. Even though price (affordability) links with the households' ability to acquire a desired food item from the market and is determined by household income level, this does not hold in this case because the prices are not different. Other factors such as convenience and 'prior experience' with the item comes in to play. For instance, urban households prefer sifted maize meal because it is readily available in nearby shops, cooks faster, and tastes better. This fits them well considering the busy urban lifestyle. Posho meal is mainly preferred for health reasons and its nutritional qualities.

Policy recommendations

- Given the notable rise in food diversification in both urban and rural areas, we recommend the formation or review of the transformative strategies to boost production and the general access to rice, potato and bananas to meet the seemingly rising demand by both county and the national government.
- This will serve to ease pressure on maize and contribute to food security.

For further assistance, more information or if you would like to conduct interviews with any of the authors, presenters or Tegemeo Institute staff, please contact: Judy Kimani, 0720 96 33 48, jkimani@tegemeo.org. www.tegemeo.org