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OBJECTIVES

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THE IMPACT OF INFLATION ON LIVING STANDARD OF HOUSEHOLDS IN HAWASSA CITY, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

In the modern globalization era, inflation crosses borders and affects both developing and developed countries. The most serious costs of persistent inflation is that it destroys the confidence that society can solve its problems and creates fear that their social contracts is falling apart. The food inflation index is currently over 12% and has shown no sign of coming down. The prices of essential food items are astronomical as compared to the prices earlier years. While the pinch is felt by every household, the poorest sections are understandably the worst affected. To understand the impact on the poorest households, the survey conducted across 240 households from five different sub-cities of Hawassa. While the average monthly expenditure has increased but more importantly, food expenditure as a percentage of monthly household expenditure has gone up dramatically. The prices paid by the households for essential food items have increased across the spectrum and this increase in prices has naturally resulted in a change in consumption habits. The burgeoning food budget has invariably led households to cut costs in other areas such as healthcare and transportation and consumption of individual food items also shows a significant reduction. In addition to women workload increase, households have also been forced to adopt other coping strategies such as using up savings, pawning or selling valuables, or taking a loan to finance their monthly cash requirements.

KEYWORDS

inflation, living standard, consumption and price.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, inflation crosses borders and affects both developing and developed countries. The term Inflation means sustained increased in the general price level of goods and services against a standard level of purchasing power of consumer, leading to fall in the currency's power. On the other hand, the standard of living is the sum of all those goods and services that this world affords us. The most serious costs of persistent inflation may be that it destroys the confidence that society can solve its problems and creates fear that their social contracts is falling apart (Edward, 1981).

For the past couple of years' Ethiopian economy has been under a severe and consistent inflationary pressure. Hawassa city, the most developing city in Ethiopia, is among the highly suffered area due to the following reasons. Hawassa is the destination of different tourists, more comfortable city for recreation, highly developing city, hosts different regional and zonal bureaus and workers. The above mentioned reasons implicitly show that there is a lot of money injection into this town which makes the cost of living very expensive. But this effect may not affect different group of society similarly or the degree of influence is not the same. Households with low levels of assets have been particularly adversely affected by this inflation. Lacking the financial resources to self-insure and being referred to informal employment and volatile earnings because of low skills, the urban poor appear to be highly vulnerable to price shocks and education appears to play a small role for the ability to cope with it.

The purpose of this research paper was to investigate the impact of inflation on different households in Hawassa city. On the other hand, this paper was studying study the micro level effects of inflation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Basically economic theory reveals that inflation results in redistribution of income and wealth because the prices of all the factors of production do not increase in the same proportion. The flexible income group, such as businessmen, traders, merchants, speculators gain during inflation due to wind fall profits that arise because prices rise faster than the cost of production. On the other hand, the fixed income groups, such as, workers, salaried persons, pensioners, interest and rent earners, are always the losers during inflation because their incomes do not increase as fast as the prices. Generally, inflation is unjust because it puts economic burden on those sections of the society who are least able to bear it. Different empirical studies conducted at macro level also confirm these economic principles. As a country many empirical studies are done on inflation and related topics at macro level. The findings of such studies represent the average effects of inflation on the whole population of the country. But in reality the effect of inflation on different groups of society is not the same. Rather than considering the influence of price shock on average it is better to understand the severity of this situation from grassroots. In our country the study of inflation at household level is not common. Specifically, in this paper the impact of inflation at household level was conducted in Hawassa city. Hence this paper tried to investigate closely the impacts of inflation on the society having different living standards and different sources of income and suggests appropriate policy interventions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate household level effects of recent inflation in Hawassa city. The specific aims of this paper was to:

- Identify copying strategies of households suffered from price shocks.
- Analyzed the depth of the problem
- Know the consensus of those societies on causes of inflation

SOURCES OF DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The data required for the purpose of this study was obtained from primary sources through structural questionnaires distributed among the target groups. The questionnaires were designed in accordance with the objective of the paper. The prepared questionnaire was distributed on pre specified target groups. To take the sample initially, the whole population of Hawassa would categorized systematically into government employed, self-employed and unemployed households. After systematic division, had made 80 samples was taken randomly from each group and sum-up 240 sample households. Once the appropriate data was gathered, the descriptive statistics and case study methods was employed. In these analysis methods some copying strategies was revealed and discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Inflation brings shifts in the distribution of income between different sections of people. The producing classes such as agriculturist, manufacturers and traders gain at the expense of salaried and working classes. The rich become richer and the poor becomes poorer. Thus, there is a transfer of income from poor to rich classes. Inflation, therefore, is unjust. Besides, those who are hard hit by inflation are the young, old, widows and small savers, i.e. all those who are unable to protect themselves. But the most unfortunate thing is that monetary and fiscal authorities who are entrusted with the task of maintaining price stability are often responsible for creating inflationary conditions, for example, a country at war resorts to printing of currency notes as one of the methods of financing the war (Makanaka).

Similar, the government of a developing economy may resort to deficit financing as one of the methods of financing development projects. In these cases, inflationary finance, like taxation, brings additional revenue to the public authorities. However, taxation cannot destroy an economy except in rare cases by elimination whole groups of people. Inflation, on the other hand, can destroy fixed income group, pauperize the middle classes and destroy the very foundation of an economy. No wonder inflation has been termed as "a species of taxation, crueler of all "and "open robbery". Inflation particular the hyperinflation type, will therefore endanger the very foundation of the existing social and economic system. It will create a sense of frustration distrust, injustice and discontent and may force people to revolt against the government. It is therefore, "economically unsound, politically dangerous and morally indefensible". Therefore, it should be avoided and even if it occurs it should be controlled (Doepke).

In literature of economics we find quite vast theories that may corresponding or contradict to one another. Among these theories the structuralist and the monetarist theories are the major one. These are believed to have relevance in most literature in general inflation and few attempts on food price inflation.

THE MONETARIST THEORY

The monetarist theory of inflation scribes (food price) inflation to changes in the money supply. Several scholars wrote on money supply as the sole cause of any inflation. According to this theory, it is a behavioral 'fact' proven by empirical evidence that demand for money is stable (Ghatak, 1981:23) and late of inflation is loss of holding real balances. It follows, therefore, that the rate of increase of the nominal stock of money determines the inflation rate (Banerjee, 1975:15-16). This is made possible based on the assumption that agents do not change the relationship among their wealth, volume of transaction and their income level and constant velocity of money in the short run.

Frisch, 1990:221, then, derived growth rate of money supply to equate the growth of general prices. That is, the monetarist formulated that the elasticity of the general price level to the change in the supply of money is unity. A number of other researches, such as Kotwal (1987) indicated that 'the long and large price movements are the liable to monetary factors'. The relationship between changes in the stock of money per unit of output and changes in the general price level is an outstanding specimen of empirical regularity in economics. However, they noted that:

...it should notice inferred that the relationship between money and price is straight, rigid and mechanical, but there are long and variable time lays with regard to the effect of changes in the rate of growth of money supply on price and output in other word, the monetary impulses that consist of changes in the rate of growth of money stock constitute a major force behind cyclical changes in the level of prices, output and employment (lbid).

STRUCTURALIST THEORY OF INFLATION

Structuralist argues that there are equally important structural and institutional factors for food price inflation especially in developing countries. Thirwall (1989) wrote that:

...the basic forces of (food price) inflation are supply phenomena, that is, structural limitations or bottle necks inherent in the socio-economic system and cumulative inflationary processes. They, however, do not deny the fact that financial factors can propagate it. In view of this, school, structural constraints in developing countries is very powerful.

They also argue that not only are there equally important structural and institutional factors but also that money supply is explained by these factors outside the control of central banks. Moreover, Kirk Patric (1981) explained that information irregularity among agents and rigidities and disequilibria between supply and demand in different sectors are the characteristics of developing economies. As a result, we may find a simultaneous underutilization of resource in one sector and significant scarcity of commodities in the others.

The structuralist note that "nominal wage contact and a decline in real wages owing to inflation restricted agricultural supplies as prime cause of inflation as witnessed following a foreign exchange bonanza (e.g. Mexico) as possible episodes of conflict and price formation inspired inflation" (Taylor, 1992).

Similarly, Flemming (1976:39-40), in view of the structuralist theory, stressed two basic causes of inflation (especially in Latin American countries); namely, the rigidity of food supply and in adequacy and in stability of the purchasing power of exports, adding, the argue that in dual economies, food supply is in elastic and hence price are very flexible in response to changing demand.

Flemming (1976) puts the difference between these theories in nutshells; while for monetarist, excess demand for food resulting from excess supply of money as a major portion of it goes for food consumption is regarded as the only cause of inflation. The structuralist scribe inflation to the composition of demand for commodities accompanied by inflexibilities in the productive structure (p.39).

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

INFLATION AND THE URBAN POOR IN ETHIOPIA

The overall economic performance of Ethiopia during the last fifty years had been in adequate and disappointing. The period of military regime was charcterized by misguided and in effective economic policies, attended civil war, high military expenditure, devastating drought, and wide spread poverty.

After taking power in may 1991, EPRDF re-instituted and implemented 'mar Retled' economic system. Some reports revealed that the real GDP of the nations between 1991/92 and 20011/12 was glowing by 16.33%. despite some progress interms of reducing poverty in recent yeas (MoFED, 2012), Ethiopia still stands amonge the poorest countries in the world. According to the united nation's (UNDP, 2012), human development index Ethiopia is 159th out of 177 countries, with human development index (HDI) of 0.606. in 2011, 78% of the total population live below the poverty line of USD 2 aday and 34% below then a final poverty line, life expectance at birth remains at 47 years for male and 45 for female, which was below the sub-saharan average of 48 (WB, 2012). In a similar line, according to the latest household survey, wms, 2004, malnutrition was preventing in the country with about 37% of children stunted, suffering from chronic malnutrition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

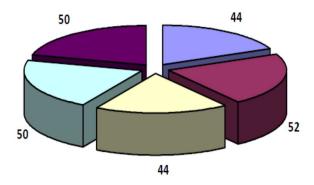
INTRODUCTION

The past few years have seen extreme fluctuations in the inflation index. After hitting double digits in early 2008, inflation has subsequently come down in the last two years. But the commodity prices in the markets are still very high, making it rather unaffordable to the poor and thus indicating a worsening food security situation. To understand the impact of the price rise in essential commodities on the households of Hawassa, the researcher decided to conduct a survey across households from some of the sub-cities. The objective of the survey was to understand the impact of price rise on the consumption patterns of the households, the effect on household aspects, and the means households have resorted to in order to survive the crisis.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

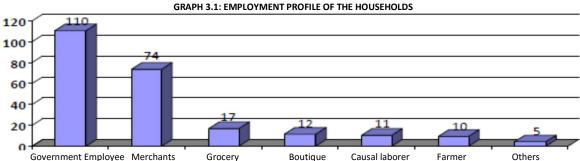
The survey covers 240 number of households which were taken from five different sub-cities of Hawassa. These sub-cities are Piazza, Meneharia, Misrak, Mehalketema and Haikdar. The distribution of the households across these five districts is shown in the following pie-chart.

CHART 3.1: SAMPLE SIZES IN SAMPLE SUB-CITIES



The average family size of the household is 7 with 4 adults and 3 children.

While almost half of the respondents (110) are government employees, the next largest category is that of merchants (74).



A little over 70% of the surveyed households report a secondary revenue stream. Participating in small scale enterprise in different manner is the most common secondary occupation with as many as 94 households practicing it.

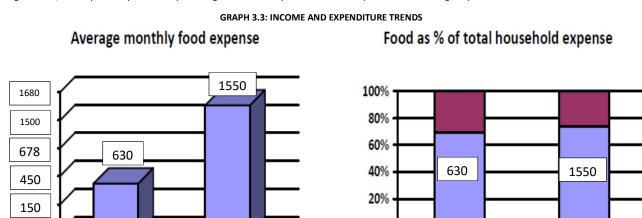


GRAPH 3.2: SECONDARY REVENUE STREAM OF THE HOUSEHOLDS

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE TRENDS

Average income over the entire sample (all five districts) has increased marginally from Birr 948fouryears ago to Birr 1,714 now. What is more relevant is the average monthly household expense, which has highly increased from Birr814four yearsago to Birr 1,988 now. This shows that the percentage at which income has increased (44.7%) over thepast four years is significantly less than the percentage increment of the household's expenditure (59.05%).

A more revealing statistic is the average monthly expense on foodwhich explains the increase in average monthly total household expense as well. As the chart on the right shows, monthly food expenses as a percentage of the monthly total household expense has risen marginally from 69% to 78%.



Hence, the average monthly household expenses havenot increased as much as the average monthly expenses on food indicates that the family has cut costs on other aspects of the household.

FOOD PRICE TRENDS

The respondents were asked the prices they paid on average for a list of essential commodities 4years back and the prices they now have to pay. The list of commodities included cereals, vegetables, oil, meat, milk and milk products. The resulting data reveals a substantial increase in prices for most of the commodities. Refer to the following table for the list.

TABLE 3.1: FOOD PRICE TRENDS

TABLE 3.1. FOOD PRICE TREINDS						
Items	Dec' 2009	Dec' 2012	% increase			
Wheat	3.9	10	61%			
Maize	2.25	7	68%			
Onions	3.6	12	70%			
Potatoes	1.25	4	66%			
Tomatoes	3.8	9	57%			
Oil	19.6	40	51%			
Sugar	7	25	72%			
Buttermilk	63	140	55%			
Milk	5.5	12	46%			
Eggs	0.6	2.5	61%			
Chickens	48	100	52%			
Meat	60	150	60%			

Source: own computation

Prices of a kilogram of maize and wheat have risen by nearly 60%. Basic vegetables such as onions and potatoes have seen a rise of over 66%. It should be understood that these are the prices the households pay their local shopkeepers.

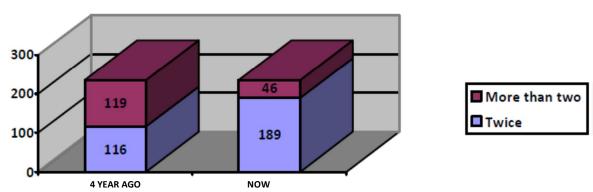
CHANGE IN FOOD HABITS

From the data presented in the previous section it can be deduced that the percentage increase in food expenses (9%) seem to be less than proportionate to the increase in commodity prices. Clearly this indicates a change in food habits – more specifically, a cut down in consumption volume and quantity.

The survey data supports this hypothesis. To a question on how many meals per day do households consume now as compared to 4years ago, over 60% of the households who earlier consumed more than two meals a day report they are no longer able to afford more than two meals a day.

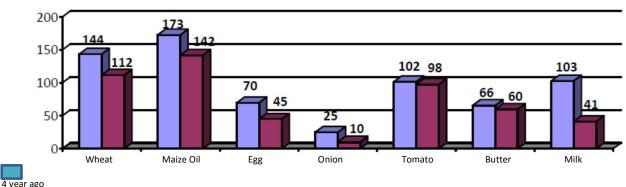
GRAPH 3.4: TRENDS OF MEALS PER

Meals per day

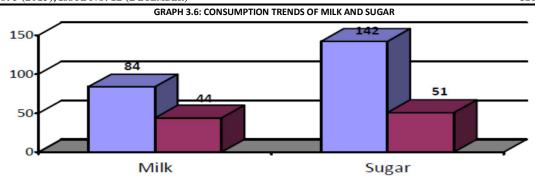


This trend has invariably been reflected in the consumption levels of individual commodities. The following chart displays the number of households who report consumption of a particular commodity at least once a day (4years ago and now).

GRAPH 3.5: CHANGE OF THE FOOD HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD



As shown in the chart, the number of households who consume cereals like wheat and maize at least once a day has come down substantially. A significant number of households however don't find the consumption of meatand buttermilk affordable on a daily basis anymore. Vegetable consumption has shown a marginal decline. Apart from these, commodities which are more frequently consumed, such as milk and sugar, also show a drop in frequency for many households. For instance, the number of households who consume milk and sugar at least twice a day has dropped by about 48% and 64% respectively.



4 year ago

Other commodities such as chicken and meat are seemingly consumed by very few households in general (less than 5% of the sample) and an analysis into the consumption patterns of such commodities therefore seems unjustified.

MANIFESTATIONS OF FOOD PRICE INFLATION IN HAWASSA CITY

In the city under consideration, the impact of food price inflation has been reflected in many ways. The shift of community's demand from more nutritious diet to food which has lesser nutritional values is among the manifestation of the problem. According to the response of some poor households previously though they are poor, they relatively get food with better nutritional values with affordable price, but nowadays due to food price inflation they are forced to rely on foods that are relatively cheaper and have very poor nutritional constituent.

According to the data, some households have reduced their daily food consumption and also started to have a meal a day. The effects of the inflation have also been deflected in some social life of the people. One of the typical examples of the fact is some households have been quitted from involving in some socially acceptable cultural and religious practices namely 'Edir", "Ekub" and "Senbete' because they are not able to afford the money contributed for this purposes. Theother evidence which indicates the severity of inflation is that some households even do not know the price of some expensive food items such as meat. This implies that such kinds of households do not go to butchery and buy meat for a long period of time.

During the data collection most young generation say that they fear the inflation to get the marriage. Becausethey are risk averse in their life and not optimist over settle down of inflation in the near future. In addition to this most respondents believe that the wide spread of street dwellers, thefts and prostitution are also the other reflections of the expensive normal living standard. In other words, because of high living costs, these members of the city households have started involving in the above mentioned dangerous but socially not acceptable income generating activities.

IMPACTS OF INFLATION ON OTHER ASPECTS OF HOUSEHOLDS AND COPING STRATEGIES

As observed in an earlier section, the increase in the average monthly household expenditure is less than proportionate to the increase in the average monthly food expenses. This clearly indicates that the household has tried to cut costs in other aspects of the household. The survey attempted to capture this trend with appropriate questions about children's education, healthcare and transportation, and the data indeed reveals that the family has been attempting to compensate in other areas. While we are not implying that the changes in household circumstances described in this section and the earlier one are all because of the price rise, we do attempt to demonstrate that the increase in food expenses have had a significant impact for sure.

Healthcare seems to be a prominent area where the household has attempted to make adjustments. To a question on how the household handles its healthcare needs now as compared to 4 years ago, a significant majority responded that they now go to government hospitals/doctors instead of private dispensaries. What is of more concern is the fact that many other households are now desisting from seeking professional help.

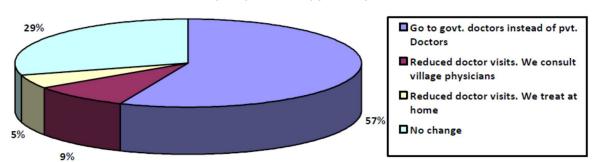


CHART 3.2: THE TRENDS OF HEALTHCARE

Transportation is another area where the household has cut down expenses. To a question on the household's transportation habits have changed, almost all the households have reported some coping mechanism they have adopted. Only 17% of households report no change in transportation habits.

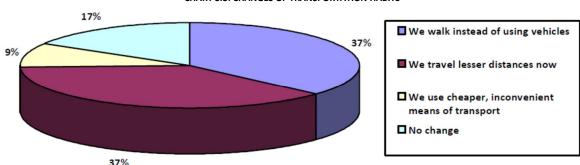
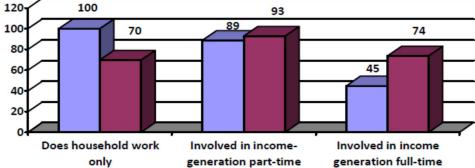


CHART 3.3: CHANGES OF TRANSPORTATION HABITS

Fortunately, children's education doesn't seem to have been impacted drastically. A very marginal number of households (< 15) have reported that their children (boys or girls) no longer attend school, but this cannot credibly be termed as a tangible insight if we take into account factors other than the price rise and any surveying errors. If there is actually a trend, however, over the long term households-particularly the poorer ones-could very well be unable to afford their children's education (as over the short term households could adopt either use debt or other coping strategies). Women however have been working harder to contribute to household's finances. To a question on how the women's workload has changed over the past 4years, a sizeable number of households have suggested an increase in the women's workload. In the chart below, notice the decrease in the women who worked only in the household and the corresponding increase in the number of women who contribute to income generation now.

GRAPH 3.6: CHANGES OF WOMEN'S WORKLOAD

93 89 70 74



4 year ago

And finally many households have had to make arrangements for cash by digging into their assets or by taking a loan. Over 40% of the surveyed households were forced to resort to desperate measures of some sort. The measures these households have taken are displayed in the chart below.

19% ■ Took a loan 36% Pawned jewellery/valuables □ Sold jewellery/valuables 25% ☐ Used up savings 20%

CHART 3.4: SURVIVAL MEASURES OF HOUSEHOLDS TOWARDS INFLATION

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The price rise has clearly impacted the poor urban households, leaving the poorer among them in a state of helpless desperation. The main means of livelihood of these peoples are employment in governmental and non-governmental organizations, trade, and daily laborer. In addition to involving the aforementioned livelihood activities, a significant number of the study households involve in petty trade. Not only has the price rise rendered many commodities unaffordable on a regular basis (and thereby reduced consumption below levels termed as adequate nutrition), but it has also resulted in the household facing hardships in other spheres of the household. Over the long term worrying trends are likely to consolidate, wherein households are forced to sacrifice necessities such as professional healthcare and children's education just to make space for sufficient food to survive.

In order to squeeze the problem this price inflation each household have employed various coping mechanisms. Some of the coping strategies are reducing the quantity of food consumption, cut or reduceentertaining of non-food items, using their savings and fixed assets for daily consumption, taking loan selling jewelries, relish visiting of government hospitals, enjoying walking on foot and shifting consumption of foods towards poor nutritious diets. It is also concluded that the majority of the householdsemployed more than one coping strategies to handle the impact of the inflation on their livelihood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher believes that in addition to macro-level policies, micro-level interventions have to considered as alternative instruments. Of-coursegovernment has already started taking some measures so as to revert this problem. The following points are raised as alternative interventions: -

- Minimizing the chain of intermediaries in the market between sellers and buyers who inflates the prices of respective products.
- Distributing some food items like wheat, maize, food oil and etc to the urban people with lower price throw consumer cooperatives.
- Taking prior initiative for market cooperatives to be established and equipping their capacity by giving short term training and providing credit with
- Providing credit to those individuals who organized themselves in group and want to involve in some entrepreneurship activities.
- Fighting the rent seekers in general and those in microfinance and consumer cooperatives which have direct effect inflation of food price in particular.

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