



Fortnightly column
Village Dynamics Insights

Changing eating patterns in rural India

A study of the overall diet diversity in rural villages of India, their consumption of processed foods and eating out behavior has revealed a dramatic increase in the consumption of food prepared outside the home – either packaged foods or food prepared on the street or in restaurants. Nearly one third of respondents diets in the group consisted of these types of foods.

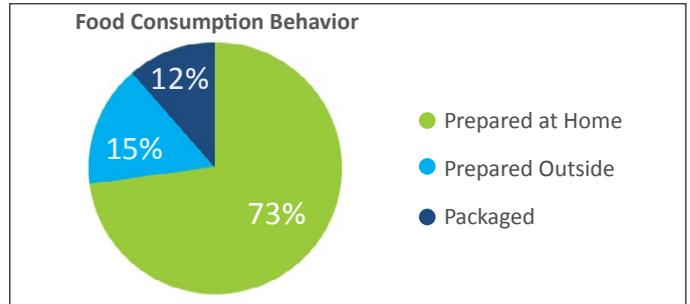
The study has nutritionists concerned as eating outside of the home often correlates with lower micronutrient intake – particularly in relation to Vitamin C, calcium and iron.

Eating out behavior results:

As the accompanying graphs reveal, 27% of respondents diets were made up of packaged food or food prepared outside of the home. When eating out behavior was mapped against farm size and caste, outside food consumption increases with farm size and higher caste; with the exception of the highest groups. Based on supporting focus group discussions, this latter finding may be explained by larger farms finding it easier and cheaper to source food from their own farms whilst the higher caste respondents felt that food prepared at home was healthier.

Other factors also contributed to the change in dietary habits. One of the interns participating in the research was Rebecca Chew Min Ting: “We found that generally there was an increase in eating out and packaged foods (in these villages) primarily due to increased incomes. There was increased accessibility as well to packaged and processed food due to improvements in infrastructure such as markets, roads, etc.”

The study was a joint collaboration between ICRISAT and the Tata-Cornell Agriculture and Nutrition Initiative (TCi). The TCi is a long-term research program focusing on linking agriculture, food systems, human nutrition, and poverty in India. Recently, a group of students and graduates from Cornell University, New York participated in a 7-week internship program on the ICRISAT campus which revolved around this study.



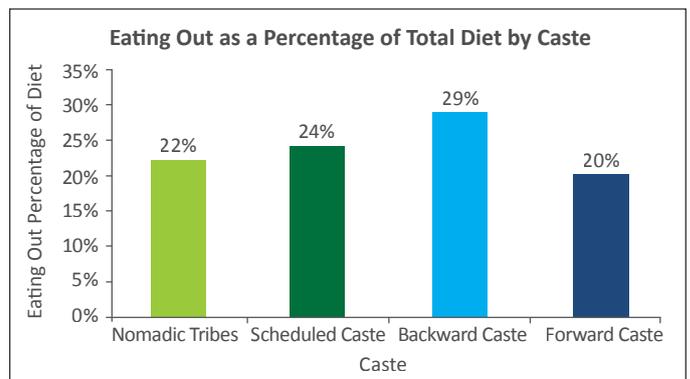
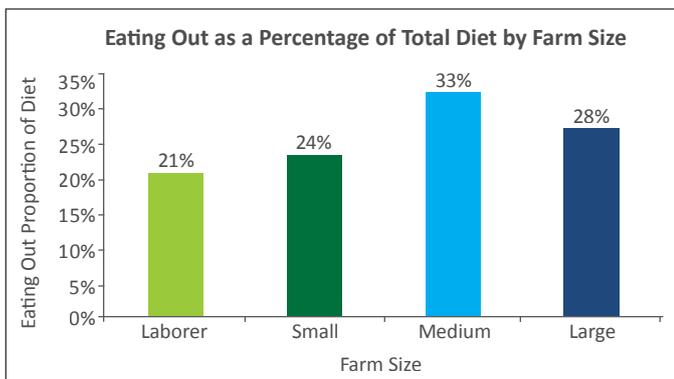
Food consumption as a percentage of total diet of respondents.

The interns studied household and individual dietary diversity with an additional focus on processed foods, eating out behavior and market-level food diversity. A similar pilot test was conducted in the summer of 2014.

The research was undertaken in four villages that are already a part of the ongoing Village Dynamics Studies in South Asia project. The villages of Kinkhed and Kanzara are located in Maharashtra state, while the villages of Dokur and Aurepalle are located in Telangana state. A total of 122 households from these four villages were included in the study.

Dr Prabhu Pingali, Director of TCi, believes the results of the study reveal a lot more needs to be done: “I think lack of awareness of nutrition is a fundamental problem at all levels. At the top policymaking level, its only now people are recognizing that nutrition is more than having enough food and having the right type of food is as important as the total quantity of food. And once you get down to the household level, I think there’s still a lot of learning to be done on what’s the most nutritious food and what is a balanced diet like and what are the health benefits of micronutrient-rich food.”

Reference: “Minimum Nutrition Dataset for Agriculture: Measuring Individual and Household Dietary Diversity with a Focus on Eating Out Behavior and Market Level Analysis.” Report submitted to TCi & ICRISAT on 28 July 2015 by Michaela Brown, Rebecca Chew, Dora Heng, Jonathan Lowry and Olivia Obodoagha. ■



Project:
Village Dynamics
in South Asia

This work is
now incorporated
as part of the



RESEARCH PROGRAM ON
Policies,
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