

POLICY BRIEF

Improving Food and Nutrition Security in Northern Ghana Through Production Diversification

Diets are over-concentrated on carbohydrates

Diets in northern Ghana are much richer in macro-nutrients like carbohydrates than in micro nutrients like vitamins and minerals. This indicates that the diets are not as balanced as they should be in order to provide adequate nourishment to the body. At the same time, there are households in Northern Ghana that do not get enough food for their daily calorie needs. 17% of children in Northern Ghana are underweight while 28% are stunted. More than 70% of children under 5 in the Northern area suffer from Anaemia. In Northern Ghana, about 40% of women of child bearing age suffer from Anaemia while only 20% of households have salt that is adequately iodized. These are indications that improvements in the consumption of micronutrients are very much needed.

Production is also not diversified

The poor diversification observed in consumption is also noted in the production of food (Table 1 below). In Northern Ghana, 87% of households consider cereals, roots and tubers to be their main source of income indicating a high degree of concentration on carbohydrate rich foods. Only 12% and 1% consider pulses and vegetables respectively to be their main source of income while only 5% consider livestock or fishery to be their main source of income.

Production and consumption are correlated

Cereals, roots and tubers which are considered main commodities by an average of 87% of households are consumed 7 times a week while vegetables which only 1% consider as main commodities are absent from household diets 3 days in a week. This also applies to meat, fish, milk or dairy whose related commodities are not ranked as key for production by households. Milk or dairy are absent from meals an average of 6 days in a week while meat and fish are absent an average of 3 days in a week. Clearly, there is a correlation between production and consumption patterns in Northern Ghana.

Strong dependence on own production for food

30% of the food Northern households consume comes from their own production (consumption of own production). The above pattern of production is important given the high dependence of households on own production for food sources. With the high level of poverty, it is understandable that households would depend significantly on their own production. While the average dependence is 30%, there are districts in the North that record about 50% dependence such as Nanumba South and Wa West.

Analytical studies in Ghana and other African countries have demonstrated that, for poor households, an increase in production diversification leads to consumption diversification. This is more so when the communities are remote in nature and the lower their income level is.

In addition to analytical studies, field projects with households have also indicated the usefulness of diversifying household production. The Africa Rising Project, for example, has achieved some success in assisting households in Northern Ghana to diversify their diet by diversifying their production.

It is recommended that communities are assisted in diversifying their production as well as in increasing their productivity. Through these 2 channels their diets can become more balanced as more diversification can be achieved with higher incomes as well.

Table 1: Comparison of Food Production and Consumption Structure in Northern Ghana

Production structure		
% of households that consider commodity group to be main commodity produced	Cereals, tubers and root crops	86.9
	Pulses	11.7
	Vegetables	0.7
% of income from Poultry, other livestock or Fishery		4.6
% households' food from own production		31
Consumption structure/ proxy nutrients unavailability		
Average number of days food group is not eaten	Cereals, tubers and root crops	0
	Meat and fish	3
	Pulses	5
	Vegetables	3
	Oil	3
	Fruits	4
	Sugar	4
	Milk or other dairy	6

Source: Based on World Food Program Survey Data

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