

# Food habits of rural Swazi households: 1939-1999

## Part 2: Social structural and ideological influences on Swazi food habits

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### OPSOMMING

Die artikel bied basiese inligting oor die eetgewoontes van landelike Swazi huishoudings. Dit bevat 'n oorsig oor die literatuur in verband met die Swazi eetgewoontes gedurende die afgelope ses dekades asook die bevindings van 'n gevallestudie oor die eetgewoontes van tien geselekteerde Swazi huishoudings in Ka-Mantsholo in die Badplaasdistrik.

Hamilton se model (1987) vir die drie komponente van kultuur, naamlik tegnologie, sosiale struktuur en ideologie, is vir die teoretiese raamwerk gebruik. Die sosiale struktuur en ideologie soos dit deur voedsel weerspieël word, word in hierdie artikel bespreek.

Die gepubliseerde literatuur sowel as die gevallestudie dui daarop dat die Swazi eetkultuur nog baie tradisioneel is. Daar is 'n mate van verandering van die maaltydpatrone (van twee na drie maaltye per dag) en in die samestelling van maaltye (in die sin dat die maaltye op weksdae en Saterdag die tradisionele samestelling van pap met 'n bykos weerspieël, maar dat veral Sondagmiddagetes en ontbyte sterk tekens van westerse akkulturasie vertoon). Kern, sekondêre kern en perifere voedsels is onderskeibaar in die Swazi dieet. Die wyse waarop voedsel gebruik word om vriendskap en gasvryheid te betoon, hoe dit tydens feesvierings, as beloning, tydens rituele en as prestige- en status- simbole gebruik word, word ook aangetoon. Hierbenewens word die heersende voedsel ideologie met die tradisionele vergelyk.

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to establish baseline data on the current food habits of selected rural Swazi households in the Southern Highveld Region of the Mpumalanga Province for household food security programmes. No studies have been done before in this area and as such there is no baseline information available as a basis for food security and nutrition-related programmes.

This article presents a literature review and a case study on the description of the food habits of selected rural Swazi households in the Ka-Mantsholo district (Mpumelelo Village) (between Badplaas and Barberton). The region is on the border of Swaziland and South Africa. The main aim of this investigation was to determine and compare the current food habits of the selected Swazi-speaking rural households with the available documented information on the traditional food habits of the Swazi people. The literature review is based on the few studies conducted in Swaziland with regard to food habits (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). In terms of the traditional food habits of the Swazi people these publications were the only sources of information the authors could obtain.

Data regarding the ten selected households were collected with the aid of a structured interview schedule. Participants were questioned on aspects such as food cultivation and acquisition, food preparation methods and facilities, and meal patterns and composition. To determine whether traditional beliefs and customs were still practised, information on food avoidances and food consumption on special occasions was also obtained. A food frequency list was completed as a crosscheck for meal patterns and composition as well as how familiar the participants were with traditional and Western foods, and how often these foods were consumed.

The majority of the participants had little formal education. Seven of them had attended school and three had no formal education. Of the seven participants who had attended school, one had acquired a Grade 9 qualification and the others had Grade 7 or lower. The size of the households ranged from four to ten members per household. This household size was similar to that reported by Ogle and Grivetti (1985). Most of the participants indicated that they belonged to the Christian faith.

The available documentation on Swazi food habits will be presented together with the findings from the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Part 2 reports on the social and ideological influences on Swazi food habits, whereas Part 1 reported on the technological influences (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 2000). Hamilton's model (Hamilton, 1987) on the three components of culture was used as frame of reference to present the information from the literature review and the case study. The model developed by Hamilton (1987) as a unifying metatheory for dress, is based on cultural anthropology and would also be appropriate in describing food habits. Food habits as subsystem of the macro-cultural system are also based on the three primary and interrelated subsystems of culture, namely technology (material culture), social structure (social behaviour) and ideology (beliefs, attitudes and values). Hamilton's model (Hamilton, 1987) is based on the assumption that culture is a dynamic, interacting and changing system. Food habits have also been described as dynamic (Fieldhouse, 1995:1) and Hamilton's model was therefore deemed appropriate for a study of food habits.

Culture is generally conceived as the non-biological means by which humans adapt to the environment. Taylor in Hamilton (1987) described culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Thus food and food habits can be viewed as a sub-cultural system. Food is part of culture and food habits are influenced by culture. Mead and Guthe (in De Garine, 1972:143) defined food habits as "the means by which individuals or groups of individuals in response to social and cultural pressures, select, consume and utilise portions of available food supply". Fieldhouse (1995:1) further stated that food habits come into being and are maintained because they are effective, practical and meaningful behaviours in a particular culture.

The contribution of the social structural and ideological influences to changes observed in the Swazi people's food habits will be highlighted.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Food habits tend to reflect the social structures that exist within a particular culture. As indicated by Fieldhouse (1995:79): "food behaviour is thus a guide to both social structure and social relationships". People are often unconscious of the social rules, which govern their food behaviour, and just accept it as simply, how things are done. "Shared food habits also provide a sense of belonging because they are an affirmation of cultural identity and as such are not easily given up" (Fieldhouse, 1995:76). Similar to other cultural groups, within the Swazi culture, there are also various ways in which food define social behaviour and denote meaning to social situations.

How socially founded aspects influenced the food habits of the Swazi will be discussed under the sub-

headings of meal patterns; friendship and hospitality; celebrations; food as reward; rituals; prestige and status.

## Meal patterns

Meal patterns are discussed in terms of the number of meals per day and the composition of the meals.

**Number of meals per day** The rural Swazi households who participated in the case study by Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) indicated that three meals were consumed per day. Nine participants reported that they ate three meals per day, while one reported that two meals per day were consumed in her household. It seemed as if the change from two meals per day to three meals per day must have started around the time of Jones's study where she observed that in some Swazi households three meals per day instead of the two meals per day were consumed as was reported by Beemer (1939). The general tendency according to Jones (1963:79) was, however, that in the rural areas, and many peri-urban areas, two meals per day were eaten. Studies amongst other ethnic groups also confirmed the tendency to consume three meals per day instead of two meals per day that were consumed traditionally by most of the other black ethnic groups (Oudkerk, 1965; Crous & Borchardt, 1982; Brink & Boshoff, 1983; Crous & Borchardt, 1984; Crous & Borchardt, 1986).

Traditionally a morning and an evening meal were served (Beemer, 1939; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). The informal morning meal was eaten mid-morning and the different age and gender groups each assembled separately at different times for this meal. The evening meal was considered the main meal of the day and was served at sunset. The evening meal was a joint meal and the different age and gender groups all gathered at the great hut (*indlunkulu*) for this meal (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:82).

The three meals reported by Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) included breakfast, lunch and supper similar to the Western meal pattern. No precise times were given for these meals. Breakfast was eaten during weekdays after the children have left for school, between 08:00 and 09:00, and the majority of the participants reported that they had lunch after the children had returned from school (around 14:00) and that supper was eaten between 18:00 and 19:00. The main meal of the day was indicated to be at lunchtime. It seemed as if the number and timing of meals were nowadays dictated by the school activities of the children, while working the fields as well as the availability of water and fuel supplies previously influenced the meal patterns as suggested by Jones (1963: 62, 79).

In-between meal snacking was a common practice as reported by Beemer (1939). This pattern was confirmed by Jones (1963:71, 83) who indicated that most snacks were seasonal in nature and included jugo beans (usually boiled and carried to the fields), sugar cane, wild fruit, roasted groundnuts and *amahewu*. Twenty years later Ogle and Grivetti (1985), however,

reported that the Swazi people snacked on leftovers and bread or frequently drank the fermented porridge **amahewu**. In the study of Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) in-between meal snacking seemed not to be a common practice. Eight of the participants indicated that they ate nothing between meals. Two participants, however, indicated that beverages such as tea or soft drinks (cordials) were consumed. This is in contrast to the findings of Jones (1963:79) who reported that snacks were eaten throughout the day. The decline in snacking between meals can probably be attributed to the availability of the wild and indigenous food items in the Ka-Mantsholo area.

**Composition of traditional Swazi meals** The composition of the traditional Swazi meals has also undergone changes during the past 100 years. Prince Madevu Dlamini indicated to Jones (1963:66) that at the end of the 19th century sour milk (**emasi**) was the core food of the Swazi people. The morning meal consisted of **emasi** or sorghum porridge while the evening meal consisted of **emasi** and porridge prepared from boiled crushed maize. The rinderpest in 1897, which destroyed most of the Swazi cattle herds caused radical changes in the Swazi diet and resulted in the replacement of the staple food milk with maize. Jones (1963:67) indicated that a decline in the custom of mixing the crushed grain with the curds of milk resulted, and consequently the Sotho eating pattern was adopted whereby the maize porridge was shaped by the hand and dipped into the bowl of relish. Milk, however, was still considered as an important food by the Swazi people (Jones, 1963:75-76).

The meals of the rural population in Swaziland consisted of two dishes namely the staple maize prepared as a porridge, and a side dish (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:81; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). The side-dishes were prepared from legumes, vegetables and meat. Depending on availability, there were generally two types of side dishes, the relish **umshibo** and stew **sithulo**. The **umshibo** relishes were prepared from green, leafy vegetables, from cultivated types such as cabbage, pumpkin tops or spinach, or from the numerous varieties of wild edible leaves. These were typically boiled, then seasoned with peanuts, fried onions and tomatoes. The **sithulo** relish was a meat stew served with the porridge (Ogle & Grivetti, 1985).

#### **Current composition of meals during weekdays and weekends**

All participants reported that the composition of breakfast was the same during weekdays and weekends (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Breakfast foods included soft sour porridge with sugar and / or bread and tea or coffee. Bread was eaten with peanut butter or jam and to a lesser extent margarine. Sometimes bread was substituted with dumplings, scones or vetkoek. Tea and coffee were drunk with coffee creamer. Only one participant reported that relish was served with porridge for breakfast, and four indicated that eggs with bread was served for breakfast, when eggs were available.

Lunch consisted of two dishes, namely stiff maize-meal porridge and a side dish. It seemed as if maize-

meal porridge was eaten almost daily, although it was sometimes substituted with rice or mealie-rice or **phuthu** (maize-meal porridge cooked in such a way that its texture resembled bread crumbs) served with fresh or sour milk and sometimes with a relish. The relish (side-dish) can either be a leafy vegetable dish, meat, fish, eggs or legumes, but mostly it would be a leafy vegetable dish. One participant also reported that samp and beans were sometimes eaten.

The meals eaten for supper resembled that of the lunch and breakfast meals. The participants in the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) reported that they ate leftovers from lunch, or that they cooked maize-meal porridge and relish for supper. What was interesting to note was that they alternated the relish they had for lunch and for supper. For example if they ate pumpkin leaves for lunch they had another vegetable or milk or fish for supper. Others reported that they ate a light supper in the evening. The light supper included tea with bread or scones or dumplings.

Similar kinds of foods were served for lunch during weekdays and Saturdays. Seven participants, however, reported that the meal composition for the Sunday midday meal differed and three reported that it was the same as during weekdays. Those who reported a difference indicated that the midday meal on Sundays was the main meal of the day and was regarded as the culinary highlight of the week. This elaborate meal consisted of non-traditional Swazi dishes such as rice, fried or roasted or stewed chicken, salads, cooked vegetables such as pumpkin, mashed potatoes and cabbage. This pattern was similar to the findings by Oudkerk (1965), Manning et al. (1974), Brink and Boshoff (1983) and Crous and Borchardt (1982) who also pointed out that with regard to other black groups the Sunday lunch was a more elaborate meal compared to that of weekdays. Supper on Sundays usually consisted of leftovers from lunch or porridge and a relish. Tea and bread, or its substitutes, were also sometimes enjoyed.

Table 1 summarises the eating patterns of the ten rural Swazi households.

The meal structure of these participants has not changed much from that noted by Jones (1963:82-83) and Ogle and Grivetti (1985) with the exception of the composition of breakfast and the Sunday lunch. The majority of the participants reported that they had tea and bread for breakfast, whereas the main meal during weekdays still consisted of stiff maize-meal porridge served with a relish. The reported changes were only with regard to the kind of food used to prepare the relish.

**Serving of and eating of meals** Food portions were allocated strictly according to ranking within the household as well as the age and gender of the person served (Jones, 1963:59). Serving sequence was therefore also a sign of the respect a person enjoyed in the household. The head of the household was always served first in recognition of his status as the head of the household however, the first spoon of

**TABLE 1: EATING PATTERNS OF TEN RURAL SWAZI HOUSEHOLDS (1999)**

<b>Number of meals a day (n=10)</b>	
Three meals a day	9
Two meals a day	1
<b>Composition of meals on weekdays and weekends (n=10)</b>	
Breakfast is similar on weekdays and weekends	10
Lunch is similar on weekdays and weekends except for Sundays	7
Lunch is similar on weekdays and weekends	3
Supper is similar on weekdays and weekends	10

porridge from the container was placed on an inverted lid of a cooking vessel. It was believed that if a man ate that first helping he would be the first to fall during a war (Jones, 1963:81). The head of the house therefore received the next helping and care was taken to pat the surfaces of his portion of the porridge neatly. Adult males were next to be served, then adult women, children and finally the women who prepared the food. The porridge was served in wooden bowls or enamel plates. The relish was served separately in smaller bowls. The porridge was shaped into a ball or sausage with one hand, dipped into the relish and then eaten (Jones, 1963:82).

The participants in the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) indicated that the tendency of eating together as a household was still common practice and this was encouraged. In eight of the ten households interviewed it was reported that they ate together as a household. The other two households explained that it was impossible to eat together during school days (it was however stated that when the whole family was present, they did eat together). Although the head of the household was traditionally excluded from sharing of a meal with the rest of the household, Jones (1963:82) reported that communal eating was encouraged within the Swazi culture and the sharing of food was according to age, gender and kinship groups.

The custom of washing hands before eating was still practised and was reported by all participants (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). All indicated that they mainly ate with their hands, except when the consistency of the food was such that it needed to be eaten with a spoon, for example when soft porridge or rice was served. Spoons and teaspoons were the commonly used cutlery for this purpose.

Apart from serving as nourishment, food and the act of eating has many associations and meanings attached to it and is for example often used as an important vehicle to express hospitality, gratitude, prestige and status as well as to perform rituals with, and also in symbolising or marking certain feasts and celebrations (Fieldhouse, 1995:78).

#### **Friendship and hospitality**

Fieldhouse (1995:83) eloquently stated that "food is used as a universal medium to express sociability and hospitality". The kind of food and meals that people share can therefore be regarded as an indication of the closeness and the type of social relationship that exist between them. In the Swazi culture kinship ties

also imposed laws of hospitality and sharing of food with relatives and children were taught from an early age to share food (Kuper, 1964:49). Food was brought along as a gift when visiting the home of a relative and on departure the relative was in return given food for the journey home (Jones, 1963:51). Hospitality was traditionally extended to all neighbours who were invited when a beast was slaughtered (Beemer, 1939). According to custom, women were prevented from coming into contact with the cattle (Jones, 1963:41), because it was believed that a menstruating woman can cause harm to the cattle, therefore only males were allowed to attend the slaughtering of the beast and Jones (1963:72) reported that the male visitor was expected to eat his portion before departure, but was permitted to take a small portion home for the children.

Food was always served to guests, even in times of shortages (Jones, 1963:60). In African cultures it was considered to be impolite not to feed a guest, and it was also impolite for a guest to decline the food offered (Fieldhouse, 1995:85). When a household had guests, the men were served beer and women food. Traditionally the female guest would help the housewife in the preparation of the meal. When serving food to visitors the male visitor received his own bowl of food, whereas the female visitor might have shared the meal with the hostess (Jones, 1963:60). Food for the journey home was given to anyone departing after a visit (Jones, 1963:60).

The custom to serve special foods for guests and on special occasions was still practised, although the type of food served had changed, in comparison to that which was served traditionally (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Distinguished guests were served a Westernised special "Sunday meal" (consisting of rice, chicken vegetables and / or vegetable salads and a dessert of jelly or canned fruit and custard), or traditional delicacies such as samp and indigenous beans, or a mixture of roasted maize kernels or maize meal with groundnuts, which was ground to resemble a butter. Cold drink and biscuits were also regarded as suitable food for distinguished guests (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999).

#### **Celebrations**

Food is often used to indicate special occasions. Celebrations are held for various reasons such as to celebrate a particular religious event, a harvest, or to pay homage to ancestors and to honour the dead. It is sometimes used to mark national events such as

independence or personal celebrations such as birthdays and weddings. In general, foods associated with celebrations have high status because they may be scarce, of high quality, often expensive and sometimes are difficult and time-consuming to prepare (Fieldhouse, 1995:93). In most black South African societies meat was reserved for special occasions, such as birth, initiation and marriage celebrations as well as at funerals, where the entire animal would be consumed by the crowd gathered for the specific occasion (Kuper, 1964:43; Coetzee, 1982:16,112; Fieldhouse, 1995:93). Meat and traditional beer were also regarded as the basis of any Swazi festivity (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:84). During *lobola* (handing over of bride wealth), weddings and funerals large quantities of food are prepared and consumed. The consumption of excessive quantities of meat and beer are synonymous with pleasure and contentment. During the handing over of the *lobola*, one of the cattle was slaughtered by a representative of the bride's family and was equally apportioned between the two families to symbolise their mutual acceptance of the marriage (Jones, 1963:61). The birth of a child was usually celebrated when a goat was slaughtered a few days after the birth of a baby (Jones, 1963:174).

One of the participants in the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) reported that traditionally neighbours used to bring food to the funeral because the bereaved family was in a state of shock and were not in the position to prepare food themselves. Today it is common practice to slaughter a beast and to have bread and scones for the people who come to comfort the bereaved family.

#### Food as reward

It was common practice to offer food and traditional beer as incentive if a household wanted neighbours to help them in their fields, especially with weeding and harvesting (Jones, 1963:47). The essential part of the reward was that the food and / or beer was consumed immediately after the task had been completed as a way of satisfying the hunger and thirst caused by the task (Jones, 1963:47; Kuper, 1964:41).

#### Rituals

Fieldhouse (1995:100) described rituals and sacrifices as envisaged repetitive acts carried out in a codified manner. Jones (1963: 51-52) described rainmaking and *Incwala* (first fruit ceremony) as two rituals practiced by the Swazi that have a bearing on food. In Swaziland the prerogative of making rain lies with the king and his mother and the Magagula clan. For the rainmaking ritual, a pregnant ewe was slaughtered for sacrificial purposes (Jones, 1963:56).

Most cultures have particular rituals or procedures to de-sanctify the first crop in order to make it suitable for ordinary humans. In the Swazi culture the *Incwala* is such an event and it takes place either at the end of December or early January, when crops reach fruition. The consumption of new crops such as maize, pumpkins, gourds and sugar cane were prohibited until the

*Incwala* was performed. Up to the time of the *Incwala* households were thus restrained from eating these new crops. On the fourth day of the *Incwala* the king, followed by the royal family and other officials, ceremoniously bit the new season's crops. At the end of the *Incwala* people returned home, and each head of a household had to ritually partake of the new crops of the homestead (Jones, 1963:52-53). Thereafter the household was allowed to eat from the new crops.

#### Prestige and status

Some foods confer high status on those who consume them, while others assume status or lack of status as a result of the status of the people who habitually eat them. Status may be conferred by the freedom to choose rare and expensive items in order to impress others (Fieldhouse, 1995:80-81). Jones (1963:84) and Kuper (1964:42) described meat and traditional beer as the most prestigious foods in the Swazi culture and they were deemed essential foods for all the important celebrations. Beer was not regarded as a drink, but as a supreme Swazi food. Ogle and Grivetti (1985) also reported that meat, and specifically beef, was a prestigious food, typically served at ceremonies and feasts. Cattle were the main symbol of accumulated wealth and therefore the most valued property of the Swazi, and as such it was rarely slaughtered for food. On the other hand sheep and goats were regarded as the poor man's wealth and were more frequently slaughtered for food (Beemer, 1939). When a beast was slaughtered, a special dish *sidlwadlwa*, prepared from the fat portion of the gravy to which finely grounded sorghum or maize was added, was served to important guests and adults (Jones, 1963:73). Some foods on the other hand have a low status. The indigenous green leafy vegetables were generally regarded as women's food (Jones, 1963:70) and were not considered suitable to serve to guests as opposed to the cultivated vegetables (Ogle & Grivetti, 1985).

#### FOOD IDEOLOGY

Hamilton (1987) described ideology as a set of cognitive rules explicit and implicit, which defines what is good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, while McIntosh (1995:159) viewed ideology as encompassing a society's beliefs, meanings and values that tend to be expressed symbolically through mythology and religion, folklore, dance, literature and language. It can therefore be argued that if ideology includes all of a society's concepts of the world and man's place in it, then even food habits will reflect the ideology of a society.

The food ideology, subscribed to by a given cultural group, therefore will represent a collection of learned beliefs, attitudes, values and philosophies within a particular social group. This will also reflect on how the group ought to conduct itself with regard to eating behaviour (Fieldhouse, 1995: 30). Eckstein in Fieldhouse (1995: 30) regarded food ideology as the sum

total of attitudes, beliefs, customs and taboos affecting a given group. It includes what people think of as food (beliefs), what effect the food will have on their health and what they think is suitable for different groups within a society according for example to age, gender and social status. What people think is suitable to be regarded as acceptable as a food item constitutes an important part of the cultural stability of a society and is passed on from one generation to the next through the process of socialisation. There is no social group that classifies all potential food as food. Humans accept food items as edible or inedible and establish preferences amongst food on the basis of sensory and cultural characteristics (Messer, 1984:433). The Swazi like all cultures are also guided in their food habits by their beliefs, attitudes, values and philosophies. Some of the traditional beliefs, attitudes and values with regard to food are still evident as indicated in the food listed to be avoided by certain groups as well as the food deemed special for certain occasions.

Ideology also provides a context within which food categorisation occurs. According to Fieldhouse (1995:32) "in every society there are rules, usually unwritten, which specify what is food, and what is not food". Food can be classified according to nutritional value, cultural usage, emotional importance or a combination thereof. Fieldhouse (1995:37) explained that "the purpose of food categorisation is often descriptive" and that the categorisation can be used as an indication of how a society assigns value to food. Some of the classifications have a rational basis, while with others it is difficult to justify the rationale behind the classification (Fieldhouse, 1995:33). Two food classification schemes, the one by Jelliffe (1967) and the other by Passim and Bennett (in Sanjur, 1982:25) can also be applied to the foods used by the Swazi households in the case study of Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999). In Jelliffe's classification food is categorised as cultural super foods, prestige foods, body image, sympathetic magic foods and physiological group foods (Jelliffe, 1967).

### Cultural classification of Swazi foods

**Cultural super foods** Cultural super foods are described as being usually, but not always, the dominant staple food and will often contribute substantially to the energy intake of the diet (Jelliffe, 1967). Traditionally, sorghum was regarded as the cultural super food in the Swazi diet (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:84; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). It was not indicated when maize was introduced, but white maize which substituted sorghum, formed the core of the Swazi diet during the past sixty years (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:85; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985, and Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). The importance of these two cereals was also indicated by the ceremony where the newborn baby was fed a fine gruel of either one of these cereals, and as explained by Jelliffe (1967) mothers usually preferred to feed their young children the cultural super food. When a household was without maize or sorghum it was regarded as starving even if other food items were available (Jones, 1963:67). In the case study by Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) it was indicated that maize remains a cultural super food for the Swazi.

It forms an important part of the daily meals and is often consumed twice a day (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999).

**Prestige foods** Prestige foods refer to those foods reserved for important occasions or people who have status in a society (Jelliffe, 1967). They are often relatively scarce and expensive foods. Traditional beer and meat were regarded to be prestige foods for the Swazi (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:84-84; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). Beer, as already indicated, was considered a supreme Swazi food and was an integral part of all celebrations that marked the life stages of a person. It was an accompaniment and / or essential part of most rituals, from the birth of a person up to his / her burial and even after a person's death, beer was used for the occasion marking the end of the mourning period (Jones, 1963:78). Beer was also used to make appeals to the ancestors by offering beer and to bring back dead spirits (Jones, 1963:60). Meat and traditional beer are still regarded as prestige foods in the Swazi diet. The results of the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) showed that meat from a slaughtered beast or goat from the family's own herd and traditional beer were still regarded as compulsory food items for weddings, funerals and ancestral communication.

**Body image foods** Body image foods are those foods that are associated with how the body functions (Jelliffe, 1967). Jones (1963:85) reported that the Swazi were aware of the relationship between food, health and body fat. Poor physical appearance of children was blamed on wrong feeding. Plumpness was regarded as a sign of prosperity, while thinness indicated want. Milk was regarded as an important health food and was used as a purifying medicine on certain ritual occasions (Beemer, 1939).

**Sympathetic magic foods** "Sympathetic magic foods refer to those foods that are believed to have special properties that are imparted to those who consume it" (Fieldhouse, 1995:37). Applied to the Swazi food habits, this class of foods can be deduced from the beliefs related to food restrictions and special foods. For example only older men and women were allowed to eat a specific liver lobe because the belief was that younger people would become forgetful if they consumed it (Jones, 1963:72). Females from puberty onwards were forbidden to consume eggs because it was believed that eggs caused women to lust after men (Jones, 1963:75). Children and all adults, who were still in their childbearing age, were forbidden to consume meat of an aborted animal because it was believed that their offspring would also be aborted (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). A participant also reported that men and the elderly were not allowed to eat soft porridge. The reason given for this was that they would become lazy, and for the elderly that it would give them sore knees. A pregnant woman was not allowed to eat sugar cane and groundnuts, or to share food with her husband (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). It was believed that the sugar cane would cause the baby to be born covered with mucus. A pregnant woman who eats groundnuts when she is five or more months pregnant will give

birth to a dirty baby. Sharing food with her husband exposes her to impurities that may harm the unborn baby. Jones (1963:171) also reported on food restrictions during pregnancy. Pregnant women avoided eating liver and kidneys for these were believed to cause baldness of the baby and the consumption of wild honey was believed to lead to a blind or one with under-sized eyes.

**Physiological group foods** Physiological group foods are those foods reserved for or restricted to a person of a particular physiological group according to age, gender or physiological condition (Jelliffe, 1967). Although milk was regarded as an important food, there were rules that governed the consumption of milk for certain age and gender groups. As a result of the belief that women have power to cause harm to the cattle by causing them to abort or die, contact between women and cattle was limited. During certain stages in her reproductive life, contact between women and cattle, and even the food products derived from cattle, were forbidden. For example women and girls were not allowed to eat **emasi** during menstruation and a woman was also prohibited to consume milk during the first month after childbirth or a miscarriage (Jones, 1963:74, 76).

A woman could eat **emasi** at her childhood home for the rest of her life; however, upon marriage she was not allowed to consume the milk products from her husband's herd until the birth of her first child. Only after the birth of the first child would a husband give his wife permission to consume the milk from his herd. This permission was customarily symbolised by the gift of a cow (Jones 1963:75). Jones (1963:76) reported that women were only allowed to eat **emasi** in the privacy of their own huts and not in public. Children were only allowed to consume milk at their own homes because there was a strong belief that if a child ate **emasi** away from home, and the child was not used to **emasi**, it would cause worms in the child (Jones, 1963:76). The consumption of eggs was forbidden for infants, children and women (Jones, 1963:75). No explanation is given why eggs were forbidden for children. Jones (1963:72) indicated that when an ox was slaughtered some parts of the entrails including spleen, liver, heart and sweetbreads were forbidden for women. Part of the entrails called **umsasane** was also forbidden for women prior to menopause. The contents of the facial sinuses combined with liver and sweetbreads were roasted for senior women (Jones, 1963:72). Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) noted that most of the participants were not abiding by some of these food restrictions anymore to such an extent that they did not remember some of them. A possible explanation for not adhering to these restrictions can be found in the fact that most of the participants in the case study indicated that they belonged to the Christian faith and according to Kuper (1964:42) many Christians did not follow the traditional food taboos after being converted. A few of the participants reported that children and all adults were forbidden to consume the cleaner part of the intestines (**msasane**), sweetbreads (**amalulu**), brain tissue and the reproductive organs when a bull was castrated (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999).

In their case study Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) reported that milk was indicated as food that was good for children and the explanation given was that it encourages growth and that it was recommended by the clinic nurses. With reference to special foods, the following were indicated for different age and gender groups. Porridge and green leafy vegetable relishes were reported to be good for women. Jones (1963:70) also indicated that vegetables were regarded as food for women and children. Porridge, meat and beer were mentioned as suitable foods for men and no particular reasons were given, except that this custom is based on traditional beliefs. Milk, eggs and meat were regarded as suitable for pregnant women and the reason for this was that the clinic nurses recommended the use of these foods. Soft porridge was reported to be the suitable food for a breastfeeding woman because it is soft enough and provides strength. Soft porridge and fermented maize beverage were regarded as suitable for sick people because these were soft enough for easy swallowing and were also regarded as a food that replenishes bodily strength.

Other beliefs with regard to food were documented by Jones (1963:74-75, 71) and included the following food products:

Milk and **emasi** were not to be eaten by anyone, anytime or just anywhere. The Swazi were only permitted to eat **emasi** at the home of someone with the same clan name or the same clan name as one's mother (Jones, 1963:75).

Consuming the meat of totem animals, linked to certain clan names, was also forbidden to persons belonging to that particular clan. This supports Jones' findings (1963:171) that a childbearing woman was not allowed to eat the food forbidden by her husband's clan.

Fish was not consumed because there was a strong belief that fish resembled snakes (Jones, 1963:74).

Although not all of the participants knew about all the food avoidances with regard to the different age and gender groups, they, however, knew that women were forbidden to consume milk from cows when breastfeeding and the reason given was that the cows would dry up (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999).

Passim and Bennett (in Sanjur, 1982:25) proposed the other method of categorising foods by dividing food items into three categories. According to Passim and Bennett's classification foods can be grouped into core, secondary core and peripheral foods on the basis of the frequency of consumption and the emotional importance attached to the specific food item. Based on this categorisation Fieldhouse (1995:38) described core foods as the "universal, regular, staple, important and consistently used foods" that are consumed by most members of a society, and he also regarded the core food as "the mainstay of the diet". Core foods are related to the core values of the society, and any interference with them tends to unravel the whole cultural system. Resistance to dietary

changes will therefore be the greatest if the core foods are involved (Fieldhouse, 1995:38). Secondary core foods are those that are in widespread use, but are not necessarily consumed by everyone in a society. They are of less importance in the diet, and the emotional values attached to these are therefore not as strong, compared to the core foods. Peripheral foods are the least commonly and infrequently consumed, with no emotional value attached to them. For the purpose of the case study, core foods referred to those food items that were consumed on a daily basis, while secondary core foods referred to those that were consumed at least once a week or more often. Peripheral foods were consumed at least once a month or when available.

Results from the ten participating households (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) indicated that some foods were used regularly and consistently by all, while others were in widespread use, although not often, and others were seldomly used.

### Swazi core, secondary core and peripheral foods

**Core foods** Sorghum, and later maize, indigenous leafy vegetables and legumes were examples of core foods in the traditional Swazi diet (Beemer, 1939; Jones, 1963:84). Maize, bread, leafy vegetables, milk (fresh and sour) and salt seemed, according to this classification, to be the core foods of the households interviewed (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Although these results were very similar to those reported by Beemer (1939) and Jones (1963:67-71), bread was the exception. Although Beemer (1939) and Jones (1963:79) observed that bread consumption was increasing it was not regarded as important as the other foods. Therefore, according to Passim and Bennett's classification, bread could have been classified as secondary food during the time when Beemer and Jones respectively reported on the food habits of the Swazi people. When looking at the present consumption patterns of the ten households interviewed, it was reported that bread was eaten second most often after maize porridge - almost daily for breakfast and / or supper. The importance and frequency of consumption of bread by this group seemed to have increased in comparison to the traditional and previously reported frequency of consumption. Therefore maize, as well as bread, can be classified as core foods for this particular group.

**Secondary core foods** Examples of secondary core food in the Swazi diet would include for instance the recently introduced foods such as rice, scones, vetkoek as well as the cultivated vegetables such as cabbage, tomatoes, onions (Jones, 1963:71; Ogle & Grivetti, 1985). The secondary core foods for this group are listed in Table 2. With the exception of meat, steamed bread and legumes, most of the other food items (rice, samp, scones, vetkoek, cabbage, spinach, potatoes, green beans, beetroot, chicken, milk powder, coffee creamer, fresh and tinned fish, cooking oil, peanut butter, white sugar, curry powder and gravy powder) listed, were not part of the traditional food pattern of the Swazi people. Some of

these items were, however, indicated as being included on a regular basis, if available and affordable according to Beemer (1939) and Jones (1963:70-71, 76.)

**Peripheral foods** Examples of peripheral foods in the traditional Swazi diet were wild fruits that were only seasonally available. After urbanisation the type of food used as snacks also changed and sweets, chocolate, ice cream, buns, biscuits and soft drinks were included (Jones, 1963:83). According to Passim and Bennett's classification all processed meats and dairy products can be regarded as peripheral foods for the participants in the case study. The inclusion of Western foods, for example vegetables such as lettuce and green peppers, certain cereal products such as pasta, bread rolls and oats porridge, as well as margarine, mayonnaise, pepper, tomato sauce and spices were also indicated, and can be regarded as peripheral foods. Although most fruits were known and liked, they were rarely eaten. The limited consumption of fresh fruit could possibly be due to availability and affordability.

All the participants (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) indicated that they knew and still used traditional Swazi food when available. Unfortunately their children were not used to some of the traditional foods due to limited exposure. The indigenous leafy vegetables and legumes were, however, still in widespread use. This supported the findings by Ogle & Grivetti (1985) that indigenous leafy vegetables play an important role in the Swazi diet. There is concern that the wealth of knowledge of some of these indigenous foods was lost to the younger generation.

On the other hand, new foods have been incorporated into the traditional Swazi diet such as rice, bread, pasta, processed and convenience foods. Vegetables such as cabbage, spinach, potatoes, onions and tomatoes form an integral part in the preparation of relishes of the ten rural households interviewed. Jones (1963:70-71) also indicated the popularity of these vegetables.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the size of the sample the findings of the case study cannot be generalised for all Swazi households but gives some indication of the current food habits of rural Swazi households on which to base further research. Although physical food availability forms an integral part of food habits, social and ideological factors are equally important because they determine the utilisation of the available food and intra-household food distribution and consumption patterns. From both the literature and the case study the notion that food is used to define social structure, to denote social situations and to fulfil social functions, is supported. These studies seemed to suggest that livestock such as cattle and goats served other social functions rather than serving as a source of food. Cattle and goats were only slaughtered during special occasions such as wedding celebrations, ancestral worship and

**TABLE 2: CLASSIFICATION OF FOOD USED**

Food group	Core foods	Secondary core foods	Peripheral foods
<b>Cereals</b>	Maize meal Bread	Rice Samp Steamed bread Scones Vetkoek	Mealie rice Pasta Bread rolls Oats porridge
<b>Vegetables</b>	Leafy vegetables Tomatoes Onions	Cabbage Spinach Potatoes Legumes Green beans Beetroot	Carrots Lettuce Green pepper
<b>Fresh meat</b>	Chicken heads and feet	Beef Chicken	Tripe
<b>Processed meat</b>			Corned beef Polony Viennas
<b>Milk / dairy products</b>	Fresh milk Sour milk ( <i>emasj</i> )	Milk powder Coffee creamer	Cheese and other processed dairy products
<b>Fish</b>		Fresh and tinned fish (pilchards)	
<b>Insects</b>			Locusts Flying ants Mopani worms
<b>Fats / oils</b>		Cooking oil Peanut butter	Margarine Mayonnaise
<b>Sweets</b>		White sugar	Brown sugar Jam
<b>Condiments</b>	Salt	Curry powder Gravy powder Spices	Pepper Tomato sauce
<b>Beverages</b>	Tea	Coffee Amahewu	Rooibos tea Soft drinks
<b>Snacks</b>		Jugo beans Groundnuts	Potato crisps Cheese curls

during family and kin gatherings. Furthermore, the case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) seemed to suggest that in the use of livestock for food, women had control over the poultry while the head of the family controlled the goats and cattle. If this is a common practice in the community, this information can be beneficial to the food security programmes especially in agricultural production to note the kind of livestock that can improve food availability in the household.

It was also obvious that food was used to express hospitality (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Guests were served status foods that the respondents called 'Sunday food'. Rice, chicken and salads seem to be regarded as status foods to be eaten on Sundays or given to distinguished guests.

Traditionally food restrictions were mainly applicable to children and women and to a lesser extent to men and the elderly (in the latter case only with reference to the totem animal of the clan). The case study (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999) seems to suggest that some of the beliefs regarding food taboos were no longer strictly adhered to but food taboos still exist within the Swazi food habits. Intra-household food

distribution can influence the nutritional status of household members and it would be beneficial if it can be investigated in future studies.

Acculturation of the Swazi food habits seems to have taken place. The meal patterns have changed. The norm is three meals per day, as opposed to the traditional two meals per day. Foods that were traditionally foreign to the Swazi such as bread and tea seemed to form an integral part of the daily meals. The number of prestige and status foods seemed to have been extended with Western-type of food items such as soft drinks, rice, salads or what the participants referred to as "Sunday food" (Kgaphola & Viljoen, 1999). Porridge was sometimes substituted by mealie rice or rice.

The case study by Kgaphola and Viljoen (1999) suggested that although food acculturation has taken place, the food habits of the Swazi households resembled the traditional Swazi food habits in many aspects. The meal structure has not changed much with the exception of the Sunday lunch - which was elaborate and contain mainly Western food items - and the composition of breakfast. Maize still remained the core or

super food in the Swazi food habits. Indigenous crops and wild food still played an important role in the Swazi diet. This suggests that culture has a large bearing on the food habits of the rural Swazi households. Thus, food security programmes need to be sensitive to the traditional value system of the community to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Traditional foods and food sources need to be integrated in food security programmes since they play an essential role in the dietary patterns of rural Swazi households.

Exposure to nutrition information seemed to have contributed to the current nutrition knowledge and beliefs of the participants of the case study. For instance milk, eggs and meat were regarded as suitable food for pregnant women and the reason given was that the clinic nurses recommended these foods.

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