

Addressing the Gendered Impacts of Food Price Volatility in Ghana: Policy Options for Nutrition and Food Security

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FOOD PRICE VOLATILITY IS ERODING FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN GHANA AND DEMANDS URGENT POLICY ACTION

Climate shocks, global market disruptions, and exchange rate instability are driving food inflation and deepening food insecurity.

Female-headed households are disproportionately affected due to unequal access to land, credit, inputs, and social protection.



Government must respond by:

- tightening market-stabilisation measures,
- investing in climate-resilient food systems,
- strengthening exchange-rate and import-management policies,
- and expanding gender-responsive social protection and financial services to reduce these vulnerabilities



URBAN HOUSEHOLDS



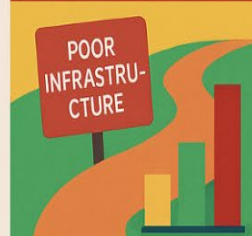
experience higher food prices but benefit from more diversified income sources, which can buffer some effects of volatility

RURAL AND LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

particularly **female-headed** families, spend over half of their income on food, leaving limited resources for essential services such as healthcare and education



RURAL AREAS



Poor **infrastructure** and market inefficiencies increase price volatility in rural areas, making food access less

Key Messages

- Food price volatility (FPV) is a major barrier to nutritious diets in Ghana, with the strongest impact on staples, fish, eggs, chicken, fats and oils. Stabilising prices in these categories would yield the most immediate gains for food and nutrition security.
- Female-headed households are disproportionately affected, often compelled to prioritise cheaper, less nutritious foods and adopt high-risk coping strategies. Policies must account for these gendered vulnerabilities.
- The effects of FPV are short-term but severe, underscoring the need for rapid response mechanisms alongside longer-term resilience-building measures, including price stabilisation, agricultural investment, and gender-sensitive policy responses.
- A coordinated, multi-tier policy strategy is essential, combining:
 - Short-term actions: temporary price-stabilisation measures and expanded social protection to cushion vulnerable households.
 - Medium-term interventions: productivity-enhancing agricultural investments and stronger market information and monitoring systems.
 - Long-term reforms: restructuring value chains and advancing women's economic empowerment to build a more resilient and inclusive food system.

Context

Food price volatility is undermining food security and nutrition in Ghana and requires immediate policy intervention (Ofori, Asmah & Nsiah-Asamoah, 2025). Climate shocks, global market disruptions, and exchange rate instability are driving food inflation and worsening food insecurity (von Grebmer et al., 2024; FAO, 2023). Female-headed households are hit hardest because they lack equal access to land, credit, inputs, and social protection. The government must act by tightening market stabilisation measures, investing in climate-resilient food systems, strengthening exchange-rate and import-management policies, and expanding gender-responsive social protection and financial services to reduce these vulnerabilities.

Key Findings

1. Drivers of Food Price Volatility

- External shocks, especially climate variability and reliance on imported foods, are major drivers of FPV, with pronounced effects on fish, eggs, chicken, fats, and oils.
- Historical price volatility reinforces current instability, creating cyclical patterns that make markets more unpredictable and difficult to stabilise.

- Exchange rate fluctuations significantly increase the cost of imported staples, particularly rice and cooking oils, magnifying food price pressure.

2. Impacts on Diet and Nutrition

- Food price volatility undermines access to nutritious diets, pushing households to substitute vegetables, fruits, and protein-rich foods with cheaper staples, inorganic eggs and low-quality processed chicken.
- Most affected households reduce meal frequency and portion sizes to cope with rising food costs.
- Nutritional impacts are most severe for young children and women of reproductive age, who have higher micronutrient needs and face elevated risks of malnutrition.

3. Gendered Coping Strategies and Inequalities

- Male-headed households primarily respond through income-based strategies, such as taking on additional work or selling assets.
- Female-headed households often rely on fragile, short-term measures, such as informal labour, community savings groups, and social networks, to buffer shocks.
- Gender norms restrict women's control over household finances, exacerbating their vulnerability to food price volatility and limiting their ability to protect household nutrition.

4. Structural and Regional Disparities

- Urban households experience higher food prices but benefit from more diversified income sources, which can buffer some effects of volatility.
- Rural and low-income households, particularly female-headed families, spend over half of their income on food, leaving limited resources for essential services such as healthcare and education.
- Poor infrastructure and market inefficiencies increase price volatility in rural areas, making food access less predictable and increasing vulnerability.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Short-Term Measures

- **Price Stabilisation Mechanisms:** Establish strategic buffer stocks for maize and rice and coordinate import scheduling to smooth seasonal supply fluctuations.
- **Targeted Subsidies:** Introduce temporary subsidies for key protein sources and fortified oils to protect low-income families' access to nutritious foods.
- **Social Protection Expansion:** Strengthen the LEAP programme by adding conditional cash transfers tied to nutrition outcomes and vocational training opportunities for women.

2. Medium-Term Measures

- **Agricultural Productivity Support:** Expand access to quality inputs, irrigation, and market infrastructure for smallholders, with targeted support for women farmers.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Strengthen microcredit and savings initiatives that enable women's agribusiness and informal enterprises to grow and withstand shocks.
- **Market Infrastructure Development:** Invest in rural storage facilities, transport networks, and digital price information systems to reduce transaction costs and improve market efficiency.

3. Long-Term Strategies

- **Climate-Smart and Gender-Responsive Agriculture:** Promote the adoption of drought-tolerant crops and inclusive extension services that reach women and other marginalised groups.
- **Empowerment and Equity:** Encourage joint household budgeting and financial literacy and education programmes to strengthen women's economic decision-making and agency.
- **Economic Diversification:** Support agro-processing, local value addition and the development of domestic food industries to reduce reliance on imports and enhance overall food system resilience.

Implementation Considerations

- **Institutional Coordination:** Strengthen collaboration across the Ministries of Agriculture, Gender, Health, and Finance to ensure cohesive policy design and implementation.
- **Private Sector Partnerships:** Engage agribusinesses and women-led cooperatives in developing resilient local food systems and value chains.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Harmonise trade policies and buffer stock management, and market monitoring with ECOWAS partners to enhance regional food security.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a national FPV observatory with gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based, adaptive policymaking.

Challenges

- Limited fiscal space and political will may hinder the continuity and effectiveness of programs.
- Deep-rooted gender norms and institutional capacity gaps constrain women's meaningful participation in food system interventions.

- Persistent global and climatic shocks continue to pose risks to price stability and market predictability.

Conclusion

Food price volatility in Ghana undermines nutrition, exacerbates gender inequalities, and threatens progress toward SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, gender-sensitive policy framework that stabilises prices, strengthens agricultural resilience, and promotes women's economic empowerment. Coordinated short-term interventions and long-term reforms are essential to ensure equitable access to healthy diets and sustainable food security for all Ghanaians.

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