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Food Price Effects on the Food Consumption in Urban Areas: Case of Benin

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Abstract

The recent worldwide increase of food prices is likely to deeply affect West African countries, particularly those that are importers of staple foods such as wheat or rice. In Benin, for instance, prices for rice increased by 50 percents between 2007 and April 2008, for maize by 67 percents, and milk powder by 22 percents. This article examines the consequences of the price increases for consumption and calorie intake by households in urban areas of Benin. In particular, it deals with the food substitution induced by the rise of food prices per household. The study focuses on urban areas as they are more exposed to price changes of tradable commodities.

The analysis is going to be based on a survey on food consumption that has been carried out in 2008. The study will enumerate the extent of price effects on food consumption patterns regarding quantity, origin and quality. Quantities consumed will be aggregated to the calorie intake per household and individual while. As to the origin of food, we will distinguish between imported and domestic food. The quality aspect will be addressed by the type of food consumed such as meat, vegetables, legumes, cereals, oil which have different energy and protein contents. The following hypotheses will be tested:

- Rising food prices lead to significant reductions in the consumption of individual food items.
- Rising food prices reduce the consumption of imported staple foods.
- Imported food will be substituted by domestic food.
- Consumption will shift from meat consumption to cheaper staple foods.
- Overall calorie intake will be reduced.

Beyond these analyses, measures taken by official actors and donors to tackle the food shortages will be discussed.

Keywords: Benin, calories intake, food consumption, food prices, food substitution