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Changing patterns of food consumption with special reference to egg, fish and meat in IndiaC Lloyd Chrispin¹, PS Ananthan¹, Paul M Jackson¹ and P Sandeep¹

An analysis of food consumption patterns and how they are likely to shift as a result of several factors is important to address the food security-related policy issues of any country. Real GDP growth which is outstripping population growth is making the average Indian per capita income to rise but this is accompanied by a fall in the per capita consumption of staple food. This decline indicates improvement in the welfare, as laid down by Engel's hypothesis.

The objectives of the study are to (1) analyse the pattern of food consumption (egg, fish, meat) among rural and urban sectors in 15 major states of India to reveal the trend and changes taking place in recent years. (2) To find out the impact of increasing average Indian Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) over the cultural preferences of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food items.

The study was based on secondary data from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO)'s household consumer expenditure surveys (CES). The four quinquennial surveys (50th, 55th, 61st and 66th rounds corresponding to 1993 to 2010) were made use of for mapping the consumer expenditure on meat, egg and fish products in different states of India while the earlier 27th round survey data was used as a benchmark to map changes over the years. Based on Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE), 15 major states were classified into 3 groups namely High, Medium and Low MPCE States, and then comparison of their expenditure for egg, fish, meat for the past 20 years were made. Analysis was done using Microsoft Office Excel ver. 2007.

The study clearly indicated two important points related to Indian food consumption pattern over the decades. One, the proportion of expenditure for food items in total monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) is declining gradually, whereas the share of expenditure for non-food items is vice-versa in both, rural as well as urban sector of all Indian states. Between 1972-73 and 2004-05, the share of food in total consumer expenditure has fallen from 73% to 55% in rural areas and from 64% to 42% in urban areas (NSSO, 2010). Two, decline in the expenditure towards food consumption is falling because of shift in consumption away from cereals to high calorie commodities such as meat, milk, fish etc, in other words from low value to high value commodities. Even though, there are several reasons claimed to be behind such a scenario, the impact of Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization (LPG) reforms caused the major change, which led Indians to spend more lifestyle spends rather than regular spends. Changing income/MPCE levels as well as changes in taste/choices seems to impact the basket of food consumption (egg, fish, and meat). However, the deep rooted cultural preferences especially for non-vegetarian food still hold sway in rural areas in North Indian States of Haryana and Rajasthan though urban consumption trends are fast changing here as well. Further field-level studies are required to validate some of these inferences.