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Who wants to eat more vegetables? determinants of consumption and aspiration in Ghana

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Abstract

In both high-income and low- and middle-income countries, low vegetable consumption is a key feature of poor diet quality and a central focus of nutrition interventions. However, it is often unclear whether those who under-consume vegetables actually want to change their diets.

Using primary data from 846 households across the urban-rural continuum in Ghana, this paper examines the relationship between actual vegetable consumption and the aspiration to consume more, as well as the geographic, socioeconomic, and motivational factors that drive both. Three distinct vegetable categories are considered: green leafy, “exotic”, and other vegetables. Descriptive results show that aspiration for higher vegetable consumption is widespread, with over 60 % of households wanting to consume more of at least one vegetable type. At the same time, consumption is significantly and positively associated with aspiration, indicating that households with the lowest consumption are also the least likely to want to increase it.

We then jointly examine determinants of both consumption and aspiration using stepwise OLS and seemingly unrelated regressions. Vegetable-related nutritional knowledge and positive beliefs emerge as consistent positive predictors across outcomes, while among structural determinants, only urban location has a consistently positive relationship with aspiration. Other determinants vary considerably between vegetable types. Finally, Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition shows that observable household characteristics largely explain the differences in aspiration between low- and high-consuming households for green leafy and exotic vegetables, but not for other vegetables.

Our findings point to both opportunities and constraints. While households with lower consumption are less likely to want to consume more vegetables, several observed factors can be leveraged to boost and sustain demand across all household types. Promoting vegetable-related nutrition knowledge and positive health beliefs offers a particularly promising pathway for strengthening both consumption and aspiration.

Keywords: Dietary aspirations, food demand, nutrition knowledge, vegetable consumption