Objectives
The overall project objective was to examine factors in social and physical food environments of African cities that drive consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor (EDNP) foods and beverages among adolescent girls (15-18y) and women (aged 19-49y).

Background
Ghana is a lower-middle income country that has reached an advanced stage of the nutrition transition. Diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 41% of total deaths for this West African nation. High-risk diets have made women and girls (ages 15-49) in Ghana three times more likely to be overweight or obese compared to men. From 1995-2008, obesity/overweight more than doubled (13.2% to 31.0%). This project aimed to understand how EDNP foods and beverages are embedded in everyday life of women and adolescent girls, by investigating what factors drive consumption in social (e.g., peers, friends/family through social support, norms, role modelling) and physical environments (e.g. at home, school, food marketing). Evidence gathered from this project can help to inform context-relevant interventions to reduce consumption of EDNP food and beverages.
Methods
This study took place in 2 deprived urban areas of Ghana: Accra and Ho. The team combined qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the social and physical characteristics of the food environment, participant perspectives on food choice and its drivers, and participants’ dietary intake. Data were derived from longitudinal qualitative interviews, photovoice exercises, geographic information systems mapping, and 24-hour qualitative dietary recalls. Additionally, the team undertook participatory exercises with key stakeholders to assess community readiness for healthy eating interventions and engage policy makers in prioritizing country-level actions to promote healthy food environments.

Results
Across income groups in these deprived urban areas of Ghana, there is widespread consumption of EDNP foods and beverages. Energy-dense nutrient-rich (including traditional dishes) were heavily consumed by 89.4% of the sample. Individuals with the lowest socioeconomic status and those who ate frequently were more likely to have unhealthy diets. Shorter eating episodes were more likely to include greater intake of unhealthy foods and beverages. Longer eating episodes contained more traditional foods that were nutrient-rich but also energy-dense and often fried. 82% of meals were consumed at home; in particular, the evening meal which was often energy-dense.

More Information


• Open Access Data - https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/DFC_Ghana
• Project Page - https://driversoffoodchoice.org/research/project-descriptions/dietary-transitions-in-ghanaiian-cities/

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