Regional Highlights

Northern region

- Food security conditions in the region are increasingly constrained by decreasing food stocks and the rising cost of grains as seasonal trends result in reduced consumption by food-poor households. As a consequence, food security conditions have deteriorated in major deficit locations, necessitating a reduction in the number of meals eaten in a day and adoption of a range of coping strategies including sale of charcoal.

- In Tamale, the nominal wholesale price of 100kg bag of maize went up by 9% from ₦61 to ₦67 between March and April 2012 and is also up by 52% over April 2011 and 81% above the five-year average. In Salaga, Damongo, Bole and Sawla, the nominal wholesale price of maize remained unchanged between March and April 2012. However, increases of 14%, 3%, 19%, 8%, 22% and 7% were recorded in Bimbilla, Walewale, Nalerigu, Kumbungu, Zabzugu and Saboba markets respectively. As compared to the previous year, the nominal wholesale prices are up by 75% in Salaga, 60% in Bimbilla, 28% in Damongo, 53% in Walewale and 80% for both Nalerigu and Gusheigu.

Upper East Region

- Food security conditions are already strained in most localities as dwindling grain reserves reduce households’ access to food while prices of major cereal grains continue to trend upward. An estimated 20% to 30% of rural households in the region could be at risk of moderate food insecurity and reduced food access due to the widespread nature of grain deficit and the prevailing prohibitive prices of major food items.

- The nominal wholesale price of a 100kg bag of maize went up by 4% from ₦67 to ₦70 in Bolgatanga between March and April. It was up by 67% from April 2011 and 81% higher than the five-year average. In terms of millet, the nominal wholesale price went up by 25% between January and April 2012, with a 16% increase from ₦81 to ₦94 between March and April 2012. In comparison with the previous year and the five year average, millet price is up by 71% and 109% respectively. The nominal price of local rice increased by 18% from ₦140 to ₦165 between January and April 2012, whereas the March to April increase was only 3%. As compared to the previous year and the five-year average, prices increased by 38% and 73% respectively.

Upper West

- Food security conditions for the majority of rural households in the region will likely continue to deteriorate for the remainder of the current lean season owing to the lower than normal grain harvest, which affected major production districts of Wa East, Sissala East, and Sissala West Districts. Even though communities in Sissala East and Sissala West are likely to have a better food security situation than other parts of the region, the general food security situation for the entire region is not expected to improve from now until the end of August 2012.

- The nominal wholesale price of a 100kg bag of maize went up by 12% in Wa market between March and April 2012. As compared to April 2011 and the five-year average, it is up by 56% and 108% respectively. Although these prices are prohibitively high, the increase is reflective of the seasonal change in grain supply to the markets and the level of disposable households stocks. In Tumu, the March to April price increase was 4% while increases over the previous year and the five-year average were 45% and 98% respectively.
1.0 Timely start of seasonal rains and farming activities in northern Ghana
The northern regions witnessed the arrival of seasonal rains in April which triggered isolated planting of crops in some localities. Overall, rainfall conditions were well distributed during the first and second dekads, but receded to scattered showers in very few locations during the third dekad. The torrential rains during the second dekad of April provided sufficient moisture conditions to sustain planting and germination of crops while land preparation activities moved into full gear. The dominant crops planted at this stage of the season were maize, groundnuts, sorghum, millet and watermelon. The planting of water melon and groundnuts early in the season is usually part of the measures adopted by agricultural households to bridge the seasonal gap in income sources, while maize serves as the replenishment cereal to break the hunger gap. The early start of planting and the growing season could facilitate an early arrival of the first harvest and perhaps reduce the length of the hunger gap and the impact of food insecurity on food-poor households. Most of the early farming activities have been concentrated in the Northern Region and some parts of Upper West Regions, where early rains are also crucial for the cultivation of roots and tuber crops.

In general, most seasonal farming activities are expected to take off fully in May with widespread planting of early maturing cereals to support recovery from the poor harvest of the 2011 agricultural season. The planting of maize, groundnuts and millet will intensify in most areas in May in northern Ghana, but early millet will be one of the earliest crops to be planted by many households in the Upper East Region because it provides early relief from hunger during the lean season, maturing only 70 days after planting.

2.0 Food Security Summary
As the lean season commences in all parts of northern Ghana, food security conditions have deteriorated among many smallholder households which were affected by the widespread production deficit that resulted from poor rains during the 2011 growing season. The depletion of stocks from the last harvest would most likely increase the risk of moderate food insecurity in widespread localities while households resorting to market purchases will be constrained by the higher than normal prices for cereal grains. It is therefore unlikely that food deficit households would have garnered enough resources to replenish their stocks as was reported in the March FSNMS bulletin because the price decrease was short-lived.

Contrary to the usual seasonal price decline in April, which is the results of increased grain sales by households preparing to purchase agricultural inputs, prices have continued to increase in most markets in the northern Ghana driven by high levels of demand from southern Ghana. All regional markets reported increases in the prices of all major cereal grains ranging between 4% and 12% between March and April, but the general supply of major staple commodities is relatively stable and satisfactory across the three northern regions.

Despite the availability of food commodities in the market, prices remain at levels considerably higher than for the same period last year, thanks to strong demand from southern traders. This has been attributed to poor rainfall and harvests of staple crops in southern Ghana, increasing the reliance of those in the south on staples produced in the north. This high level of demand is sufficient to maintain high prices, despite reports from traders of adequate levels of supply for staple food commodities than the same period last year. Demand for staple foods at the retail level is reported to also be higher than last year, despite the relatively high prices for food commodities, apparently due to the high level of households’ dependence on markets to meet their grain needs.

The continuing depreciation of the Ghana Cedi against all the major foreign currencies and concerns about inflation pose serious challenges to macro-economic stability and has raised concerns about its impact on the prices of imported food and non-food items. The Ghanaian Cedi depreciated by 5% against the US Dollar from ₋1.72 to ₋1.81 in April alone. The increased cost of imported food items as result of this and continuing upward increase in inflationary trends will further contribute to the deterioration in the purchasing power and quantity of goods and services low income households are able to purchase.
2.1 Northern Region
Food security conditions in the region are increasingly constrained by decreasing food stocks and the rising costs of grains in markets as seasonal trends call for reduced consumption by food-poor households. As a consequence, food security conditions have deteriorated in major deficit locations, necessitating a reduction in the number of meals eaten in a day and adoption of a range of coping strategies. The population groups at risk to food insecurity are the grain deficit areas that experienced unfavourable precipitation conditions during the 2011 growing season that have already depleted their reserves, contrary to normal years when grain stocks usually last up to April-May.

Favourable agro-meteorological conditions and timely commencement of seasonal agricultural in April could result in the timely arrival of early maturing crops, bringing an early relief to food insecure households. Although few agricultural labour opportunities are increasingly available in planting and land preparation, the low purchasing power of food deficit households may compel them to work more on the fields of wealthier ones for their immediate food needs at the expense their own food production. The low coping capacity and constrained access to inputs resulting from the poor harvest of the past growing season means that many households will be unable to grow some important cash crops or will borrow at very high cost from wealthier neighbours, thus increasing their debt burden and recovery from last year’s production decline.

Seed for groundnuts and rice, which recorded significant decline in production during the previous year, may not be accessible to many farmers due to the higher than normal price and could reduce the area under cultivation for this crop.

2.2 Upper East Region
Food security conditions are already strained in most localities as dwindling grain resources reduce households’ access to food while prices of major cereal grains continue to trend upward. An estimated 20% to 30% of rural households in the region could be at risk of moderate food insecurity and reduced food access due to the widespread nature of grain deficit and the prevailing prohibitive prices of grain items. The increased cost of the households’ food basket, coupled with the cost of agricultural inputs will increase pressure on the purchasing power of these households and increase the likelihood of some households resorting to cheap and less preferred foods. Food insecurity conditions may be more intense in those parts of the region where farmers have not been able to reinforce their grain stocks through dry season cultivation.

Own produced grains reserves remain the primary sources of food in most localities, but sustaining these reserves may necessitate the employment of various coping mechanisms such as reducing the number of meals eaten in a day or reducing portion sizes at meal times. Although the incidence of declined food access is likely to be widespread, households in districts which suffered significant production decline in 2011 such as Talensi-Nabdam and Bongo are likely to be the worst affected.

From now until the next harvest becomes available in August and September, some households are expected to sustain their food consumption through the combination of the sale of small ruminants, wages earned from daily labour employment and occasional remittances from other family members. Should early season precipitation conditions remain favourable, early millet-cultivating households are expected to see their early harvest by the start of August which could considerably improve their food access.

2.3 Upper West Region
Food security conditions for the majority of rural households in the region will likely continue to deteriorate for the remainder of the current lean season owing to the lower than normal grain harvest, which affected major production districts of Wa East, Sissala East, and Sissala West Districts. As the lean season commences and seasonal patterns of food availability changes, the availability of grains in local markets will progressively decrease. Like in many other parts of the northern regions, most rural households are likely to experience moderate food insecurity and could endure constraints in accessing seeds to plant and food to eat until the next harvest in August and September 2012.

The lower than normal supply of grain stocks from the major producing districts, coupled with the high demand from various parts of the Ghana and Burkina Faso could drive up prices of cereal grains and render many more poor households vulnerable to food insecurity. As a consequence, most household may be resorting to the consumption of
fewer meals to maximize their reserves for the long period of reduced grain access. Households which have already exhausted their grains are turning to the market in large numbers to meet their grain needs, but as income sources dwindle and opportunities for generating income are fewer, market sources of grain will not be a viable alternative for these households. Even though communities in Sissala East and Sissala West are considered to have a better food security situation than other parts of the region, the general food security situation for the entire region is not expected to improve as household food stocks continue to be depleted across the region from now until the end of August 2012.

3.0 Price trends and marketing activities

3.1 Northern Region

In Tamale, the nominal wholesale price of 100kg bag of maize went up by 9% from ¢61 to ¢67 between March and April 2012 and is also up by 52% over April 2011 and 81% above the five-year average (Figure 1). In Salaga, Damongo, Bole and Sawla the nominal wholesale price of maize remained unchanged between March and April 2012. However, increases of 14%, 3%, 19%, 8%, 22% and 7% were recorded in Bimbi, Walewale, Nalerigu, Kumbungu, Zabzugu and Saboba markets respectively. As compared to the previous year, the nominal wholesale prices are up by 75% in Salaga, 60% in Bimbilla, 28% in Damongo, 53% in Walewale and 80% for both Nalerigu and Gusheigu. In Savelugu, Zabzugu, and Saboba, prices are also up by 71%, 56% and 60% respectively.

Similarly, increases in the nominal wholesale price of millet were 19% for Bimbilla, 24% for Nalerigu, 12% for Gusheigu, 1% for Savelugu, 20% for Kumbungu, 20% for Zabzugu, 48% for Bole, and 20% for Saboba. Salaga, Damongo and Walewale recorded no increase in the price of millet between March and April. In comparison with April 2011, the nominal price of millet is up by 35% in Salaga, 36% in Bimbilla, 28% in Damongo, 35% in Walewale, 74% in Nalerigu and 68% in Gusheigu. In Savelugu, Zabzugu, and Saboba, prices are also up by 34%, 51% and 100% respectively.

In terms of local rice, the majority of supply markets recorded increases over March 2012, including Bimbilla at 10%, Nalerigu at 8%, Savelugu at 3% and Kumbungu at 10%; while Bole and Sawla both recorded an increase of 14%. When compared to the April 2011, the nominal price of local rice is up by 55% in Salaga, 43% in Bimbilla, 30% in Damongo, 35% in Walewale, 74% in Nalerigu and 68% in Gusheigu. In Savelugu, Zabzugu, and Saboba, prices are also up by 34%, 51% and 100% respectively.

3.2 Upper East Region

The nominal price of maize went up by 4% from ¢67 to ¢70 in Bolgatanga between March and April. It is up by 67% from April 2011 and 81% higher than the five-year average (Figure 2). In terms of millet, the nominal price went up by 25% between January and April 2012, with a 16% increase from ¢81 to ¢94 between March and April 2012. In comparison with the previous year and the five year average, millet price is up by 71% and 109% respectively. The nominal price of local rice increased by 18% from ¢140 to ¢165 between January and April 2012. March to April increase was only 3%. As compared to the previous year and the five-year average, prices have increased by 38% and 73% respectively.
The nominal wholesale price of 100kg bag of maize increased by 13% from ₡52 to ₡59 in Fumbisi, and by 23% from ₡65 to ₡80 in Bongo between March and April 2012. Decreases of 3% and 15% were recorded in Navrongo and Garu respectively, but maize remained stable at ₡70 in Zebilla market. As compared to the previous year, prices are up by 41% in Bawku, 36% in Navrongo, 30% in Garu and 69% in Fumbisi.

Millet prices also went up in all markets in the region between March and April reaching 1.2% in Bawku, 9.7% in Navrongo, 2.9% in Garu, 14% in Fumbisi and 14% in Zebilla and 5% in Bongo. When compared to April 2011, prices are up by the following percentage points: 43% in Bawku, 27% in Navrongo, 31% in Garu and 33% in Fumbisi.

With respect to millet in Tumu, the nominal wholesale price of a 100kg bag increased by 20% between March and April, but compared to the same period last year and the five-year average, the price is

3.3 Upper West Region
The nominal wholesale price of 100kg bag of maize went up by 12% in Wa Market between March and April 2012. The price of maize is currently 56% above its level for April 2011 and 108% above the five year average. Although these prices are prohibitively high, the increase is reflective of the seasonal change in grain supply to markets and the level of disposable households stocks. In Tumu market, a 4% increase in the nominal price of maize was recorded between March and April while increases over the previous year and the five-year average were 45% and 98% respectively.

With respect to millet in Tumu, the nominal wholesale price of a 100kg bag increased by 20% between March and April, but compared to the same period last year and the five-year average, the price is
up by 33% and 163% respectively. The price of local rice has been stable during the past three months, but it is up by 25% from April 2011 and 100% above the five-year average. Millet price increase in Wa between March and April 2012 was 13%, while increases over the previous year and the five-year average were 24% and 90% respectively.

4.0 Health and Nutrition
The nutritional status of selected children under two (2) years of age in the Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions were assessed using the weight-for age (WFA) indicator. Data was gathered from seventeen (17) selected health institutions in nine (9) districts close to the respective Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) sentinel sites in the three northern regions. In the Upper East Region, data was obtained from 60% of the sentinel sites, 50% in the Upper West and in Northern Region; data were obtained from 40% of the identified sentinel sites.

The Information was gathered during growth monitoring sessions carried out by personnel of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) at outreach points of these health centres. The data is therefore from individuals who are patronizing child health services so there is an element of self-targeting. The percentages of these underweight children examined (95% CI) shows the combined effects of acute and chronic malnutrition, as shown by figure 4 -which compares the nutritional status of children between critical months in the lean (June ) and the period after the harvest season months (Nov – Mar) of northern Ghana from 2008 to 2012.

Observation:
Generally, the levels of underweight are lower during the harvest season (as shown for November) for all regions as compared to the levels in the lean season months (June). For April, 2012, there has been a sharp increase in the levels of malnutrition in the Northern and Upper East Regions which needs to be closely monitored. March marks the start of the lean season in northern Ghana, where the factors for poor household food security become more apparent.