

The reshaping of eating habits in Ouagadougou of Burkina Faso in a global and local context

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Abstract

This article examines the changing eating habits of city dwellers in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, in a context of globalisation, urbanisation and nutritional transition. Based on a mixed methodology comprising a quantitative survey, semi-structured interviews, field observation and documentary research, the study identifies a significant change in dietary practices, marked by a gradual shift from traditional foods to industrialised products. The analysis also reveals that the reshaping of the eating habits of city dwellers in Ouagadougou is part of a dynamic of global and local nutritional transition. Globalisation and rapid urbanisation have led to a shift away from traditional dietary practices towards modern diets. This shift is fuelled by factors such as urbanisation, increased availability of processed foods, advertising and economic constraints. Local populations are adopting new eating patterns influenced by these factors, with health and economic repercussions, including an increase in nutrition-related diseases.

Keywords: Nutritional transition, eating habits, urbanisation, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Introduction

The question of eating habits has become a central subject of study in research into contemporary social and economic transformations, particularly in developing urban environments. In the context of globalisation, the dynamics of food systems have changed considerably, shaping new food consumption practices that affect both developed and developing countries (Popkin & *et al.* 2020) [7]. This phenomenon is accompanied by a nutritional transition, with a gradual shift from traditional diets to more industrialised ones (FAO, 2021) [4].

In Africa, the process of food transition is also observable, although local specificities play a significant role in the reshaping of eating habits. Increasing urbanisation, coupled with the emergence of new social classes, is leading to significant changes in diets (Bosu, 2015) [1]. In West Africa, in particular, street food and traditional dishes are gradually giving way to more processed foods, often imported, or offered by international fast-food chains.

In Burkina Faso, changes in eating habits are following the same trend as observed in many other parts of Africa (Somé, 2022) [9]. However, Burkina Faso's health authorities are concerned about the impact of these changes on the health of the population.

Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, is a prime example of the changing face of food in West Africa. A rapidly expanding city, Ouagadougou has seen a massive influx of rural populations seeking better economic opportunities. This rapid urban growth has been accompanied by a diversification of food practices, fuelled by both the growth of street food and the opening of new fast-food outlets (Robert & *et al.*, 2020) [8].

The aim of this article is to study the issue of the changing eating habits of city dwellers in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Specifically, it aims to identify traditional and modern eating habits, to determine the reasons for this change in habits and to determine the impact of these changes on the health and economic situation of the people of Ouagadougou.

Methodological approach

This research into the changing eating habits of city dwellers focuses on the city of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso in West Africa, a city in the Central Region (Figure 1).

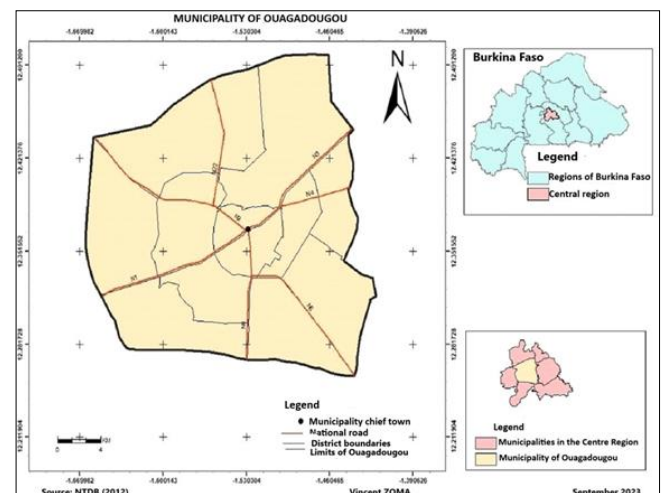


Fig 1: Map of the municipality of Ouagadougou

The city is a major cultural centre with numerous festivals, artistic events and exhibitions. Ouagadougou has modern infrastructure including hotels, restaurants, shopping centres, higher education establishments and hospitals. Ouagadougou international airport is the main point of entry for travellers from all over the world.

Ouagadougou's cuisine is varied and reflects the country's cultural diversity. There are traditional dishes as well as international culinary influences, with restaurants offering Western, Asian and other African cuisines. The city is known for its lively social life, with numerous bars, cafés and discotheques where locals gather for entertainment and socialising. It combines tradition and modernity, offering a vibrant experience for residents and visitors alike.

This research combines documentary research, direct observation in the field, a quantitative survey and semi-structured interviews.

Data collection in the field took place in May 2023 in four districts of my city of Ouagadougou. These were Zone 1, Zogona, Karpala and 1200 Logements.

The quantitative survey, based on a non-probabilistic reasoned choice, involved 52 people chosen at random from among managers and consumers found at fast-food outlets and local food processing plants. In addition, semi-directive interviews were carried out with randomly selected population groups in the study area, with 02 general practitioners and a nutrition and public health specialist. The aim of this fieldwork was to understand the different eating habits, the reasons for the changes and the health and economic implications.

The field data were supplemented by documentary research to provide a better analysis of the problem of changing eating habits in Ouagadougou.

Results and discussion

Changes in eating habits in Ouagadougou

Differentiating between traditional and modern food

Identifying the characteristics of traditional and modern foods is a challenge for those unfamiliar with the field of nutrition or agri-food. Discussions with nutritionists and food establishment managers have enabled us to develop an identification key that takes into account various criteria: composition, method of preparation, form, presentation, cultural origin, accessibility and availability.

In terms of composition, traditional foods are essentially prepared from natural ingredients such as local cereals, vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. Modern foods, on the other hand, are characterised by the addition of processed ingredients, additives and preservatives.

Traditional foods are prepared by hand, using local techniques such as cooking over a wood fire or steaming. Modern foods, on the other hand, are often the result of large-scale industrial processes, involving modern equipment such as electric ovens or blenders.

In terms of form and presentation, traditional foods generally retain a simple appearance, whereas modern foods can be heavily modified, giving rise to products such as snack bars or pre-packaged drinks.

In terms of cultural origin, traditional foods are closely linked to local customs and are often passed down from generation to generation. Modern foods, on the other hand, are influenced by international and Western dietary trends.

Finally, accessibility also distinguishes these two types of food. Traditional products are easily found in local markets or small shops, while modern foods are accessible via supermarkets and fast-food chains.

However, this distinction can be blurred, as mixes between these two types of food frequently occur in everyday life.

Traditional eating habits in Ouagadougou

According to the interviews, the people of Ouagadougou have historically favoured a diet rich in cereals, vegetables, fruit and meat. Rice, millet, sorghum and fonio form the basis of meals, accompanied by vegetable sauces and local meats. Meat such as chicken or mutton is eaten, albeit in moderation. Quick dishes such as fritters or galettes, rich in carbohydrates and proteins, are also common in the traditional diet.

This tradition varies from region to region in Burkina Faso, with notable differences such as the consumption of milk in the north and the use of cassava leaves in the south. However, urbanisation and modernity have gradually introduced imported processed foods, altering the traditional diet, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Description of different types of eating habits

Consumption period	Food type	
	Traditional foods	Modern Food
Breakfast	Porridge of cereals	Croissants, coffee, milk
	kinkeliba	fond of
	Pancakes	sandwich
	To lie down	Pastel
Lunch	To, <i>gaonré</i> , weight of earth	hamburgers,
	Rice	Spaghetti, macaroni
	Bean	Kidney, beef tongue
	Yam, cassava	chicken
Dinner	to	soup
	Leaf ratatouille (Babenda)	Rice
	rice	Attieke
	bean	pizza
	Local couscous	Arabic couscous
Drink, food supplement and snack	Peanuts	Chips, sausage, broth (Maggie), canned sardines
	Donuts, pancake	French fries, canned tomatoes
	Shea, grape, mango	Cashew, beetroot, turmeric
	Dolo, bissap Zoom- koom	Wine, beer, sweet drink
	Shea butter	Ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard
	soumbala	Chocolate, sweets (candy, lollipop)

Source: Fieldwork, May, 2023

The emergence of modern eating habits

The growing influence of urbanisation and globalisation has transformed eating habits in Ouagadougou. Traditional meals are tending to be replaced by processed and industrialised products. Fast food outlets, supermarkets and restaurants serving international dishes and packaged foods are multiplying, offering a quick alternative to local meals.

Breakfast, once made up of cereal porridges or patties, now includes bread, sugary cereals and industrial drinks. Younger generations are increasingly adopting Western dishes such as hamburgers, pizzas and chips, to the detriment of local dishes.

Table 2 summarises these changes in eating habits, according to the time of consumption.

Table 2: Identification of food types according to consumption period

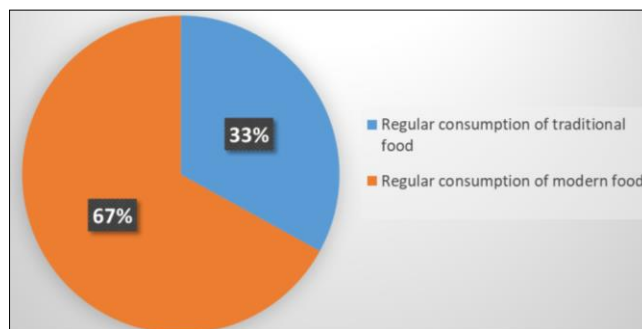
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In addition, a number of external and internal factors can be identified as driving this change, providing a basis for understanding the impact of this dietary reorganisation.

Factors influencing changes in eating habits in Ouagadougou

Changes in eating habits in the city of Ouagadougou are the result of many interdependent factors. A survey of the local population revealed that 67% of residents eat mostly modern foods, while 33% maintain a diet based on traditional and local products (Figure 2).

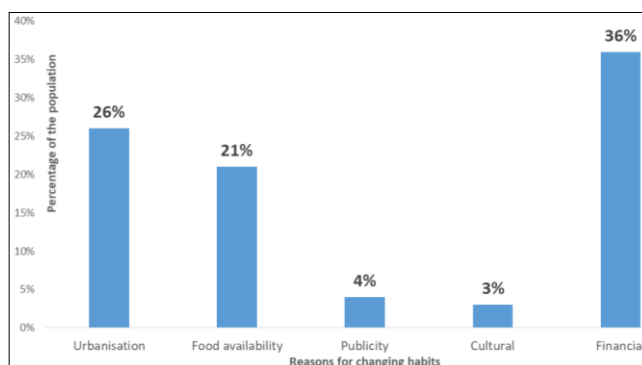


Source: fieldwork, May, 2023

Fig 2: Breakdown of types of food consumed

Analysis of the fieldwork results highlights the main drivers of this food transformation, which include rapid urbanisation, increased availability of processed foods, advertising, culture and economic constraints. These factors, illustrated in Figure 3, show the preponderance of financial

reasons (36% of respondents), followed by the influence of urbanisation (26%) and food availability (21%). By contrast, advertising and cultural influences were cited by only 4% and 3% of respondents respectively.



Source: fieldwork, May, 2023

Fig 3: Main reasons for changing eating habits

Urban expansion in Ouagadougou has significantly changed the way people live. The sedentary nature of urban jobs has reduced physical activity and encouraged the consumption of processed foods rich in calories, fat and sugar. Fast food and convenience foods have become a convenient alternative, particularly in densely populated areas. According to the data collected, people explain this preference by the increased availability of imported food products, which, despite their relatively low cost, facilitate access to fast food to the detriment of local cuisine.

In addition, industrial food products, particularly imports, are more accessible in supermarkets and fast-food outlets. These products, which are often less expensive than fresh food, are popular with an urban population whose fast-paced lifestyles leave little time for preparing traditional dishes. The immediate availability and convenience of modern foods therefore directly influence the food choices of city dwellers.

In addition, advertising campaigns, particularly those targeting the younger generation, are helping to transform food preferences. Processed foods, sugary drinks and international brands are promoted as symbols of modernity and social status. Although their impact is limited to 4% of respondents, younger generations are the most influenced by these trends. Globalisation is also reinforcing the adoption of Western diets, with fast food, pizzas and hamburgers growing in popularity in Ouagadougou.

Economic dynamics are also behind these dietary changes. Rising incomes and the emergence of a middle class mean that more households have access to products that were once seen as luxuries reserved for the elite. Access to processed and imported food, although more expensive, has thus become a sign of social distinction. Surveys show that neighbourhoods with higher purchasing power consume more imported products, gradually abandoning local cereals such as millet and sorghum.

In addition to these factors, food choice also depends on the availability of products, level of education, marital status and religious practices in Ouagadougou.

Generally speaking, according to Somé (2022) [9], in Burkina Faso, urbanisation and rapid modernisation have largely modified the traditional diet of city dwellers, particularly among young people influenced by the international media and advertising. Bougma & *et al.* (2022) [22] point out that this change in diet is particularly marked in the central areas of Ouagadougou, where modern eating practices dominate. In the outlying districts, on the other hand, traditional food practices persist, although these are tending to diminish in the face of pressure from industrialised products.

On a global scale, Cockx & *et al.* (2019) [3] highlight the role of globalisation in the evolution of urban food preferences, where processed products are perceived as an indicator of modernity. In addition, Haggblade & *et al.* (2009) [5] explain that the expansion of the informal economy, combined with rapid population growth, is encouraging the adoption of fast and affordable food, to the detriment of traditional cuisine.

So the reshaping of eating habits in Ouagadougou is part of a complex dynamic combining economic, cultural and urban factors. Although the modernisation of the food supply has led to greater access to new products, it has also had

worrying health consequences (Haggblade & *et al.*, 2009) [5].

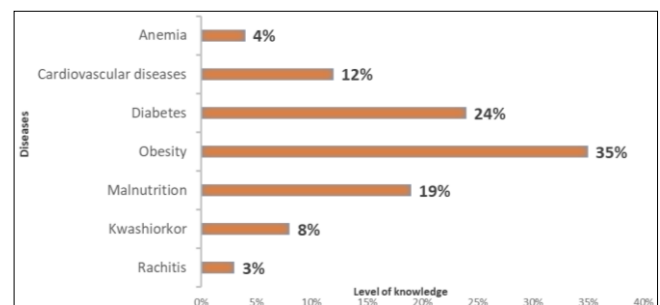
An analysis of the determining factors of dietary change in Ouagadougou shows that the consequences of this development are not limited to cultural or economic transformations. The repercussions on public health and the urban economy are far-reaching. It is therefore necessary to examine the health and economic implications of these new food practices.

Health and economic implications of changing eating habits in Ouagadougou

The transformation of eating habits in Ouagadougou represents a major challenge, both in terms of public health and the local and national economy. These changes in eating habits are not without consequences for urban populations, who are suffering the repercussions of this transition towards a diet more focused on processed products. On a global scale, these changes pose major challenges in terms of food security and sustainability, particularly for developing countries such as Burkina Faso (FAO, 2021) [4].

Worrying health implications

The health repercussions of new food practices are of particular concern in Ouagadougou, as revealed by the field survey. Although the majority of residents are aware of the dangers posed by certain modern foods, many are unaware of the specific diseases they can cause (Figure 4).



Source: Fieldwork, May, 2023

Fig 4: Knowledge of diseases linked to eating habits

Diet is a key determinant of health, and an unbalanced or deficient diet can lead to serious pathologies such as anaemia, rickets, kwashiorkor and malnutrition. On the other hand, excessive consumption of foods rich in fats, sugars and salt encourages the development of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), notably obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

In fact, modern diets, which are often low in essential nutrients (iron, vitamins A and C, etc.), can lead to nutritional deficiencies that particularly affect children. These nutritional deficiencies are at the root of diseases such as anaemia and rickets, which hamper the physical and cognitive development of the very young.

The rise of fast food and processed foods is also contributing to the increase in cases of overweight and obesity in the population. Excessive consumption of foods rich in saturated fats, salt and sugar is directly associated with these pathologies, with serious consequences for public health in the long term.

Furthermore, an unbalanced diet, with a high intake of fats

and sugars, increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, particularly hypertension and atherosclerosis. Similarly, type 2 diabetes, linked to excessive sugar consumption, is becoming an increasingly common chronic disease in Ouagadougou. This is a cause for concern because of the serious complications it can lead to, including kidney disease and blindness.

Finally, according to interviews with health professionals in Ouagadougou, certain types of cancer, such as colorectal cancer, are associated with diets low in fibre and high in animal fats. In addition, unhygienic diets can expose people to food-borne infectious diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid and hepatitis A. These diseases, which are common in developing urban areas, exacerbate health inequalities.

Individual and collective economic implications

In addition to the health consequences, food processing in Ouagadougou also has a significant economic impact, both at individual and collective level. The adoption of processed foods and fast-food outlets is leading to additional costs for households, both in terms of food budgets and health spending.

Firstly, illnesses linked to inadequate diet, such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease, entail high medical costs for households. The cost of care, medication and hospitalisation places a heavy burden on families, particularly in a context where health infrastructures remain limited and access to care is unequal.

Interviews with the specialist in nutrition and public health confirm that regular consumption of fast food is a major factor in the increase in cases of diabetes, obesity, hypertension and even cancer. These pathologies, which are often chronic, require long and costly treatments, putting additional pressure on family budgets.

On a collective level, eating habits also influence the national economy. Promoting the consumption of local, fresh and minimally processed foods could support local agriculture and encourage short marketing channels. This dynamic would not only create jobs for farmers and producers, but also strengthen the rural economy, which is essential to Burkina Faso's development.

On the other hand, the country's growing dependence on imported food products is likely to exacerbate its economic vulnerability. Massive food imports contribute to dependence on international markets, exposing Burkina Faso to fluctuations in world prices and food crises. In the long term, this dependence could undermine the country's food sovereignty and the stability of its economy.

Global issues and international trends

The phenomenon of changing eating habits in Ouagadougou is part of a wider international dynamic. As shown by the work of Hawkes & *et al.* (2017)^[6], globalisation, combined with rapid urbanisation, has played a decisive role in the adoption of Western food models, marked by growing consumption of processed products from the agri-food industry.

Global fast-food chains such as McDonald's, KFC and Subway have expanded into developing countries, contributing to the erosion of traditional diets. This dietary transition, largely driven by economic and cultural factors, has led to a homogenisation of dietary practices across the world.

This standardisation of diets has global health implications. Swinburn & *et al.* (2019)^[10] and Popkin & *et al.* (2020)^[7] note that the widespread adoption of these empty-calorie, nutrient-poor foods has led to a dramatic increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). These pathologies, such as obesity and diabetes, are no longer the exclusive preserve of rich countries, but now disproportionately affect populations in developing countries, where health infrastructures are not always adapted to meet these new challenges.

Conclusion

The transformation of eating habits in Ouagadougou, analysed through the many factors influencing this dynamic, highlights the tensions between tradition and modernity. These changes, which mirror global trends, are marked by a gradual transition towards a more industrialised diet, associated with urbanisation, globalisation and changing lifestyles. The distinction between traditional and modern food, as well as the emergence of eating habits influenced by outside cultures, bears witness to a rapid reshaping of the diets of city dwellers.

The implications of this change are far-reaching, in both health and economic terms. On the one hand, the benefits of food modernisation include greater product diversity and convenience. However, these benefits are accompanied by public health risks, notably an increase in non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The incidence of these diseases, linked to an unbalanced diet rich in fats and sugars, is becoming a growing concern, not only for individual health but also for Burkina Faso's already fragile health system.

The transformation of eating habits in Ouagadougou, analysed through the many factors influencing this dynamic, highlights the tensions between tradition and modernity. These changes, which reflect global trends, are marked by a gradual transition to a more industrialised diet, associated with urbanisation, globalisation and changing lifestyles. The distinction between traditional and modern food, as well as the emergence of eating habits influenced by outside cultures, is evidence of a rapid reshaping of the way city dwellers eat.

The implications of this change are considerable, in terms of both health and the economy. On the one hand, the benefits of food modernisation include greater product diversity and convenience. However, with these benefits come risks to public health, including an increase in non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The incidence of these diseases, linked to an unbalanced diet rich in fats and sugars, is becoming increasingly worrying, not only for the health of individuals but also for Burkina Faso's already fragile health system.

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