



# Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) Ghana Executive Summary



## Background

Ghana faces a multidimensional challenge in improving nutrition. The country's dynamic economic expansion in the past decade has benefitted households' food security and nutrition, but not equally across socioeconomic groups or regions. In Ghana's northern most regions, the estimated percentages of households that were food insecure in 2020 were 49 percent in Upper East, 33 percent in Northeast and 31 percent in Northern region. These numbers are stark in comparison to estimates of food security in Ghana's southern most regions, with 4 percent each in Greater Accra and Central, and 5 percent in Western region (Government of Ghana 2020). Another contrast is in the incidence of stunting, with as many as one child in four affected amongst the poorest households compared to fewer than one child in ten amongst the wealthiest households (UNICEF 2022).

Approaches to strengthening food systems for nutritious diets will require a focus on equity. Like many other low- and middle-income countries, Ghana's food system is undergoing a period of transition, creating opportunities for policy formulation that ensures no one is left behind. As demographics, wealth levels, value chain capacities, and consumer preferences change, food systems also change. Policies, programmes and compliance measures must ensure that fresh and nutritious foods are available, that social protection programmes are designed to support nutrition, and that the private sector is an enabling environment for producing, transporting and selling nutritious foods at affordable prices. Consumers, foundational to food systems, must be enabled to access and afford diets that meet their nutritional needs.

In 2016, the Ghana Health Service (GHS) and the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis to identify opportunities within the food system to improve access to, and affordability of, nutritious diets. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic and macroeconomic fluctuations have impacted household livelihoods and food prices. In 2022, Ghana's National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and WFP re-initiated the FNG analysis to update results on costs and affordability of diets and to model interventions that could mitigate unaffordability.

## Process and Methods

The FNG analysis estimated the cost of three diets: energy-only, nutrient-adequate (or nutritious, as per linear programming) and healthy (as per food-based dietary guidelines), and the percentage of households that, given current food expenditure, would be unable to afford the nutritious and healthy diets. These indicators were calculated for three time periods in 2021 and two time periods in 2022. The cost of energy-only and nutrient-adequate diets are estimated using the linear optimization software Cost of the Diet (CotD) and the cost of the healthy diet was calculated using the Healthy Diet Basket (Food Prices for Nutrition, Tufts University, Boston, USA, 2020). All analyses were carried out in all 16 regions of Ghana.

Diet costs and non-affordability were estimated for a five-person modelled household comprising a breastfed child (12 months), a school-age child (6–7 years), an adolescent girl (14–15 years), a breastfeeding woman (30–59 years), and an adult man (30–59 years). The estimations used retail prices collected by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and expenditure data from the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA 2020). The analysis was initiated in October 2022 and finalized in February 2023 with two workshops for results validation and intervention prioritization, plus a final dissemination to a larger group of stakeholders.

## Main findings

1. Nutrient-adequate and healthy diets cost two to three times more than diets that meet only energy needs. Diet costs are lowest in northern regions and highest in southern regions.
2. Ghana has experienced macroeconomic shocks due to COVID-19 and the global food crisis. Food price inflation in 2021 and 2022 has dramatically increased the cost of food and of healthy and nutritious diets.
3. Rising food prices have led to more households in Ghana being unable to afford diets that meet their nutritional needs. By late 2022, at least one in two households was not able to afford the cost of a nutrient-adequate diet, increasing the risk of food insecurity and malnutrition.
4. Wealth levels and opportunities to improve living conditions vary widely across socioeconomic groups and geographies. Improving access to nutritious diets requires an equitable multisectoral approach to strengthen households' economic capacities.
5. Nutritious school meals based on diverse local recipes and/or including fortified staples, provide good nutrition for schoolchildren. Ingredients for a meal that covers at least a third of a child's daily nutritional needs cost more than Ghanaian cedi (GH¢) 1 per day, excluding preparation overheads.
6. Nutrition sensitive agriculture can support dietary diversity and strengthen local food systems. Programmes such as Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) and Rearing for Food and Jobs (RFJ) have the potential to improve nutrition outcomes by supporting producers to increase production and consumption of nutritious foods.





7. Value vouchers designed to meet nutrition needs can reduce the affordability gap of a nutrient-adequate diet. Inclusion of fortified foods in value voucher lists can generate demand for fortified and biofortified products and stimulate actors in value chains to ensure supply.
8. Children under 2 years, adolescent girls and pregnant and breastfeeding women are particularly nutritionally vulnerable. Provision of fortified nutritious foods and supplements are cost-efficient ways to meet nutrient needs while continuing to enable increased dietary diversity.
9. The impact of social protection can be increased by making it more nutrition-sensitive, for instance, layering nutrition interventions on top of social protection, and communicating social and behaviour change (SBC) alongside transfers. This can increase the impact on nutrition outcomes of cash transfer programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme.
10. Consumption of unhealthy foods is increasing and leading to overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. An SBC strategy could align actors along the food value chain to meet people's nutritional needs and enable them to make decisions that benefit their health and development.
11. Institutional demand can stimulate supply chain development, enabling economies of scale in the production of fortified foods, including rice, and driving down consumer prices. Simultaneously, people must be informed of the benefits of fortified staples and reassured that fortification is safe and does not cause health problems.

## Stakeholder recommendations

The FNG stakeholder engagement process led to the identification of stakeholder priorities for the improvement of diets in Ghana. Based on inputs gathered during the workshops held in February 2023, stakeholders prioritized the following actions:

- **Create an enabling environment for the production, transportation and retailing of nutritious perishable food items** by realigning government policies like the PFJ programme towards production of nutritious foods and increasing government support for providing inputs for fruit, vegetables, legumes and pulses to local producers.
- **Leverage social assistance to better support nutrition** by linking programmes within Integrated Social Services to health and nutrition interventions and SBC for healthy diets.
- **Consider equitable approaches to economic growth**, including through targeted approaches towards women, financial inclusion, and investment in comparatively underdeveloped areas, particularly in the north.
- **Strengthen national fortification initiatives** by strengthening capacity for local millers, improved monitoring of fortification compliance, and advocacy for raising fortification standards to internationally recognised recommendations.
- **Utilise technology, media and innovative approaches for SBC** to raise awareness about the risks associated with the consumption of unhealthy food and drinks.
- **Promote private sector investment in the production of nutritious foods** by developing policies that economically enable production and implementing guidelines for labelling and food quality.





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