

Understanding the Drivers of Diet Change and Food Choice Among Tanzanian Pastoralists to Inform Policy and Practice

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Key Takeaways

- Overall, diet patterns have changed dramatically for traditionally pastoral communities in rural Tanzania, with younger and more sedentary communities experiencing the most significant changes.
- While social and environmental changes underlie the altered food choice behaviors, proximal factors such as cost and availability of foods dictated decisions at the point of purchase and appeared to accelerate pattern shifts. For example, cereals, refined grains and processed foods were the most affordable and accessible food items in the markets while traditional fruits and vegetables have declined substantially in availability over the past several decades.
- Participants expressed concern regarding these dietary shifts and implications for both social identity and long-term health, with expressed concerns around childhood malnutrition due to reduced milk supply, pregnancy/postpartum complications due to declining blood consumption, and increased chronic diseases related to increased consumption of cereals, fats and oils, and soft drinks.
- Participants exhibited a strong desire for enhanced land tenure policies to ensure access to quality grazing lands and water sources.
- A high value on children's health was expressed by participants who emphasized a need for more inclusive nutrition and health education pertaining to balanced diets.

Objectives

The overall project objectives were to assess food access, particularly animal-source foods. Additional objectives were to identify 'emic' values and understand their interpretation with respect to food choices and the role of these values in individual and collective identity. As the context of the study contained various economic and environmental challenges, the study sought to describe how these values were prioritized and the implications for diet patterns and household nutritional status. Lastly, the study evaluated the effect of dairy value chain participation and market integration on household food production, sale, access, expenditures and consumption.

Background

Over 300-600 million people worldwide are nomadic pastoralists. In response to increasing environmental, social, and political pressures, many pastoralists are shifting to sedentary livelihood strategies (known as "sedentarization"). Research in East Africa suggests that sedentarization may have negative effects on diets of mothers and children with respect to the consumption of animal-source foods, nutrition and health. Findings will be grounded in existing literature to hypothesize impacts of changes in gender norms, food valuation and access to valued foods on health and well-being of pastoralist families.

Methods

This mixed-methods study took place among 466 households representative of transitioning pastoral livelihoods in the Handeni and Mvomero Districts of rural Tanzania. A quantitative survey was used to assess dietary patterns, livelihood strategies, and agriculture and livestock activities among households participating in a concurrent dairy development project. Two rounds of qualitative research aimed to understand participants' perspectives on a range of topics relating to food production, acquisition, preparation, allocation, and consumption, including typical diets, values relating to food and eating, livelihood strategies, changes in diets over time, and potential drivers of dietary changes. Data included focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and household in-depth interviews. Additionally, a market survey was conducted at three time points using the Cost of the Diet approach to understand the availability and affordability of healthy diets locally and seasonally.

Results

Diet changes most prominently include reductions in milk, meat and blood consumption and an increased consumption of maize, rice, fish and eggs. Youth, in

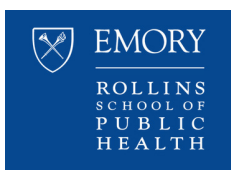
particular, tended to favor obtaining convenience or ultra-processed foods outside the home, such as “chips maiya” (French fries with fried egg), mandazis (fried sweet dough), and tinned fish. Soft drinks and fruit juice were also popular among youth in this study. Respondents noted significant shifts in food preparation methods from mostly boiling and grilling in the past to now a large preponderance of frying and sautéing in oils.

Climate change was perceived to negatively impact livestock health, contributing to declines in milk production and sales, increased cattle deaths, and decreased availability of indigenous and foraged fruits and vegetables. Respondents perceive women to be most impacted by declining milk sales and noting they now have less money available for daily household expenses, such as food. Participants experienced stress and adverse mental health outcomes due to failed crops, cattle death, and reduced milk production. Declines in blood consumption were attributed to the adoption of Christian religious tenets that dictate blood consumption as unclean. Additionally, real and perceived notions of poor livestock health due to climate change has influenced pastoralists to reduce bleeding their animals for blood consumption.

More Information

- **ILRI MoreMilk Project** - <https://www.ilri.org/research/projects/moremilk-making-most-milk>
- **Open Access Data** – <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/DFCpastoral>
- **Project Page** - <https://driversoffoodchoice.org/research/project-descriptions/tanzanian-pastoralists/>

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