

CHAPTER III

THE GENERAL PATTERN

The fishermen in Basorah follow a simple pattern of household expenditure consisting of only a few items. Briefly, these expenditure items can be classified into four groups, namely home-prepared food, non-home-prepared food, non-food items and 'others'.¹ In this chapter the writer will discuss the general pattern of household expenditure according to these four expenditure groups. The detailed analysis of the individual items will be discussed later in the next chapter.

A. Expenditure Groups.1. Home-Prepared Food.

Home-prepared food includes all food stuff prepared at home such as rice, flour, sugar, coffee powder, fish and vegetables. These food items form the daily diet of two meals per day. Breakfast consists of coffee or tea, without milk, cakes and sweets.

ii. Non-Home-Prepared Food.

Non-home-prepared food are cakes, vermicelli, sweets which are largely rice in composition and coffee or tea taken at coffee shops. Snacks which consist mainly of sweets taken

1. Refer page 17 for the items that come under 'others'.

with coffee or tea in coffee-shops, are an integral part of the fishermen's life. Coffee or tea is taken at coffee-shops only by men; it is considered improper for women to do so. Generally, snacks are supplementary to the daily diet of two meals per day but it was found that in some households, especially those with high income and few members, snacks are sometimes bought in place of the main meals.

iii. Non-Food Items.

Non-food items include mainly cigarettes, matches, betel and kerosene. It was found, with surprise, almost all the male adults were smokers but the brand of cigarettes smoked varies according to their financial position. Locally manufactured cigarettes which are sold at forty cents per packet of twenty sticks are the most popular, and foreign-manufactured cigarettes, for example "Players", are rarely taken except when income is high. "Dann puchok", which consists of ordinary tobacco wrapped with locally dried nipah leaves, provides the cheapest form of cigarettes and are commonly taken by the lower income groups.

iv. 'Others'.

Household expenditure on 'others' includes expenditure on durable and semi-durable goods, such as clothing and household equipment. In addition it also includes expenditure

on repairs and investment in boats and nets and recreation.

B. Average Distribution of Expenditure.

The average distribution of household expenditure according to the four expenditure groups is shown in Table IIIA below, and in Diagram IIIA on page 19.

TABLE IIIA
AVERAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURE

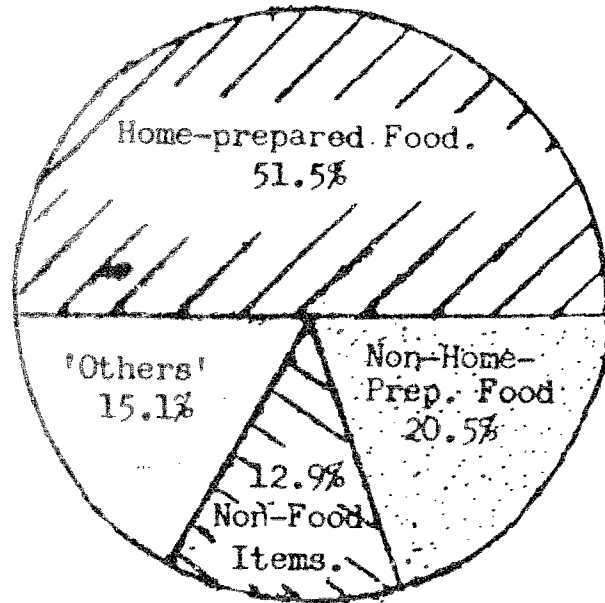
Expenditure Groups	Av. Exp./Household/ Month in Dollars	% of Total Expenditure
Home-Prepared Food	48.00	51.5
Non-Home-Prepared Food	19.00	20.5
Non-Food Items	12.00	12.9
'Others'	14.00	15.1
Total	93.00	100.0

Table IIIA above shows that the average total expenditure on food of \$67.00 per household per month represents about 72 per cent of the total expenditure. There seems to be very little change in the pattern of household expenditure among the Malay fishermen between the period immediately before the Second World War and today. Writes Rosemary Firth in her book 'Housekeeping Among Malay Peasants' which was based on a survey carried out by her in Kelantan in 1940, "Together rice and snacks occupy about two thirds of the budget."¹

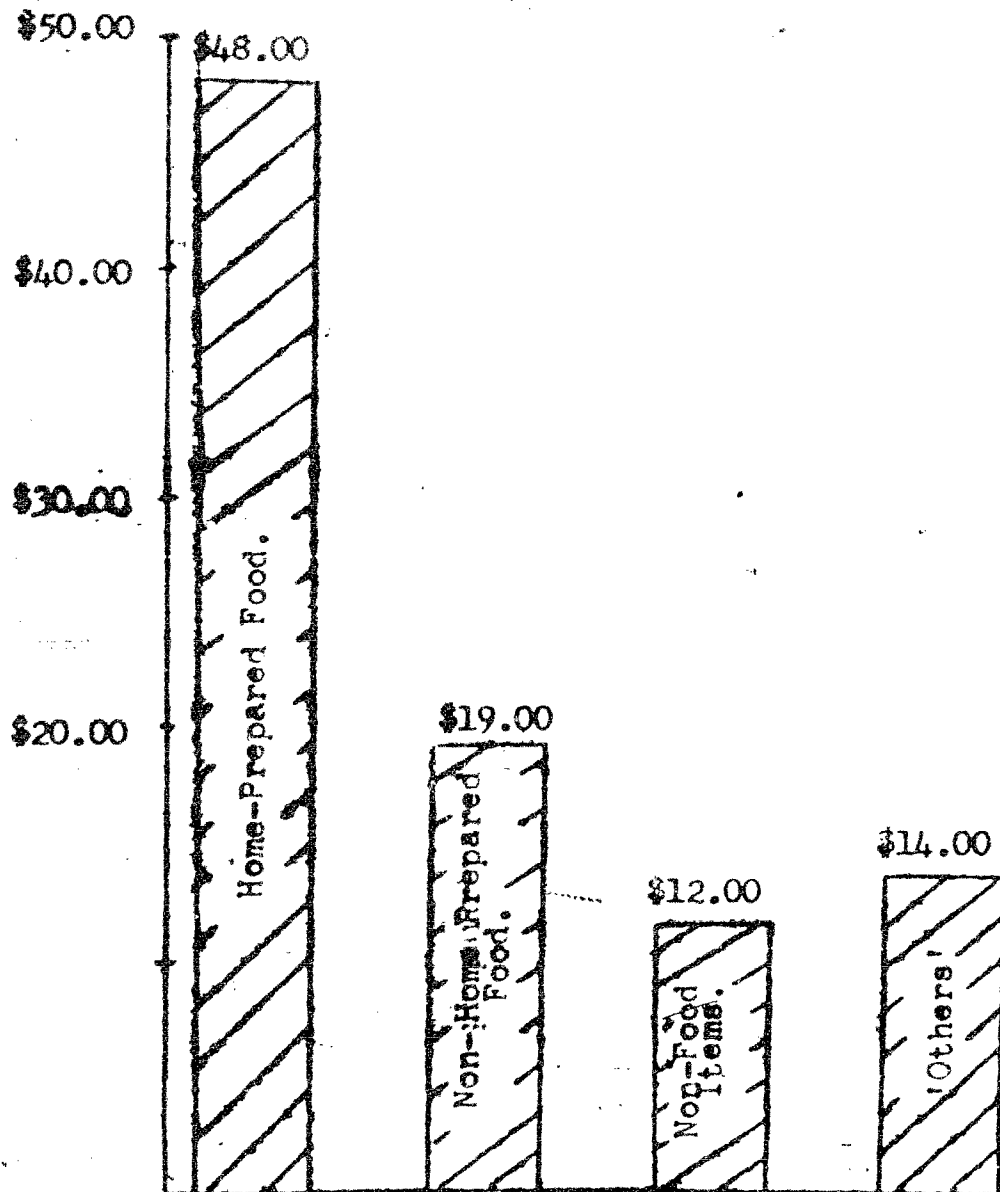
1. Rosemary Firth, Housekeeping Among Malay Peasants, Percy Lund, Humphries & Ltd., London, 1943, p.65.

AVERAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURE

i. In percentages
(of total exp.)



ii. In Dollars.



Expenditure Items.

Owing to the unavailability of data on the pattern of consumers' expenditure in Malaya, the percentage expenditure on food among the fishermen in Baserah could not be compared to that of Malaya. However, compared to that of Hong Kong and Ceylon where the figures available show the percentage expenditure on food to be 54¹ and 60² per cent respectively, the 74 per cent total expenditure on food among the fishermen in Baserah is exceptionally high. According to Engel's Law, 'the poorer a family, the greater is the proportion of the total outgo which must be used for food.'³ The high percentage expenditure on food among the fishermen seems to suggest that incomes are low and that a high percentage of income has to be spent on food leaving only a small percentage to be spent on other things.

However, it is not very correct merely to say that low income alone is responsible for the high percentage expenditure on food, since the analysis of the consumption pattern in Table IVB on page³² indicates that consumption habits on food greatly

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1. E.F. Sassepenik, Standard of Living in Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1956, p.7.
 2. Report on the Survey of Ceylon's Consumer Finance, May 1953, Central Bank of Ceylon, Colombo, p.22.
 3. C.C. Zimmerman, Consumption and Standards of Living, Williams and Morgate Ltd., London, 1935, p.99.

influence the expenditure pattern. It is of interest to note that there is a strong tendency among the fishermen to supplement their daily diet with snacks bought from shops, though snacks are more costly than rice cooked at home.

Expenditure on food is of two types: (i) expenditure on home-prepared food and (ii) expenditure on non-home-prepared food.

i. Home-Prepared Food.

The average total expenditure on home-prepared food of \$48.00 per month, as shown in Table IIIA on page 18, represents about 51.5 per cent of the total expenditure. This item makes up the daily diet of two meals per day.

ii. Non-Home-Prepared Food.

The percentage on non-home-prepared food is about 20.5 per cent of the total expenditure. Non-home-prepared food does not make up the daily diet of two meals per day, but it mainly supplements the main diet. The high percentage expenditure on food is due not so much to low income alone, though it is to some extent, but rather to the combination of low income and the high marginal propensity to consume on food. Expenditure on non-home-prepared food varies greatly with income since it has a fairly high income elasticity of demand and any increase in income will greatly increase the expenditure on non-home-prepared food.

It is the opinion of the writer that the consumption of non-home-prepared snacks, resulting from an increase in income does not necessarily improve their nutritional food value, since sweetmeats, which form a high proportion of the snacks, are mainly rice in composition. A more rational way of spending the extra income, if ever it should be spent on food, should have been on eggs or meat. But the fishermen regard these as luxury foods, and thus very rarely take these except during festivals and ceremonial occasions.

iii. Non-Food Items.

The average total expenditure on non-food items of \$12.00 per month represents about 12.9 per cent of the total expenditure. The high percentage expenditure on non-food items results from the fact that, while income among the fishermen is low, the expenditure on non-food items, especially cigarettes which make up nearly three-fourths of the total expenditure on non-food items, is quite high.

iv. 'Others'.

The average total expenditure on 'others' of \$14.00 per month which represents about 15.1 per cent of the total expenditure is rather too little. Since 'others' includes such items as repairs or investment in boats or nets and expenditure

on clothing and house equipment, one can easily imagine the amount spent on each of these items. It is, thus, quite clear that the fishermen have little to spend on clothing, household equipment and recreation.

C. Expenditure by Income Groups.

Since expenditure pattern varies considerably with changes in income, an average expenditure for all spending units, irrespective of income, may not give a clear picture of the expenditure pattern. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse the expenditure of the households according to income. This analysis is given in Table IIIB on page 24 and in Diagram IIIB on page 25.

It shows clearly that the total percentage expenditure on the two types of food, namely home-prepared food and non-home prepared food, increases from the higher income group to the lower income group. Also interesting to note from the table is that the relationships for the two types of food are different as income increases. The percentage expenditure on home-prepared food increases from the higher income group to the lower income group, while the non-home-prepared food decreases from the higher income group to the lower income group. The difference in behaviour shows that non-home-prepared food is a semi-luxury food to be had only when income is high. However, the same table

TABLE IIIB

DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURE BY INCOME GROUPS

Expenditure Items	Income Groups (In Dollars Per Month)							
	Under 70.00		70.00-100.00		100.00-130.00		Over 130.00	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Home-prepared Food	43.00	70.5	48.00	53.0	62.00	50.8	64.50	44.8
Non-Home- Prep. Food	8.00	13.1	18.50	20.6	25.00	20.7	35.50	24.6
Non-Food Items	6.00	9.9	13.00	14.7	13.00	10.7	15.50	10.8
'Others'	4.00	6.5	10.50	11.7	22.00	18.0	28.50	19.8
Total	61.00	100.0	90.00	100.0	122.00	100.0	144.00	100.0

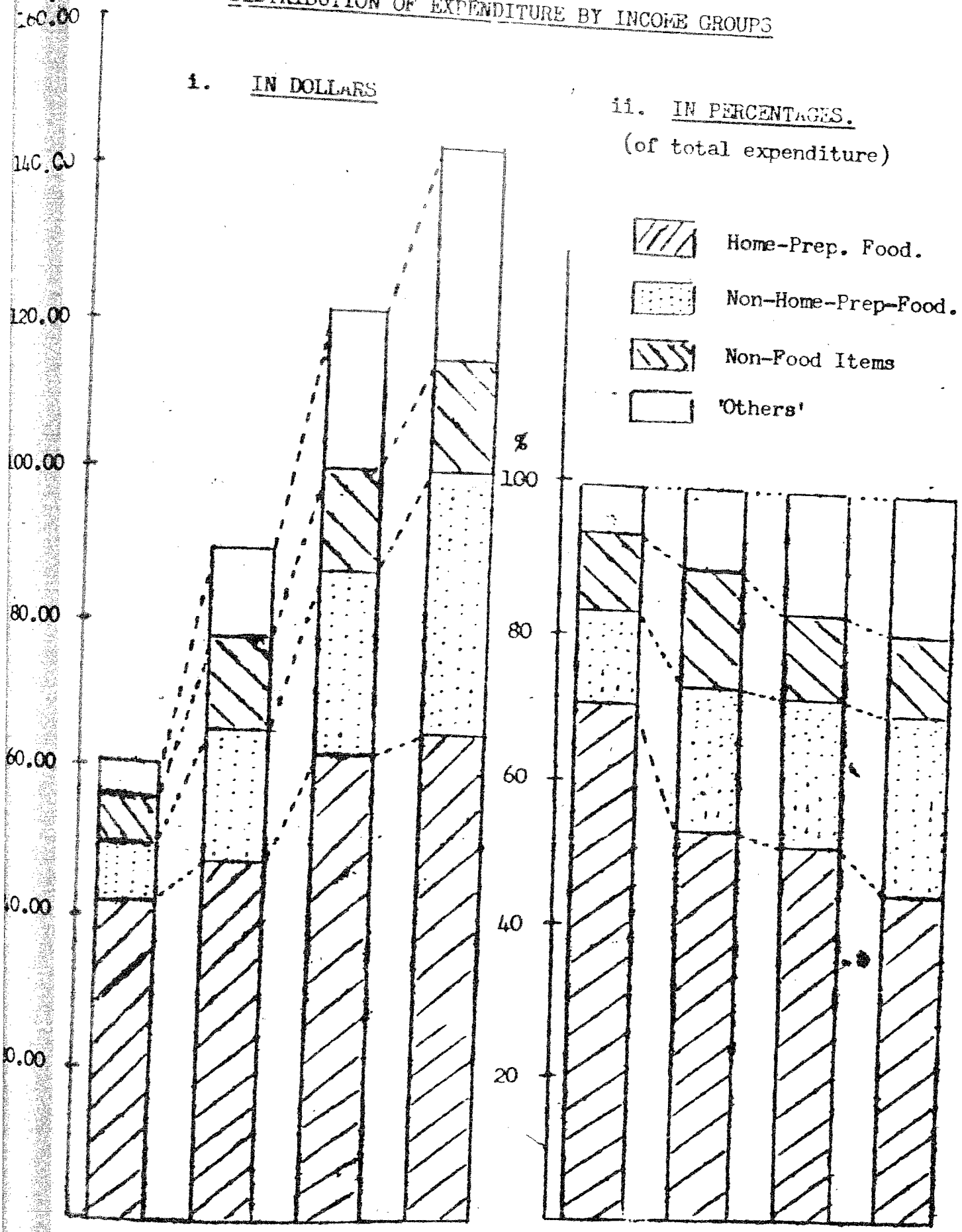
shows that while percentage expenditure on home-prepared food increases from the higher group to the lower income group, the actual expenditure on this item, as shown by the absolute figures on the same table, increases from the lower income group to the higher income group. The increase in the actual expenditure is due to the substitution of better foodstuffs by those in the higher income group. For example, while the lower income group may consume low quality rice and cheap fish, the higher income group may substitute better grade rice and better fish for the low quality rice and cheap fish.

DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURE BY INCOME GROUPS

i. IN DOLLARS

ii. IN PERCENTAGES.

(of total expenditure)



Under \$70 70-100 100-130 Over 130 Under 70 70-100 100-130 Over 130

Income Groups In Dollars per Month.

Assuming that the fishermen are a homogeneous group having similar consumption habits and tastes, differing only with respect to income, a rise in income will mostly be spent on food.

From Table IIIB on page 24, it is noted that the percentage expenditure on non-food items among the households with income of between \$100.00 to \$130.00 per month is almost the same as those with income of more than \$130.00 per month. But it increases suddenly among households with income of between \$70.00 to \$100.00 per month and falls again among those with less than \$70.00 per month. However, the absolute figures show that the money expenditure on this item increases from the lower income group to the higher income group.

Table IIIB, on page 24 also shows that the percentage expenditure on 'others' decreases from the higher income group to the lower income group. This merely indicates that, as expected, the fishermen of the lower income group have very little to spend on such items as clothings and household equipment. It is, further, an indication that the lower income group fishermen have very little to spend on repairs or investment in fishing gear.