

African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) &

Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent & Protracted Crises (SPARC)

Concept note for public communications 01 and 02 October 2025

Higher food prices in low-income Africa since 2020: causes, impacts, responses

Background

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in 2020, international prices of cereals and fertiliser began to rise through 2020 and 2021 to be driven even higher by the effects of Russia-Ukraine war which started in February 2022. World prices of selected food items peaked in mid-2022, by which time they had doubled or more compared to the previous levels. From March 2020 to May 2022, world prices rose 2.1 times for maize, 2.6 times for wheat, and 2.4 times for urea fertiliser.¹ The FAO Food Price Index in December 2024 was 6.7 percent higher than in December 2023.

Concern mounted that the higher prices of cereals would transmit to domestic markets of low-income countries making food unaffordable for many people especially the vulnerable, hence threatening livelihoods, health, and wellbeing. Higher fertiliser prices, it was feared, would reduce use of fertiliser, leading to lower harvests in low-income countries, thereby pushing domestic food prices even higher.

In this context, through the support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, Cowater international and a research consortium² led by AERC undertook detailed empirical analysis of the impact of the war. The second phase of this work, supported by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), deepened the analysis of the gendered impacts and of policy responses. This included generation of new primary data from Egypt and Kenya and deepened insight on how policy responses can address gender inequalities. IDRC also commissioned, in partnership with SPARC, two studies of higher prices in northeast Nigeria and northern Uganda. At the same time, SPARC undertook studies of food prices in Mali and Sudan, and of food crises in fourteen vulnerable countries across the world.

The findings from the AERC led consortium showed that despite low exposure, the war impacted food and fertilisers prices, and indirectly demand for imports and investment decisions, and that this shock may have long-term consequences. The impacts of the war prompted governments to put policy measures in place, including monetary, agricultural and social protection

The findings of the SPARC studies in Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda are broadly similar in terms of food price trends. In all four cases, staple food prices rose sharply from early 2020 onwards, but largely owing to domestic causes — above all poor harvests (exacerbated by conflict in three cases) and hyperinflation (in Nigeria and Sudan). Unlike world prices, which declined from mid-2022 to 2025 to settle at their previous, pre-spike levels

¹ WFP (2023) reported that the price of a local basket of food in the East Africa region had increased by more than 55 percent over the past 12 months.

² The consortium consisted of African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP), the Economic Research Forum (ERF) and ODI.

(in real terms), domestic prices in the four countries did not fall back by much if at all — the high prices have persisted.

The effects of higher staple food prices were largely similar across the countries. Low-income households, already highly vulnerable to higher food price increases were particularly hard hit. Many responded by reducing their food consumption and cutting back on essential spending, including healthcare and children's education — increasing the risks of malnutrition and children being taken out of school. They tried to earn extra income, but most found only poorly paid employment. Those most affected received very little, if any, public support from governments, NGOs, donors and international agencies. They had to cope from their own resources.

Given these critical findings, the AERC and SPARC are hosting an outreach event, on 2 October 2025 at the SPARC-Jameel Observatory event on two key issues for future policy making

The first question addresses how governments (both local and national), NGOs (at domestic and international levels), donors, and multilateral agencies can intervene effectively and cost-efficiently during times of elevated food prices and food crises.

The second question is broader in scope. All the countries examined in these studies have experienced food crises. Historically, rural Africa has faced periodic food emergencies and famines, often triggered by localized harvest failures. These failures typically lead to sharp increases in staple food prices, making it difficult for low-income populations to afford adequate nutrition. This, in turn, results in malnutrition, health crises, and—in extreme cases—famine with mass mortality. The central issue is whether the recent food crises resemble those of the past or differ in significant ways—and, if so, what the policy implications might be. A related question is whether food crises in Africa have become more frequent and severe since 2015, as some data appears to suggest.




Proposed session

AERC, PEP, ERF, ODI and SPARC will convene a joint session at the SPARC & Jameel Observatory event in Nairobi on **October 2 2025**.

The session will be 90 minutes long, and will target national policymakers, NGOs and other implementing organisations, and multilaterals based in Nairobi, including UN agencies, development banks, CGIAR agricultural research centres, and other key stakeholders who have important roles to play in shaping new research findings, paving new policy directions, and initiating innovative practices in the areas of food security



Restated programme

[9:30 – 9:45 15 mins)	Opening Session
	Chair, Abbi Kedir, Director of Research, AERC
Opening/Welcome Remarks	Prof. Victor Murinde , Executive Director, AERC
	Alicia Sosa , First Secretary (Development), Pan-Africa Regional Program, IDRC
09.45 – 10.30 (45 mins)	Panel Session
	Moderator, Steven Were Omamo, Director, Development Strategies and Governance, IFPRI <i>Welcome and introduction by the session Moderator</i>
	Framing Presentations (7 Minutes) Steve Wiggins [SPARC] Dirk Willem te Velde [ODI]
	Panellists  Eleni Yitbarek , PEP Research Fellow & Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Pretoria  Roselyne Akinyi Wallender , Africa Director, Practical Action.  Margie Buchanan-Smith Fellow of the Rift Valley Institute, Visiting Fellow at Tufts University, Senior Research Associate at ODI Global
10.30–11.00 30 Mins	Q&A
	Closing Remarks from Session Chair