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Navigating Food Price Volatility: Gendered Consumption Patterns and Coping Strategies of Households in Ghana

Meeting the food needs of Sub-Saharan Africa remains a pressing challenge, as highlighted by the 2024 Global Hunger Report, yet the 2024 Global Hunger Report highlights a rising cost of nutritious diets and food insecurity in the region. At the heart of these challenges lies food price volatility (FPV), a key factor influencing the affordability and consumption of healthy foods. However, empirical evidence on how FPV impacts food consumption patterns and the coping strategies households employ to cope with them (if any) remains scarce. This study fills this critical gap in the literature by adopting an exploratory research approach, utilising in-depth interviews and surveys conducted across enumeration areas in Ghana. The findings demonstrate that FPV compels Ghanaian households to shift their dietary patterns, prioritising cost over nutritional value. Notably, while the consumption of staples such as rice, beans, and maize has increased, there has been a marked decline in the intake of vegetables, fruits, and fats, leading to reduced dietary diversity. Further, the evidence reveals that gender dynamics also influence coping strategies male- and female-headed households adopt to mitigate FPV. We find that male-headed households typically engage in additional income-generating activities, give out lands for sharecropping, or liquidate valuable assets to cope with rising food costs, while their female counterparts rely more on kinship networks, innovative food management strategies, informal labour, and community support mechanisms. The study concludes by offering insights into policy interventions aimed at mitigating FPV and alleviating the difficult consumption trade-offs it imposes on Ghanaian households.

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