

# Social Survey on Food Habits of Ugandans Living in Ås, Norway

- C. M. Sharma, J. Lindara, I. Mathumo, and D. Msangameno.

Agricultural University of Norway, Noragric, P.O. Box 5001, N- 1432 Ås, Norway

## Introduction:

Uganda is composed of many ancient people with their own traditional lands, their own customs and a way of life inherited from their ancestors; and they now live together as one people ([www.uganda](http://www.uganda) 2000). “Food habits are the ways in which individuals or group of persons, in response to social and cultural pressures, choose, consume and make use of available foods” (Mead 1945). Social scientist such as Malinowsky (1944) and Richards (1939) pointed out that human bodies need for food has done much to shape society through all activities concerned with food production, distribution and utilisation (cited from Hartog and Staveren 1985). Food is considered as a part of a culture that is central, connected to many kind of behaviour, and infinitely meaningful (Counihan 200). Counihan (2000) writes “an examination of food ways in all cultures reveals much about power relations, the shaping of community and personality, the construction of the family, system of meaning and communication, and conception of sex, sexuality and gender”. For the qualitative part of assignment we formulated three research questions as follows:

- What is the relationship among gender, sex and food?
- Is it easy to adapt to a new environment in terms of food?
- Who is responsible for preparing food in the family?

We have general assumptions that the culture has a great role in the food habit of the people in an area. Similarly, feeding habit also depend on the gender, sex and

sexuality among different family members. We also assume that time taken for the adaptation of people to any new environment depends on their previous food habit. Some people feel easier to cope with the new food materials whereas others feel it difficult. We guess our assumptions make the above mentioned research questions more interesting and meaningful.

## **2. Target Group:**

We were solely concerned with the food habits of the Ugandans living in Ås, Norway. Our group targeted to study the food habit of Ugandans. We selected senior students at NLH and tried to balance the proportion of gender while doing interviews and questionnaire surveys.

## **3. Methodology:**

To perform qualitative study on the food habit of Ugandans, we used two main methods, namely:

- Interviews, and
- Participatory observations

Six people were interviewed (3 men and 3 women) regarding the food habit. We also asked about different kind of foods taken during last 24 hours. The interview, according to Ellen (1984), is not simply recording of objective facts: it is an exploration of meaning. The field notes based on the interviews, and participatory observations are developed with the references of Spradley (1979).

For the participatory observation, we stayed with them and observed how they

prepare food and talked about the cultural aspects and discussed other issues related with food habits, which are described in the results and discussion of this paper.

## **4. Results and Discussion:**

In our sample we included both men and women for representing both the genders so that outcome could be generalized to some extent.

### **4.1 Faith/Religion and Food:**

What people produce is more important than what their culture allows them to accept as consumable food in a particular area. From the analyses we found that there is no influence of (or restriction due to) faith/religion on what they eat. But their general conception is that traditional belief is very important in deciding their food habit.

### **4.2 Food, Gender and Sex:**

Counihan (2000) writes that eating is a sexual and gendered activity throughout life, thus, relating food to the gender and sex in a great extent. He gives an example of Hua of New Guinea who have elaborated conception about *koroko* and *bakeri'a* foods. The *koroko* is associated with females (cold, wet, soft, fertile and fast growing) whereas *bakeri'a* is associated with males (hot, dry, hard, infertile and slow growing); and these foods are not consumed in opposite way in public (Counihan 2000). But, in case of Uganda, our informants did not accept in having such categorization in food items in their society. Though our informants

were from male dominant society, where women are responsible for preparing food for the whole family, no discrimination prevails in the consumption food by them. They gave the information that men require more food than others because they engage in physically hard works that is the physiological requirement. Girls are taught for preparing food as soon as they reach their puberty whereas there is no such necessity for boys. Women are responsible for the marketing of food items needed to the family but other family members equally participate in this activity.

### **4.3 Food, Family and Children:**

Feeding is regarded as one of the most important channels of infant and child socialization and personality formation (Counihan 2000). Sen (1987) has also given emphasis on the importance of food by writing 'grub first, then ethics' in his popular lecture paper 'Food and Freedom'. Food identity and its importance passes on to the new generation automatically. Preserving food identity would in a real sense preserve the dignity of a large number of people throughout the world (Goonatilake 1984).

In our findings the normal expenditure on food by each family is normal in comparison to their income level. Most of them take their meal two times a day and highly nutritious food is taken at the dinner. Most of our informants mentioned banana (Matooke) as their staple food. In addition they mentioned Potatoes, beans, groundnuts, millet (Karo), Kassawa flour and peas as their most commonly used food items. But their staple food is found to be different at different parts of the country. They prepare some more varieties of foods (e.g., rice meat) during special occasion, e.g., wedding, funeral etc. They take care of pregnant women in the family and provide nutrient rich food during that period of time. Our informants informed us that they treat their guests with some special food that depends on the close relationship and hierarchy of the guests.

According to our informants, there is no difference in the food prepared for the

children. Children take food more frequently than other members in the family which shows that their timing of having food do not necessarily match with other adult person in the family. Children are generally fed with easily digestible food. The most common food for children are milk, fish, eggs, rice and meat but there is not restriction for the selection of food. They are not allowed to take much sweet, hot spices and fibre containing foods.

#### **4.4 Adaptation to the New Environment:**

Hartog and Staveren (1985) studied the migration to the urban places and wrote that there is a general tendency of accepting new foods when people migrate from rural to the urban areas. The case is not very similar in our present study. Our informants found difficulties in getting all kinds of foodstuff here in Norway which they used to get in their home country. They feel very much difference in the food items between Uganda and Norway. They already knew about the food items available in Norway by some of the previous senior students from Uganda, therefore, they brought some of their staple foods with them while coming to Norway. Now all of them succeed to get the substitutes for their food habit. Half of the informants felt very easy to cope with the new situation regarding food habit after their arrival here, whereas, half of others felt slight difficulties.

#### **5. Lessons Obtained:**

During our field study and report writing we learnt many things as follows:

- First of all we selected our area of the study in food habit and formulated three research questions according to the demand of assignment given to us.
- We developed research design that included two of the qualitative methods we have discussed in the class (presented as an appendix-1).

- Before conducting interview, we pre-tested our target questions to the people to be interviewed and taken some suggestion from them. Then we reformulated our research questions according to their suggestion wherever we feel necessary.
- Then we conducted interview to our target informants who are senior students at NLH.
- We tried to apply the method participatory observation, as far as possible, by staying with them in the same flat for some time.
- We wrote some of the important notes in condensed form during the interview and elaborated it afterwards that is presented in appendix-2.
- We discussed our findings obtained from our informants and related these with the research questions.
- We feel that it is essential to get information on food habits and food consumption during planning, implementation and evaluation of food and nutrition programmes.

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## Appendices

### Appendix-1 (Research Design)

For a survey on food habits and food consumption of Ugandans, we designed a research containing following steps:

#### 1. Defining the problem:

- We formulated the precise research questions to be answered.
- We also assumed our goal of the survey.

#### 2. Survey Methods used:

- We have to collect the following data in order to answer the questions.
  - a. Socio-economic: income

- b. Food habits:
  - Religion
  - Gender
  - Kinds of food
  - Food avoidances (taboos)
  - Food preferences
  - Knowledge of food
  - Foods given to children

### 3. Methodology:

We had following source and data.

Source	Methods
Documents: reports, books	Content analysis
Informants: Senior Ugandan students at NLH	Interviews, Participant observation

### 4. Collection of data in the field:

We did a pre-test of the questions to be asked to them so that informants could feel easy to understand our questions. Then we organised visits to each and every informant and took the interview from them.

### 5. Report writing: Finally we wrote a report on the basis of the information provided by our informants.

## **Appendix-2 (Field notes: Chhatra Sharma)**

### **Some examples expanded accounts taken during the interview with an informant:**

He is born in the village and migrated to the town so that he got some changes in his food habit. He is staying alone and he is unmarried, therefore, he is not regular in his food intake. Now he is devoting most of his time in his Ph.D. work

He mentioned that Ugandans staple food differ from place to place but Matooke (banana) and Irish potato are the most common foods that are used as the staple foods in most of the parts of the country. To prepare their staple food, they mix potato and banana with beans and groundnuts and make solid food. They also use beef, chicken and peas as their staple food.

In ceremonies, they prepare some more foods besides their staple foods, e.g., rice and posho (maize food), and make maize bread. For special guests, they prefer to serve millet bread, roasted beef and cooked beef as well.

He asserts that they do not have any taboos related with the food habit. They take more nutritious foods at the dinner.

They prefer normal food for their children. But they do not give them spicy, chilly, and fobre containing foods. They do not prefer to give more sweets to the children. Children take their food more frequently than other adults do, therefore, it is not necessary to take food with their parents, but they can do so.

Women are considered as the home minister because they are responsible for all the domestic works including the preparation of food for the family. Men perform hard and physically tough-jobs, therefore, they require more energy which is their physiological demand.

Food items found in Norway are very much different form the items found in Uganda. My respondents took some of their staple foods from their home country. Now, they got few substitutes for their staple foods in Norway. They felt not more difficulties in adapting to the new environment here in Norway regarding their food habit. One of my respondents mentioned that he got the information about the food items available in Norway because his brother stays

here.

### **Field Work Journal: 23<sup>rd</sup> March, Saturday (6:00 pm).**

The informant I choose was busy in his Ph.D. work. He invited me in his work place on Saturday. He was hard working in his studies though it was holiday. I went to his office at 6 pm (he invited me through the back door because front door was close). I gave him a questionnaire for the quantitative part of our assignment and I started interview at the mean time. I talked with him for more than one hour related with the food habit of Ugandans. I wrote down most of the important points he had said in the condensed form and elaborated them after coming to my room. I felt no hesitation in talking with him because I knew him before.

I knew him for last 5 months because we were in the same flat in the hostel (Grotten). I observed him for a long time as his flat met to observe how he prepares and takes food. I also asked few questions when in doubt related to the food he takes and his culture. We generally had two-way conversation so that he could feel comfortable to speak to me. Therefore, I felt no difficulties in contacting and talking to him. I found him very polite and helpful. He tried to give as much information as possible in each and every question. I realized that he has much information in this field as his own experience. I must say that my interview as well as participant observation with him was an excellent work to gather information regarding the food habit of his country.

### **Analysis and Interpretation Notes:**

I have my own analysis and interpretation of the methods we used; and of the food habits of Ugandans. We applied two main methods for qualitative part of the assignment about the food habit of Ugandans:

- Interviews, and
- Participant Observation

I found interview as one of the most important tools that helps to gather much more information about the targeted topic or field. But interview mainly depends on how informer perceives and gives answers to a particular question. It mainly focuses on the idea given by the informer and there is very less chance of modifying and giving our own perception.

By participatory observation we can gather or verify the facts. I say that these two methods are complementary to each other. We can generate much more facts if we perform both of the methods together for any kind of social fieldwork. I will write more later on.

Ugandans seems to be more polite to their guests and outsiders. They eat the food items whatever they think is the best and accepted by their tradition. They are found to be more practical in utilizing the food items found in their own area.

### Appendix-3 (Field notes: Janaka Lindara)

#### **Condensed and expanded accounts:**

***Countryside*** – She lives at countryside in Uganda.

***Unmarried*** – She is unmarried

***Christian- protestant*** – Her religious denomination is Christian protestant.

***No religious influence*** – Her faith /religion doesn't influence what she eat.

***Income \$ 200*** – Her monthly income is about \$200 and 1/5 of salary allocate for foods.

***Men dominated society*** – its men dominated society and all final decision are made by men.

***Women -prepare food*** – women are responsible for preparing food and child caring.

***Girls learn 10 yrs*** – Girls are taught for preparing foods as soon as they reach

their puberty (approximate age 10 yrs) where as there is no such necessity for boys.

**Staple food – matooke (banana), peel and cut into small pieces, wrapped banana leaves, steamed about 1hr.**

Matokes (bananas) are the main food of people in Uganda. There are many types. Harder green ones that remain colour even when ripe. These are called matoke.

First the matoke banana are peeled and cut into small pieces .Now they are wrapped in banana leaves to make parcel. It's that this point that they are steamed for about an hour until they are ready to eat.

**Taboos – twined matooke** – They believe that if they eat twinned matoke (banana) they may give a birth to twins.

**Children – not give cassava** – There are restrictions for selecting food for children. Specially they don't feed high fibre food and cassava for children.

### **Adaptation to new environment**

**No entire foodstuff** – They don't get the entire foodstuff, which they use to get their home country.

**Slightly different food-** She described that there is slightly food differences between her country and Norway.

**Brought some foods** – She brought some staple food from Uganda when she was coming to Norway.

**Limited substitute** – Eventhough there is difference in food, she manage to find some substitute food in Norway.

### **Fieldwork Journal:**

Date: 18/03/20023

Time: 7.30 p.m.

The informant I choose was busy in her final thesis work. She was a second year Resource economics student who came from Uganda. She invited me her flat (Hemson 2 nd floor) on Monday 18 Th March 2002. I went to her place at 7.30 p.m., at that time she was preparing Ugali. It's a traditional food in Uganda.

(Maize flour mixed with hot water and shaking about fifteen minutes until its ready to eat). She invited me to eat ugali with chicken curry. I was taste their traditional food and started to interview at the mean time. It was very interesting conversation. I felt no difficulties because of her hospitality. I wrote some important point as condensed form in my field book. On the other hand it was very good experience for me because I observed their food preperation method and also taste some foods. I spend about two hours in her flat. She tried to give exact answer for my questions. But she didn't know about husband – wife relationship in terms of food habits, because she was unmarried.

But se had good knowledge about her culture religion in terms of food habits.

### **Analysis and Interpretation:**

There are several methods of collecting field data. To get information on sociological aspects of food and nutrition, the following methods are appropriate.

- Observation of target group and its environment (participant observation)
- Personal interviews aided by questionnaire. (Interviews)

In here we applied above two methods qualitative part of the assignment about the food habits of Ugandans.

Participant observation method much used in social anthropological surveys, may give useful information on food habits of community and its member. A disadvantage is time consuming. In order to observe food habits adequately, one need to stay for long time in community.

Observational methods should be combined with personal interviews where interviewer ask questions and records the answers on questionnaire. This method allows one to collect numeric data and its comparatively quick.

### **Appendix-4 (Field notes: Itani Mathumo )**

## Expanded notes

**Staple Food:** is variation in staple food taken in Uganda, the main staple food is Posho( made (form maize flour and Matoke ( mainly form special variety of banana).

**Friends:** Prior to coming to Norway, he met and was advised by friends on the food situation in Uganda, so he came almost prepared for the new environment, though he finally had to but the food in Norway because he could not bring enough for the whole period during which he had to stay in Norway.

**New Environment:** Partying with the respective Ugandan food stuff not always easy, but he had to cope by but almost similar food that he finds in Norway

**Culture and food:** No taboos related to food:

There is change in the treatment of women in the sense that nowadays they can eat meat, in the past there not suppose to:

**Cooking and Gender;** Cooking is the responsibility of women and girls; Boys are suppose to look after the animals, fetch water and collect firewood

**Special occasions:** Basically there is no food difference prepared for the occasions such as weddings and parties

## Field Work Journal:

The responded was interviewed after noon. at 1900hrs. The interview was originally y planned for the same day 600hs, but had to be rescheduled for1900rhrs because the respective respondent had to other pressing assignments. He was originally y given a letter to inform him of the planned interview in advance. On arrival at 1900hrs, I was offered a place to sit , al later a glass of milk of 3,9% protein. The compared to the other respondents this responded was rather open on answering questions and offering explanations of the subject matter, and that allowed for a conducive environment for asking relevant

questions. In addition he allowed me to have a look at some of the food stuff that he had brought from Uganda. One important observation that was made responded could not easily remember his height, he had to refer to his passport. The height, contrary to the units (metres) that are mostly used, his height was indicated in feet and inches. This is very contrary to my country of origin ( Botswana) where the height of the person is indicated in metre.

### **Analysis and interpretation on the field notes:**

I find interviews and participation observation to be important tools towards gathering information, thus the researcher has the chance to probe his respondent in give more and more information on the subject matter. A given answer may lead to other questions for purposes of clarity. Difficulties, may however be experienced when the respect rive respondents are not readily available during the planned schedule It is also essential that the respondents are aware and fully understand the objectives of the research, otherwise scanty information may be provided.

Generally information as provided indicates that he takes a form of cereal every day. Beer is unusually taken during the weekend. He is also very cautious on the health of his children. Very conservative of the issues of gender and cooking, thus according to him, cooking is a women's responsibility, while men are supposed to do hard labour especially, fetching firewood, looking after the animals. He however admits that this traditionally limitation of cooking towards boys, becomes a disadvantage when one has to stay alone especially in town where most of the people migrate to find job.

### **Appendix-5 (Field notes: Daudi Msangameno)**

### **Expanded Account:**

- Ø The interviewee was mostly engaged with the school works so he did not have time to cook some varieties that consume much time.
- Ø There no one staple food for the whole country, it differs among the regions of the country, but there one common type called matooke made from banana.
- Ø In the country it is women who prepares food
- Ø In the towns the type of food eaten will depend on the level of income of the individual.
- Ø The person is married so he could not give a more account on the wedlock relationships with regards to household food habits

### **Field Work Journal:**

The person I interviewed was a student. He is in his second year at the university. He was very cooperative, though he seemed to be very much engaged with personal works. I interviewed the person in a weekday. It was in the evening, since he did not have time in the morning or afternoon hours, as he was busy with his thesis write up. In addition to that I managed to have an observation on him for about a week or so on his food habits. This was easy for me because I use to live with the guy in the same flat at the student village. Although he was still busy with his work which he planned to do in the evening, I still managed to have about one and a half hours for the interview with him.

### **Analysis and Interpretation Notes:**

In the study of the food habits of the Ugandans, questionnaires and long-term

observations were made use of. From the interviews and questionnaire administration we were able to reveal some of the insights of the food habits of the Ugandans which we did not know about before. By observing the individual personally as I did with one of the respondents, it was easier to get some of the information about the food habits which were not revealed during the interviewing sessions.

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