



Gendered Pathways to Nutrition in Tanzania: The Interplay of Household Dynamics, Food Affordability and Adaptive Strategies

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Gendered Pathways to Nutrition in Tanzania: The Interplay of Household Dynamics, Food Affordability and Adaptive Strategies

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Highlights of key Findings and Key message

- Diets remain monotonous and dominated by staples, limiting nutritional diversity.
- Women carry unequal domestic and productive workloads, reducing time for nutrition-focused choices.
- Limited access to land, income, and decision-making weakens women's nutrition autonomy.
- Female-headed households are most food insecure and price-sensitive.
- Engaging men in nutrition education and improving affordability of diverse, nutritious foods are key for equitable outcomes.

“Addressing malnutrition in Tanzania requires gender-responsive policies that enhance women’s access to resources, involve men in nutrition education, and make nutritious foods affordable. Empowering women and promoting shared household responsibilities are essential to achieving sustainable and inclusive nutrition outcomes.”

1. Introduction

Nutrition is a key driver of health and human development. In Tanzania, however, household power dynamics and economic pressures continue to create gender-based inequalities in food access and consumption. Women and children are often the most affected, as limited control over land, income, and household decisions restricts their ability to obtain and consume nutritious foods. These imbalances directly contribute to poor nutrition outcomes such as higher rates of undernutrition and stunting. Female-headed households face particular challenges. With fewer assets and limited labor support, they are more likely to experience food insecurity and child malnutrition.

Addressing these inequities is essential to progress on SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Globally, malnutrition remains a major challenge, with approximately 149.2 million children under five experiencing stunting in 2022. In Tanzania, despite progress in agricultural production, food insecurity still affects about one-third of the population, and child stunting remains high. Persistent gender disparities such as unequal access to credit, extension services, and decision-making power undermine national efforts to improve nutrition and overall well-being.

2. Rationale of the Issue

Despite high awareness of malnutrition in Tanzania, limited gender-disaggregated data have constrained policy action. This study provides new insights by examining how gender roles, access to resources, and food affordability jointly shape nutritional outcomes. It highlights that food security is not only a matter of availability but also of intra-household power, decision-making, and adaptive strategies. Without addressing these gendered pathways, nutrition interventions risk marginalizing women and children, who are already among the most nutritionally vulnerable.

National surveys such as the Tanzania National Panel Survey and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) provide valuable household-level socioeconomic data, yet they lack the granularity to capture intra-household dynamics and gender-specific nutrition responses. This study bridges that gap by exploring how household budgeting, food access, and perceptions of food prices influence dietary decisions and nutrition outcomes.

The findings are expected to inform gender-sensitive nutrition policies and interventions, guiding policymakers to design programs that recognize and respond to the distinct roles of men and women in ensuring food security. By integrating gender perspectives into nutrition education and resource allocation, the study aims to enhance the effectiveness of Tanzania's National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan. Ultimately, the research will provide actionable insights to strengthen equitable nutrition outcomes, particularly for women and children, thereby improving the overall resilience and well-being of Tanzanian households.

3. Methodology

This study used a mixed approach combining surveys, group discussions, and interviews to capture both numbers and lived experiences.

Household Survey: Data were collected from 300 households in three regions: Njombe, Dodoma, and Tanga, chosen for their different levels of malnutrition and mix of rural and urban settings.

Focus Group Discussions: Twelve male and female groups discussed food access, decision-making, and coping strategies.

Key Informant Interviews: Fifty-three community leaders, health officers, and NGO staff shared insights on gender and nutrition.

Information from these sources was compared and analyzed to understand how gender roles, access to resources, and food prices influence household nutrition.

4. Findings

Dietary Patterns Are Limited and Gendered:

Across the surveyed households, diets are dominated by cereals and starches, with fruits, pulses, and animal-source foods consumed only occasionally. Although differences between men and women in food consumption are modest, overall dietary diversity remains low. This monotony in diets directly undermines nutritional outcomes, particularly for women and children, who have higher micronutrient needs. The persistence of staple-based diets suggests that nutrition

interventions should go beyond food availability to address the affordability and cultural acceptance of diverse, nutrient-rich foods.

Gender Roles Restrict Women’s Opportunities:

Women continue to bear the greatest share of domestic and caregiving responsibilities—cooking, childcare, and managing household food needs—while men dominate income-generating and productive activities. Women’s limited access to land and assets constrains their ability to grow or purchase a variety of nutritious foods. As one participant observed, “If a woman lacks land to farm, she may not have a place to grow diverse food.” This dual burden, intensive domestic work combined with agricultural and petty trade activities, creates severe time poverty. The resulting trade-offs reduce women’s capacity to make nutrition-enhancing choices, highlighting the need for policies that promote equitable access to resources and shared household responsibilities.

Unequal Access to Nutrition Knowledge and Decision-Making:

Women make most daily food decisions, determining what is eaten in over half of households and managing food budgets in about two-fifths. However, their ability to act on these responsibilities is often constrained by limited control over financial resources. Nutrition education is also uneven: while over 90% of women have received some form of training, only about one-fifth of men have. This gender gap in knowledge reinforces unequal household dynamics and limits joint decision-making. Policies that engage men alongside women in nutrition education could foster shared understanding and collective action toward better dietary outcomes.

Financial Strain Shapes Coping Strategies:

Both men and women view nutritious foods as expensive, leading households to prioritize cheaper staples such as ugali and beans while reducing consumption of meat, fish, and other nutrient-dense options. Female-headed households are particularly affected; they rely more on periodic markets than on their own production and are more sensitive to food price changes. For instance, prices influence food choices in nearly all female-headed households (95%) compared with about 87% of male-headed ones. Moreover, almost four in five female-headed households report cutting back on healthy foods because of cost pressures, a higher share than among male-headed households. These findings underscore the importance of policies that make nutritious foods more affordable and accessible, particularly for households led by women.

5. Policy Recommendations

To improve nutrition outcomes and address gender disparities in Tanzania, this study recommends an integrated, gender-responsive approach that targets structural barriers, supports shared responsibilities, and improves affordability and access. The following priority actions are proposed:

i. Strengthen Women’s Access to Productive Resources

- Secure land rights for women: Implement district-level *land titling and legal support campaigns* to increase women’s land ownership and production autonomy.
- Expand access to credit and inputs: Introduce *credit guarantee schemes* and *voucher-based subsidies* (for seeds, fertilizer, tools) targeting women farmers.

- Promote joint asset ownership: Encourage *co-registration of assets* within households to support shared decision-making and improved dietary diversity.

Expected outcomes: Increased household food production, reduced dependency on markets, and enhanced women's economic empowerment.

ii. Promote Inclusive Nutrition Education and Shared Household Responsibilities

- Engage men in nutrition education: Scale up *community-based nutrition programs* that target both men and women, emphasizing shared decision-making and household cooperation.
- Develop gender-balanced curricula: Integrate *joint learning modules* into village training sessions and community health worker programs.
- Challenge restrictive gender norms: Support *community dialogues and campaigns* to redistribute care and household roles, reducing women's time poverty.

Expected outcomes: More equitable household nutrition decisions, stronger cooperation between spouses, and improved dietary diversity for all family members.

iii. Enhance Food Affordability and Market Access

- Lower the cost of nutritious foods: Introduce *targeted food vouchers, cash transfers, or price support programs* for vulnerable households.
- Invest in women-friendly markets: Upgrade *rural market infrastructure* with dedicated spaces for women vendors, cold storage units, and improved sanitation and safety.
- Improve food distribution systems: Strengthen *feeder roads and transport networks* to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure year-round access to nutritious foods.

Expected outcomes: Greater affordability of healthy foods, enhanced income opportunities for women traders, and improved dietary intake among low-income households.

Costing considerations/estimates for the implementation of proposed policy recommendations

General Recommendation	Specific Recommendation	Proposed Actions / Activities	Indicative Costs (TZS)	Financing Sources	Key Assumptions
1. Strengthen Women's Access to Productive Resources	Expand land/asset ownership & access to inputs	Land titling campaigns (sensitization + legal support)	60–90M per district (one-time)	Gov't land registry; women's banks; UN Women; AGRA	Avg. cost of titling per parcel: TZS 150,000 - Target: 400 women per district - Inputs subsidized at 60% of market value
		Credit guarantee schemes for women farmers Input subsidies (seeds, tools) via voucher systems	25–40M per district annually (inputs)	Gov't land registry; women's banks; UN Women; AGRA	Assumes 500 women benefit per district - Inputs include seeds, fertilizer, tools
2. Promote Inclusive Nutrition Education & Shared Responsibilities	Scale up community-based training engaging both men & women	Develop gender-balanced nutrition curriculum - Village-level training sessions (target: men and women jointly) - Training of trainers (CHWs, extension officers)	25–35M per district annually	MoH; NGOs; FAO; local CSOs	20 trainers per district - 100 community sessions per year - Avg. cost per session (venue + materials): TZS 250,000
3. Address Food Affordability & Market Access	Improve rural markets, storage, and transport systems	Construct/upgrade women-friendly market stalls - Install cold storage units - Improve transport infrastructure (feeder roads)	70–100M per market (one-off) 200–300M per region (transport)	Local gov't; vendor associations; PPPs; World Bank	Market facility upgrade costs about TZS 80M each - Cold storage unit: TZS 20–30M - Feeder road cost: TZS 100M/km (2–3 km per area)
	Increase the affordability of nutritious foods for vulnerable households	Targeted cash or in-kind transfers - Food voucher systems for nutrient-rich foods	250–500M per district annually	Gov't social protection programs; WFP; UNICEF; Donors	5,000 households per district - Monthly transfer: TZS 5,000–10,000 per household - Delivered via mobile money or community agents

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