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GLOBALISATION AND NUTRITIONAL CHANGE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the change in the nature of food demand in India in the last twenty years. It identifies two distinct stages of diet transition associated with the period of economic growth. During the first stage, income-induced diet diversification, Consumers move away from inferior goods to superior foods and substitute some traditional staples, especially rice. In the second stage, diet globalisation, the influences of globalisation are much more marked with increased consumption of proteins, sugars and fats. Diet diversification has marked the process of transformation in food production systems. The implications for small and marginal farmers could be serious, unless there are incentives and policies that allow them to move away from subsistence agriculture and become more integrated in the global food market.

KEYWORDS

globalization, nutritional change.

INTRODUCTION

India is in a phase of rapid economic and demographic transition. Per capita income has been rising steadily since the 1980s. Life expectancy is increasing and birth rates are falling. The impressive growth rates of the 1980s were maintained in the last decade with reforms to open up the Indian economy. Poverty levels continue to decline as does the incidence of malnutrition and stunting. A key feature of this remarkable period of growth has been the change in the *nature* of the Indian diet. As the world economy becomes more integrated and communication faster, diet transition would have been inevitable. But it is clear that during the most recent decade globalisation has played an enormously important role in the transformation of food consumption patterns of Indian households. This is particularly evident in urban areas. The change in consumer tastes and demand has critical implications for the whole food supply system. The present paper looks at the impact of globalisation on both the demand side and the supply side of the food system in India.

DIET AND NUTRITION CHANGE IN INDIA

1. DRIVING FORCES OF DIET AND NUTRITION CHANGE

Significantly, and consistent with high rates of growth, the proportion of per capita expenditure on food items has fallen. Economic growth has been accompanied by rising urbanisation. Indian cities are expanding with substantial increases in the growth rates predicted in the next thirty years.

Increased urbanisation has seen the rise of the middle classes and it is predominantly the lifestyle preferences of this group that mark a change with the past. Moreover, economic growth alters the structure of the labour force in urban areas characterised by increased female participation with important consequences for the family diet. As more women enter the labour force, the traditional role of the Indian housewife to be in charge of food preparation is eroding. Whilst women may still have prime responsibility for providing the daily meals, the nature of these meals may change. The consumption of ready made meals, or foods that cut the long preparation time of traditional dishes, are likely to be a predominant feature of the diet for families where there is a high female participation rate. Chapati-mixes for example can be likened to the availability of ready-made bread mixes in developed countries. Both are designed to appeal to women whose opportunity cost of time is high.

Moreover, working couples with no children may enjoy on average higher disposable incomes and are thus likely to consume food outside the home on a regular basis. It should be noted that whilst the emergence of the nuclear family is growing, India is still far from having the same numbers of two-income families that characterise labour markets of developed nations. With further increases in economic growth and greater integration in the global market, this may change more rapidly and consequently, we may see an even stronger upward shift in demand for convenience processed food.

The process of diet transformation in India can be seen as involving two separate stages:

- (i) *income-induced diet diversification*. At the start of the process of faster economic growth, diets diversify but *maintain predominantly traditional features*;
- (ii) *diet globalisation*. As globalisation begins to exert its influence, we see the adoption of markedly different diets that *no longer conform to the traditional local habits*.

2. TRENDS IN DIET DIVERSIFICATION IN INDIA

Diet diversification, we should observe an increase in the demand for all traditional foods as income increases, such as rice, wheat, pulses, cereals, and animal products. During the second stage of change, as global influences begin to exert their effects, we should observe that the increase in demand is mainly concentrated on wheat, animal products and related foods, and there could be a *decline* in the consumption of traditional foods. However, it is important to note that income-induced diversification is still continuing and will do so for a long time to come but there are signs that diet globalisation is emerging. Diet globalisation is a phenomenon to watch over the future.

3. DIET DIVERSIFICATION AND HEALTH

The process of diet transformation has far-reaching consequences for public health. The adoption of a more varied and nutritionally balanced diet, typical of *income-induced diet diversification*, generally leads to a substantial improvement in public health indicators. The health implications of the *globalisation* of diets are less clear-cut. On the one hand, the availability of a much broader range of food products enables consumers to overcome the limitations of the traditional local diets in terms of availability of resources. Also, the process of food standardisation that is put in place by large food distributors and supermarket chains can ensure higher levels of food hygiene. Both these aspects would be associated with an improvement in health indicators.

A diet that is particularly unhealthy, for instance because it is highly energydense or includes a high proportion of processed food, would clearly have individual costs in terms of a higher risk of illnesses for the individuals or households involved. These costs might be taken into account by the consumers, although they are often not given the weight they deserve.

TRANSFORMATION OF FOOD SUPPLY SYSTEMS

India is beginning to observe a dramatic change in food supply systems in response to rapid urbanization, diet diversification, and the liberalization of foreign direct investment in the food sector. The observed changes are in both the retail sector as well as in the production sector. This section describes the changes in food supply systems, with a particular emphasis on provisioning the cities. It then proceeds to examine the implications for domestic production and the specific impact on small farmers.

1. FEEDING THE CITIES

Feeding the burgeoning urban masses is one of the most important food policy challenges facing India today and for the foreseeable future. There are three specific dimensions to the issue of feeding the cities. The first stems from the quantitative aspect. Towns are getting larger and so the size of the urban market is expanding. This requires not only increases in total urban food supply, but also the establishment of large suppliers in order to manage the increased level of activity in the market. The second dimension derives from the qualitative aspect of demand changes in cities. The rapid diversification of the urban diet cannot

be met by the traditional food supply chain. It requires in effect the commercialisation and diversification of domestic production systems and/or increased food imports. The third dimension draws from the location of urban centres. India's most populous cities and towns tend to be located on the coast. Importing food to satisfy the changing food demand could be relatively easier and less costly than acquiring the same food from the domestic hinterlands.

The change in urban food demand is almost simultaneously accompanied by changes in retail preferences. Western style marketing outlets are gaining a foothold in most Indian cities. Whilst income-induced diet diversification may be met by local suppliers with few changes to the existing production environment, the second stage of diet globalisation requires a shift away from traditional products. Globalisation results in a significant increase in the size of the domestic food market and this generates powerful incentives for foreign suppliers and supermarkets to enter the food sector. Trade liberalization greatly facilitates the widespread establishment of global supermarket chains and fast food outlets and thus speeds up the diffusion of homogenous foods and of a global diet in the Indian market. The growth of supermarkets is thus a crucial determinant for the second stage of the change in dietary habits.

2. GLOBALISATION, DIET DIVERSIFICATION AND THE SMALL FARMER

The most critical issue for Indian agriculture is how small and marginal farmers can be integrated into the global process. Indian farming is dominated by subsistence farmers who need to be able to face the challenges that result from exposure to integrated world markets. Although subsistence farming carries its own risks, the risks arising from globalisation are quite different. Therefore appropriate mechanisms and policies need to be put in place. The nature of the challenges facing smallholder farmers stems from competition with large-scale production and the ability to diversify into new varieties of crops. Their ability to adapt hinges fundamentally on their ability to make the necessary investments and changes. Given the rapid pace of change, it may appear that small farmers might be the losers of economic transformation. identifies several necessary conditions that must be met to allow local suppliers access to the changing market. Specifically, these conditions are grouped under four key areas. These are an understanding of the market, including knowledge of buyers and changing tastes; organisation of the firm to consider production equipment and investment capital, technology and quality of goods and services; good communication and transport links and fourthly, an appropriate policy environment that the legal framework to deal with issues such as land tenure, the trading environment and acceptable tariff and non-tariff barriers.

The growth of village milk co-operatives in India has pointed to a successful way of integrating landless, small and marginal farmers into the changing food market. Following from the experience in the dairy industry, co-operatives are also in operation in vegetable production but with mixed results. Nonetheless, it is widely accepted that diversification into vegetables away from the more traditional cereal production does increase rural employment. A crucial issue for the survival of small farmers is their ability to sell their products to large supermarket chains. It is critical that small farmers are guaranteed access to the procurement systems of supermarkets. This could be achieved by ensuring that structures of intermediation are in place, for instance in the form of cooperatives of small farmers, that provide the latter with a channel for selling their products to supermarkets under fair conditions. The implications for small farmers to selling their products to supermarkets rather than to retailers or directly to customers can be far-reaching. First, their output has to conform to the standardization requirements of supermarkets. They will therefore have to invest in the appropriate technology for ensuring this outcome, and this could impact on their production systems. Second, they might face reduced uncertainty on their sales, since they would work directly for the supermarket chains. In Africa, for example, British supermarkets have entered direct agreements with farmers in the production of fruit and vegetables. In India, this is beginning to happen with companies such as McCain (major supplier to McDonalds') negotiating with small farmers directly for the provision of potatoes (see Sabharwal, 2003). In these types of agreements, the large food outlet undertakes the required investment necessary to produce the specific product.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have examined the change in the nature of food demand in India in the last twenty years. We identify two distinct stages of diet transition associated with the period of economic growth. The impact of globalisation has accelerated the nature of dietary change and this has implications for food supply systems. Liberalisation has meant that large food chains have a strong incentive to enter the very large Indian market but given their relative bargaining power this could have adverse effects on Indian suppliers. However, whilst agricultural diversification has marked the process of transition in food production in order to meet the change in food demand this need not spell the demise of small farmers. We have seen in Andhra Pradesh, positive initiatives taken by small farmers in securing their livelihoods. Moreover, an examination of the experiences of small farmers across the globe may provide some useful ways for the protection of small farmers.

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