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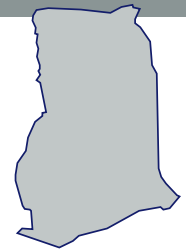
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INTERNATIONAL FOOD
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

sustainable options for ending hunger and poverty



GHANA

THE ACCRA URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION STUDY

In the Accra Urban Food and Nutrition Study, IFPRI collaborated with the Noguchi Memorial Institute of Medical Research and the World Health Organization to examine the nature of urban poverty and how it relates to food insecurity and malnutrition in Accra.

In recent decades the rapid growth of urban poverty in developing countries has quickly overwhelmed efforts to address the unique problems associated with poverty in cities. Meanwhile the problems of the urban poor have become more pressing, including their difficulties earning livelihoods and the effects of this difficulty on food security and nutrition, particularly for children. Like many developing-country cities, Accra has seen a dramatic rise in its population, and a corresponding decline in the quality of livelihoods.

From 1996 to 1997 IFPRI performed a comprehensive analysis of urban food and nutrition security in Accra with the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research in Ghana and the World Health Organization.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND KEY FINDINGS

Project Leader: Marie Ruel

The main goal of the research project was to determine how the strategies employed by the urban poor to secure their livelihoods affected households' food security, the care of children, and their resulting health and nutritional status. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and included participatory community studies, household case studies, a representative household survey, and follow-up interviews and focus groups. Data collection was completed in 1998.

Key findings of the study included the following:

- Households in Accra rely heavily on their labor for income. Men are likely to be involved in skilled or unskilled labor, whereas women are more likely to engage in petty trade or street food vending, where they earn far less than men.



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- Both individuals and households strive to diversify their income sources—the average number of income-generating activities per household was 1.9, and it was significantly lower for female-headed households.
- Urban agriculture does not play as large a role in household livelihood strategies within the city of Accra as in some other African cities. It is, however, of critical importance in the periurban areas around the city. Agriculture as a source of livelihood is increasingly vulnerable in Accra as the city physically expands, destroying farmland.
- The people of Accra rely heavily on the urban market for access to food—more than 90 percent of all food consumed is purchased. Street foods are central to food consumption patterns, especially among the poor, where they account for nearly 40 percent of the total food budget.



- Childhood malnutrition is lower in Accra than in rural areas of Ghana but is still high, with close to 18 percent of children younger than three years of age suffering from linear growth retardation (low height-for-age).
- Poor child-feeding practices may be responsible to some extent for the high levels of malnutrition in Accra. Although breast-feeding is the norm, a large percentage of mothers do not exclusively breast-feed their child up to six months of age as recommended. Also, the foods used to complement breast milk are often low in energy and essential micronutrients.
- Higher maternal schooling is strongly associated with better child feeding and care practices, whereas household economic resources are not, which suggests that food security may not be the main constraint to optimal child care practices in this population.
- Although approximately two-thirds of mothers in the sample were engaged in income-generating activities, mothers' employment was not found to result in poorer child care practices and worse nutritional status among children. Mothers seemed to be able to juggle efficiently between their child care responsibilities and their income-generating role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- National policies must address the needs of different vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households living in urban areas. These female household heads face acute trade-offs between their role as caretaker and their responsibility to maintain household food security.
- Education of girls is a good investment for reducing poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition in Accra. Increasing employment opportunities and access to credit could release some of the constraints faced by the urban self-employed.
- The rapid proliferation of traders and vendors of street foods will require new approaches by municipal authorities, emphasizing participation and collaboration rather than control. Strengthening trader or street food vendor associations would help to develop self-regulatory mechanisms and give a political voice to small-scale entrepreneurs.

COLLABORATORS

- Noguchi Memorial Institute of Medical Research at the University of Ghana, Legon
- World Health Organization (WHO)

DONORS

- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- International Development Research Center (IDRC)
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- World Health Organization (WHO)

PUBLICATIONS

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