



Safeguarding Nutrition in Togo: Policy Responses to Rising Food Prices

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Key Messages

- Rising food prices significantly reduce food consumption and worsen the nutritional status of households in Togo.
- The impacts are gender-differentiated and vary between urban and rural areas.
- Universal policy responses can cushion shocks but place substantial pressure on public finances.
- Well-targeted, nutrition-sensitive cash or in-kind transfers are the most effective short-term policy response.

Executive Summary

Food and nutrition security in Togo is increasingly undermined by the transmission of international food price shocks to domestic markets. Using a CGE–microsimulation framework, this study shows that while higher global food prices stimulate GDP through increased export incentives and higher value added, they simultaneously reduce household food consumption and deteriorate dietary quality. Urban households and male-headed households are the most affected, reflecting their strong dependence on food markets.

The comparative analysis of policy responses reveals strong heterogeneity in effectiveness. Cash transfers (particularly those originating from the rest of the world and directly targeting households) emerge as the most effective instrument to protect food consumption, nutrition, and household welfare, while also generating positive macroeconomic effects. In contrast, generalized food subsidies and trade restrictions, although politically attractive, entail high fiscal costs and generate market distortions, with limited capacity to safeguard nutritional outcomes.

These findings highlight the need to shift food policy responses away from price-based interventions toward targeted, nutrition-sensitive, and fiscally sustainable instruments that directly protect vulnerable households during food price shocks.

1. Introduction

Food and nutrition security in West Africa remains a major concern. In the UEMOA region, the number of people facing food insecurity increased from 8.24 million in 2022 to nearly 10 million in 2024 (RPCA, 2024). According to FAO, WFP, and UNICEF, approximately 48 million people do not have regular access to safe and nutritious food, and 16.7 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. This situation results from multiple shocks, including health crises, geopolitical tensions, global price volatility, and climate vulnerabilities.

In Togo, the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet is high (USD 1.94 per person per day, FAO 2023), with diets dominated by local staples and limited consumption of protein-rich foods, fruits, and vegetables. Households face:

- High monetary poverty (43.8% in 2023; 58.2% in rural areas);
- Undernutrition (12.8% in 2022);
- High food inflation (4.19% in 2021 → 7.4% in 2022 → 5.3% in 2023, INSEED 2024).

In response, the government has implemented several measures, including subsidies and tax exemptions, controls on staple exports, cash transfer programs (ASTRE), local school feeding programs, and the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan 2024–2030.

In response to this situation, public policy responses have mainly focused on price stabilisation measures, such as generalised subsidies on certain basic commodities and temporary trade restrictions. While these policies have partially contained short-term price increases, they have also incurred significant budgetary costs, while proving limited in their ability to target vulnerable households and improve nutritional quality.

In a context of tightening fiscal space, it is increasingly essential to reassess public policy instruments not only in terms of their capacity to contain food prices, but, more importantly, in terms of their broader effects on actual food consumption, nutritional quality, inequalities between households, and macroeconomic sustainability. With this in mind, this policy brief uses a MEGC-microsimulation framework to compare the relative effectiveness of different public policy scenarios in response to food inflation shocks.

2. Methodology

The analysis is based on an integrated approach combining:

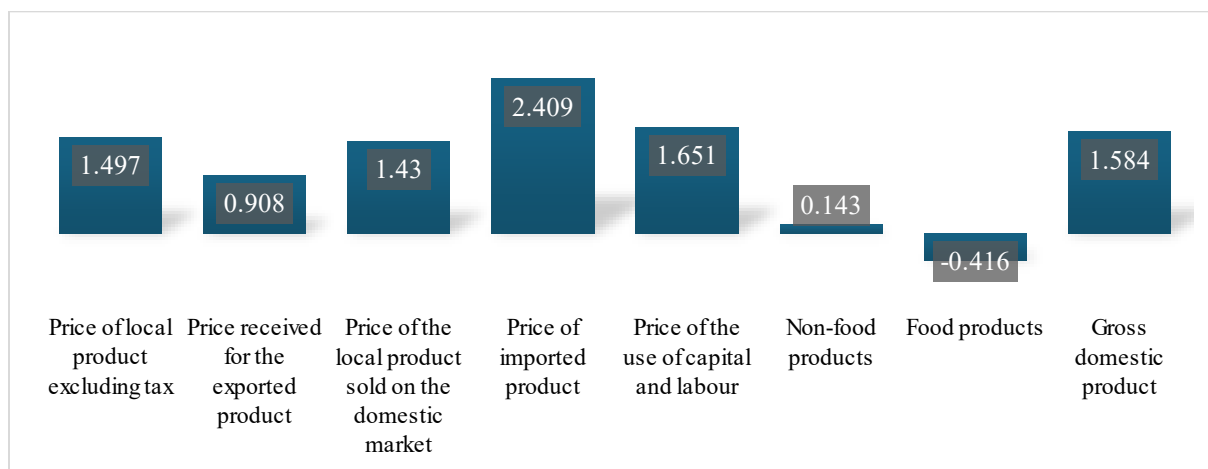
- A static MEGC, calibrated to Togo's Social Accounting Matrix (2019);
- A microsimulation module based on the Harmonised Household Living Conditions Surveys (EHCVM).

The simulations reproduce an increase in international prices for key food products observed over the period 2019-2023, as well as various public policy scenarios: transfers, subsidies, trade restrictions and external trade shocks. This approach makes it possible to simultaneously assess the macroeconomic, distributional and nutritional effects.

3. Main results

3.1. Prices' impact and macroeconomic aggregates response

- **Strong transmission of international food price shocks to domestic markets.**
The rise in international food prices leads to significant increases in domestic prices, particularly for imported goods (+2.4%) and value added (+1.65%). Producers increasingly favor exports due to higher export prices, reducing domestic food supply and exerting upward pressure on local prices.
- **Macroeconomic gains coexist with declining household welfare.**
While GDP increases (+1.58%), driven by higher value-added prices and export demand, household food consumption declines sharply (-0.42%), reflecting a loss of purchasing power and weakened domestic demand.



Figure

1: Variation in prices, consumption and GDP (as a percentage of the baseline scenario)

Source: the authors

3.2. Effect on nutritional status

Higher food prices reduce average energy intake and micronutrient consumption (vitamin A, iron, zinc, folate, fiber, proteins). Nutrition poverty increases by 0.30 percentage points, confirming that households substitute nutritious foods with cheaper, calorie-dense options. Thus, 1.6% of the population is expected to move from "good" to "acceptable" nutritional status¹, and 0.7% of Togolese are expected to move from "acceptable" to "poor" nutritional status. These results are consistent with those of Bouis et al (2011), who point out that rising prices of staple foods, such as rice, wheat and maize, often prompt households to switch to cheaper foods that are high in calories but low in nutrients.

¹ Households with a good nutritional status have both energy intake and nutrient levels above the reference threshold. Those with an acceptable nutritional status meet the energy requirement only, while their nutrient intake remains below the reference threshold. Households with a poor nutritional status fall below the reference threshold for both energy intake and nutrient levels.

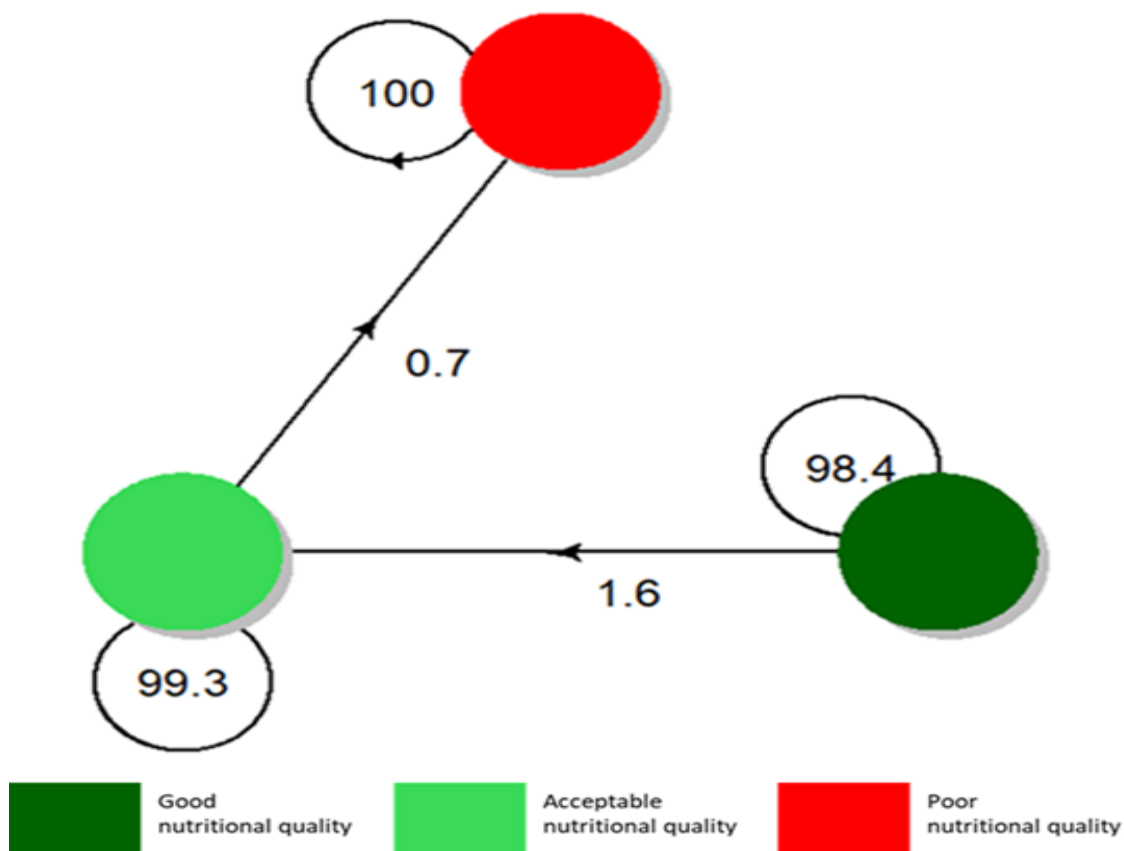


Figure 2: Transition between nutritional classes. Source: the authors

3.3.Effect of public policy options

- **Cash transfers** remain the **most effective policy instrument**, particularly transfers from the rest of the world to households. A 3% increase in these transfers raises GDP by **0.066%**, household food consumption by **0.043%**, and public revenue by **0.059%**, confirming their strong multiplier effects and direct support to household purchasing power.
- **Government transfers and food subsidies provide only limited mitigation.** A 3% increase in government transfers to households results in modest increases in GDP (**0.006%**), household food consumption (**0.011%**), and public revenue (**0.006%**), reflecting their constrained scope under fiscal limitations. Food subsidies (**20%**) slightly improve household food consumption (**0.024%**), but are associated with a decline in GDP (**-0.009%**) and a substantial reduction in public revenue (**-0.073%**), raising concerns about their fiscal sustainability.
- **Trade restrictions perform poorly in protecting household welfare.** Export restrictions lead to a sharp contraction in GDP (**-0.327%**), a decline in household food consumption (**-0.179%**), and a loss in public revenue (**-0.228%**), directly worsening welfare outcomes. When combined with a 10% customs duty, GDP temporarily increases (**0.353%**) and public revenue rises significantly (**0.762%**), but household food consumption deteriorates further (**-0.216%**). Import restrictions (**-15%**) yield comparatively better results, with increases in GDP (**0.126%**), household food consumption (**0.046%**), and public revenue (**0.079%**), although they remain second-best solutions

due to market distortions and their limited capacity to fully offset nutritional losses induced by rising food prices.

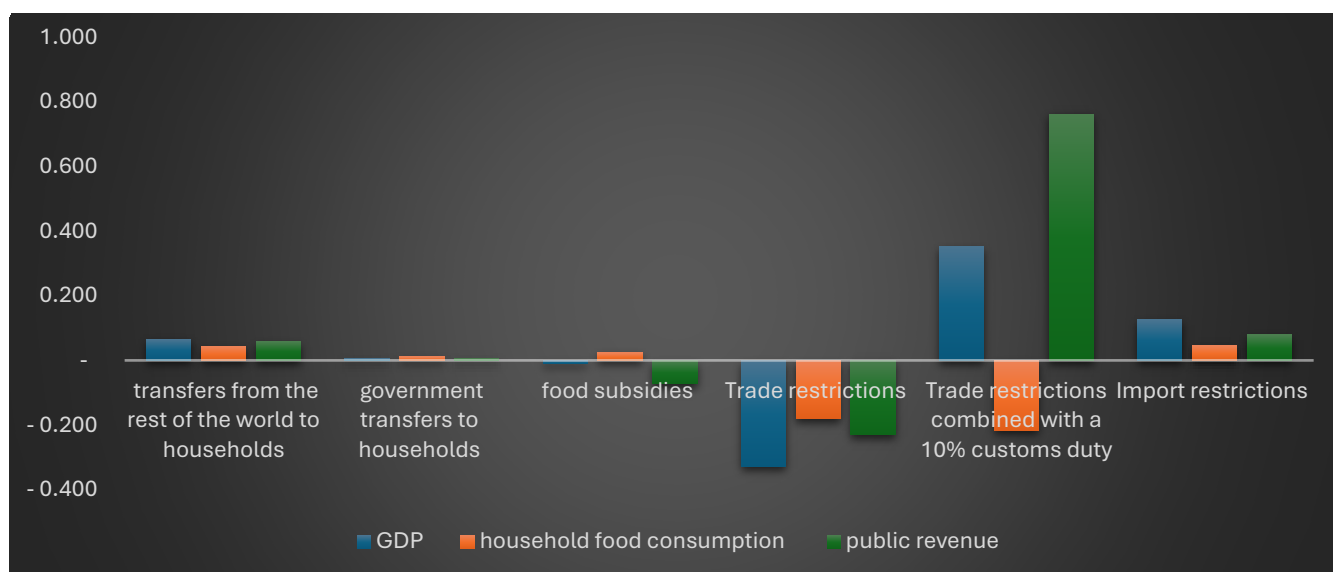


Figure 3 : Effect of public policy options. Source: the authors

4. Policy implications

- Prioritize cash transfers over price-based interventions:** Cash transfers—especially those originating from the rest of the world—are the most effective instrument for protecting household welfare and food consumption while supporting GDP and public revenue. Policies should focus on facilitating remittance flows, lowering transfer costs, and integrating external inflows into national social protection strategies.
- Strengthen targeting of domestic social transfers under fiscal constraints:** Government-funded transfers generate only modest gains, highlighting the need for improved targeting toward food-insecure and low-income households. Expanding coverage without improving efficiency is unlikely to deliver meaningful welfare gains and may exacerbate fiscal pressures.
- Limit food subsidies to short-term, targeted use:** While food subsidies marginally increase household food consumption, their negative effects on GDP and public revenue make them fiscally unsustainable. Subsidies should be temporary, narrowly targeted, and progressively replaced by cash-based support mechanisms.
- Avoid export restrictions as a food security tool:** Export restrictions reduce GDP, household food consumption, and public revenue, thereby worsening household welfare. Even when combined with customs duties, they fail to protect food consumption and should not be used as a policy response to food price shocks.
- Treat import restrictions as second-best options:** Import restrictions yield relatively better outcomes than export bans but still distort markets and provide limited nutritional protection. They should only be considered as temporary measures when fiscal and social protection instruments are unavailable.

Conclusion

This study highlights a central paradox of food price shocks in Togo: rising international food prices may stimulate economic activity and boost exports, yet simultaneously erode household food access and worsen nutritional outcomes. Market-driven adjustments push households to substitute away from nutrient-rich foods toward cheaper, calorie-dense staples, thereby increasing nutrition poverty—particularly in urban areas. The findings clearly show that policy choices matter. Targeted cash transfers are the most effective response to food price shocks, as they directly support purchasing power, stabilize food consumption, and preserve dietary quality. By contrast, export restrictions and generalized food subsidies deliver weak or counterproductive results, due to market distortions and high fiscal burdens. In a context of tightening public budgets, food security strategies must move beyond short-term price stabilization. Integrating explicit nutrition objectives into macroeconomic and social protection policies, and prioritizing targeted transfers over distortionary interventions, is essential to strengthen household resilience and improve food and nutrition outcomes in the face of recurrent food price volatility.

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Mission

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