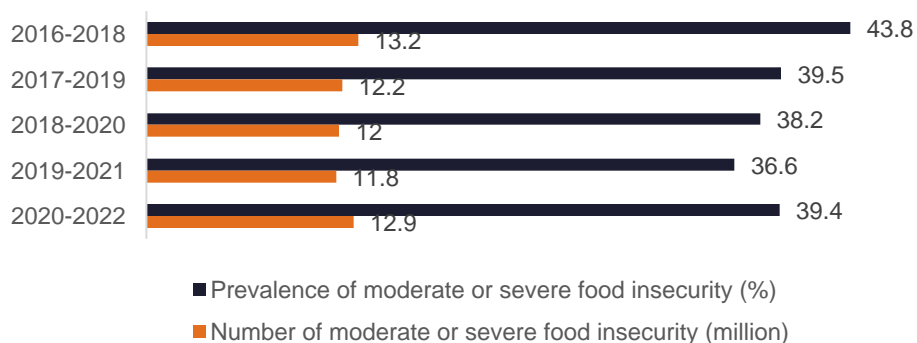




## Ghana: Inequalities in Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a global health challenge, especially among low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 2.1](#) targets to: “End hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and vulnerable people, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round by 2030.” In Ghana, the situation worsened in 2022. The number of individuals in food crisis surged [from 560,000 in 2021 to 823,000 in 2022](#), marking a 47% increase in individuals suffering from lack of food access, availability, and utilization. As per the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), in terms of the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in Ghana, [12.9 million people, or 39.4% of the total population](#), were affected in 2022 (see **Graph 1**).

Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity in Ghana



**Graph 1.** Prevalence of Food Insecurity in Ghana. FAOSTAT. <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS>

**The exacerbated food insecurity in Ghana in 2022 can be largely attributed to the food price inflation, which averaged 34% higher than overall inflation at 29%. Overall inflation hit a 20-year high. By the end of 2022, 850,000 Ghanaians had been pushed into poverty.** Those impacts were even more severe for people with lower incomes since they spend a larger percentage of their money on food.

**400,000** more women than men suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022

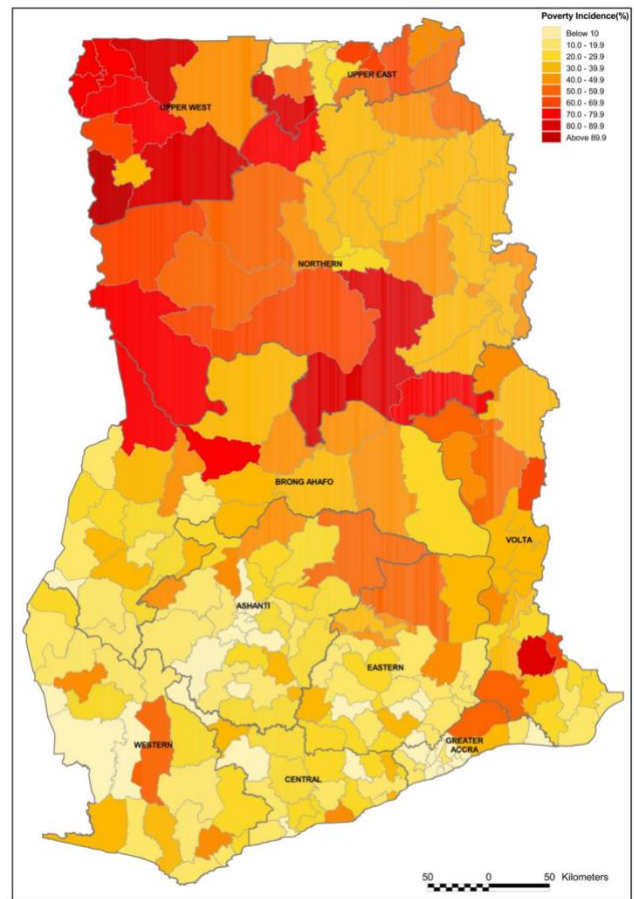


**It is noteworthy that food insecurity in Ghana is not uniformly distributed. The highest levels of food insecurity were found in the northern regions, especially in the Upper East, Upper West, North East, and Northern regions. Data from the 2022 Annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey showed that the prevalence of food insecurity in four northern regions: Savannah (58.8%), Upper West (61.8%), North East (65.6%), and Upper East (73.7%), was more than double that of the Greater Accra Region (27.2%). Notably, food insecurity disproportionately affects women. In 2022, 400,000 more women than men** suffered from moderate

or severe food insecurity. Research also revealed that about 71.9% of households and 72.7% of women experienced food insecurity in East Mamprusi Municipality in 2020. Therefore, to develop effective solutions to address the ongoing food crisis in Ghana, it is crucial to understand the regional, socioeconomic, and gender disparities present in Ghanaian society.

### Regional Economic Inequality

Despite Ghana’s consistent progress in reducing acute malnutrition and stunting at the national level, the Northern Savannah Ecological Zone continues to grapple with high rates of poverty and stunting, at 21% and 28% respectively. The incidence of poverty was notably higher in the northern regions—namely Northern, Upper East, and Upper West—compared to other regions of the country (see **Graph 2**). Furthermore, research suggested that farming households in the Eastern region had a higher mean monthly income (₵644.11) than those in the Northern region (₵518.25), yet their mean total monthly food expenditure (₵323.81) was lower than in the Northern region (₵330.46). **The intensified poverty and food insecurity in the north are due to the region’s strong dependence on agriculture, less engagement in more lucrative off-farm businesses,**



**Graph 2.** Ghana Poverty Mapping Report.

<https://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/publications/POVERTY%20MAP%20FOR%20GHANA-05102015.pdf>

**limited access to credit, and related climatic challenges.** In the northern region, 90% of Ghanaian households rely on agriculture for their sustenance. However, only 31.94% of these households participated in off-farm businesses, and only 9.52% of them had access to credit. In addition, this region experiences only one rainy season, in contrast to the south, which benefits from two. This climatic disparity has a significant impact on food production, exacerbating both poverty and food insecurity in northern Ghana.

## Gender Inequality

Gender inequality remains a deeply entrenched challenge in Ghana. The nation has a Gender Inequality Index score of 0.53, placing it 130th globally. Women in Ghana consistently earn less, have lower access to employment opportunities, are less likely to engage in decision-making processes, and encounter more obstacles in educational enrollment, achievement, and completion than their men counterparts. Food security is about power and gender; investing in gender equality can improve food security in the following two ways:

- **Investing in gender equality can increase agricultural productivity**

In Ghana, women play an important role in agriculture, making up 50% of the agricultural labor force and producing nearly 70% of food crops. However, it is noteworthy that female farmers in Ghana have been found to exhibit lower agricultural productivity compared to male farmers. This disparity can be attributed to **women's restricted access to land and financial services, and the disproportionate time burden**. While the law formally acknowledges women's property rights and ownership, prevailing social norms curtail their actual rights to own and utilize property. A mere 8% of women possess land, in stark contrast to the 30% of men who do. Women also face financial exclusion, and their daily lives are marked by varying levels of time-use inequalities. This is exacerbated by traditional expectations which dictate that women shoulder a larger share of domestic responsibilities and unpaid care work. Therefore, agricultural productivity and food security can be increased if women's access to productive resources is ensured and traditional gender norms are transformed.

"Boys do not stay at home. They like playing with friends in the community so **you will hardly get them to sweep.**" --- a man from Akrobi states

Source: Egyir, I. S., O'Brien, C., Bandanaa, J., & Opit, G. P. (2023). Feeding the future in Ghana: Gender inequality, poverty, and food insecurity. *World Medical & Health Policy*.

- **Investing in gender equality can alleviate women from poverty and improve their food security**

**In Ghana, women consistently earn less than men and bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care responsibilities.** As revealed by the 2022 Annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey (AHIES), women, among paid workers, earned 34.2 percent less than their male counterparts. This gender wage

disparity exacerbates poverty and food insecurity among women. When it comes to unpaid care and domestic duties, women and girls over the age of 10 [allocate 14.4% of their time](#) to these tasks, in contrast to the 3.5% spent by men.

While Ghana has achieved notable economic growth, registering a [3.1%](#) increase in 2022, and made strides in poverty alleviation, with the poverty rate declining [from 52.6% in 1991 to 27% in 2022](#) and [almost 300,000 individuals](#) were lifted out of poverty between 2006 and 2013, poverty remains a stark reality for many women. A significant proportion of households headed by females, [61% in urban areas and 53% in rural areas](#), fall within the poorest quintile. Disturbingly, this figure has risen from approximately 25.7% in 1960 to over 33% in 2003. **It is evident that Ghana needs a society that prioritizes equality, ensuring that both genders benefit equitably from its economic growth.** The government should champion the introduction of more social protection programs specifically tailored for women. Moreover, it is essential to ensure universal access to quality health care and education, with financial constraints not hindering anyone from accessing these crucial services.

In summary, despite Ghana's success in economic development and poverty reduction, food insecurity remains a challenge endangering the well-being of its citizens. **Addressing food insecurity in Ghana necessitates confronting both regional economic disparities and deep-seated gender inequalities.** [A recent CARE report](#) also underscored this, revealing that economic growth can worsen food insecurity if gender and economic inequalities are not addressed.

## Best Practices

Between 2018 and 2022, [CARE's Agrosource project](#) helped smallholder women farmers in Northern Ghana **increase their incomes by 66% (\$73), improve food production by 55% per acre, and more than double the yield of "women's crops"**—the ones that make up most of the families' diets. The success of empowering women in agriculture in the highly patriarchal social-cultural contexts of Northern Ghana can be attributed to several key initiatives:

- A 50% increase in the availability and access to high-quality agricultural inputs in rural communities through a private-sector-led agro-dealership scheme.
- Boosting the supply of certified seeds via a community seed production system, collaborating with the private sector. This system engaged 200 smallholder women farmers as outgrowers.
- Enhancing smallholder farmers' knowledge and thereby improving the utilization of top-quality agricultural inputs through input fairs, demonstration plots, and training sessions.
- Establishing a conducive environment for women in the Agri-input systems by enhancing the gender responsiveness of both private and government sector partners.

**"My yield and income have increased.** I never imagined it would be like this. I have been able to pay the annual health insurance subscription fees for two of my children."

--- Ayishetu Mahama (47), a project participant of Agrosource

Additionally, [CARE's Women Rear](#) helped women serve as animal health service providers to reach women livestock keepers with much-needed vaccines for chickens and goats—sometimes even using drones. That keeps critical sources of protein and income available for women. **91% of women say they are getting better services for their livestock.** The project also reduced vaccine wastage from 27% to 8%, so every dollar invested goes further for women and their communities. **Gender stereotypes changed too. Now, women farmers are supported to rear animals, instead of being prevented from it.** They can openly declare that they own livestock, and they can sell their own animals. Female vets feel more accepted and valued in their jobs, narrowing the gender gap in the veterinary workforce.

## Recommendations

Following the findings and success of the projects' examples mentioned above, we recommend the following for policymakers and agricultural-related interventions:



**Incorporate a gender lens:** Ensure a gender perspective not only in solutions but also throughout the design and implementation phases. This means including smallholder women growers and allowing them to take on leadership roles across decision-making spaces. At the same time, engage men and boys in the different intervention components to promote gender equality reflections and conversations. Additionally, actions should be planned aimed at men, youth, and community leaders, to change gender stereotypes, which will have an impact on the integration of men in household activities and will significantly reduce the work overload that female producers face when they are involved in economic activities for income generation.



**Adopt a gender transformative approach:** It is essential to work on the personal empowerment of women producers and microentrepreneurs, since most women have experienced situations of gender violence; Recognizing these situations allows them to expand their life projects, and then begin a process of enforcing rights [promotion and demand]. While it is crucial to implement policy changes that bolster women's economic and political rights, these changes should be paired with broader social and cultural shifts, like household decision-making power. It is essential to support women's rights organizations and campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality.



**Provide women with tools to use their power:** Include farmers, especially women, in training related to good agricultural practices and technologies, and climate resilience knowledge. Moreover, this must be accompanied by policies that aim to enable women to access loans, land ownership, and agricultural technologies.



**Prioritize data collection and analysis:** Recognizing the situation and condition of women producers and microentrepreneurs allows us to measure the barriers in their community contexts, thereby providing assistance according to the identified challenges. Gather sex-disaggregated data to comprehend the unique needs of females and craft programs tailored to the different contexts.



**Engage with local communities and local women's organizations:** Actively listen to communities and support solutions that meet their specific needs.



**Listen to women:** Take time to listen to women and their specific contexts and needs. This way we will be able to understand the different situations related to gender dynamics and food insecurity to promote programs and policies towards gender equality.



**Consider intersectionality:** Using an intersectional lens to understand multiple risk situations faced by women producers and microentrepreneurs is imperative. Programs and projects must have the openness to intertwine with other key actors in the territory that complement the intervention. When working on agricultural knowledge sharing, skills like literacy are crucial. Therefore, when undergoing any project, reflect on how the different contexts are interconnected with the group of people you are working with, for example, literacy levels and language diversity.

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