

Market Monitoring Bulletin

Highlights



Imported rice (5% broken) reached annual change of 21%

Year-on-year comparison shows the price of imported rice increased by 21%, with the largest increase witnessed in Pleebo, Maryland (31%) and Fish Town, River Gee (28%).



Head inflation 10.7% spike recorded year-on-year

Double digit inflation 10.7% coupled with 21% local currency depreciation since March 2023 is weakening purchasing power of poor households and constraining their food access.



13% change in gasoline prices since March 2023

Spike in prices for gasoline across all markets expected to put additional pressure on prices of food, basic commodities and transportation costs.



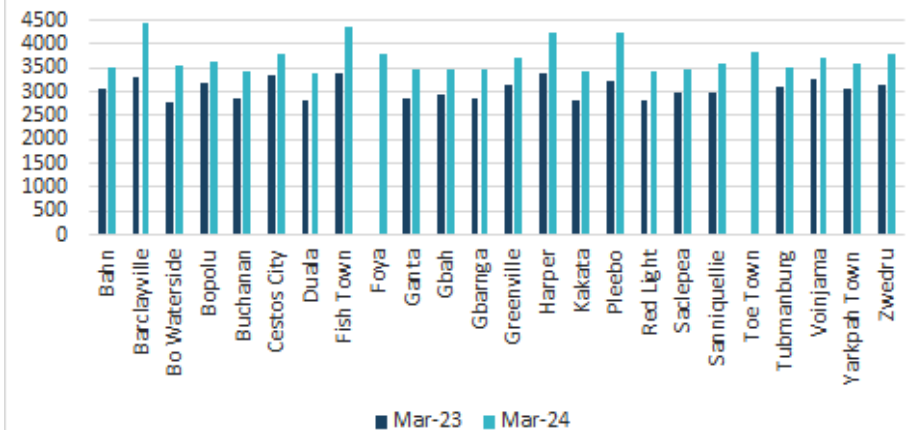
Food Prices

Imported Rice 5% Broken

Imported rice 5% broken showed an increase all 24 markets monitored across the country. The national average price for a 25Kg bag of rice in March 2024 is LRD 3,700, an increase of 21% compared to the same period last year. The biggest increases were recorded in south eastern markets of Barclayville, Grand Kru (34%), Pleebo, Maryland (31%) and Fish Town, River Gee (28%). Far-off markets continue to record higher prices than markets closer to Monrovia, main port of entry. For example, the price for the same 25Kg bag of rice sold for LRD 3,400 in Duala market in Monrovia is LRD 1,030 or 30% more expensive in Barclayville market in Grand Kru. The high demand coupled with the depreciation of the local currency as well as the high transportation cost due to the deplorable state of the roads appear as the main drivers of the rice price increases.

Meanwhile, markets across the country remain well supplied with imported rice. However, the majority of the poor households especially those in the rural areas may find it difficult to access the available commodity due to unsustainable incomes and weak purchasing power. This could further worsen the precarious food security situation of the poor and vulnerable households.

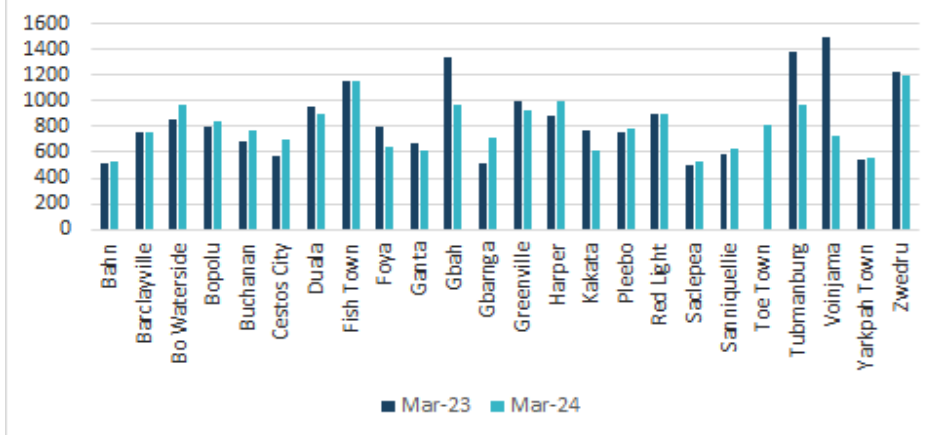
Figure 1: Nominal Price Change for 25Kg bag of Imported Rice in LRD March 2023 and March 2024



Palm Oil

The national average price for a gallon of palm oil decreased by -6% year-on-year. Palm oil ranges from LRD 500 to LRD 975 across the country, but is more expensive in Zwedru LRD 1,200 and Fish Town LRD 1,150. The decline in palm oil prices from LRD 850 in March last year to LRD 800 in March 2024 can be explained by a good harvest compared to last year. High production areas in Nimba (Bahn, Ganta, Saclepea, Sanniquellie) and Rivercess (Yarkpah Town) are the cheapest markets to purchase palm oil. Palm oil prices are lower during the dry season, in particular from March to May when the market is flooded with palm nuts. Prices are very high from June to October. Relevant to note that palm oil is both an important source of fats in household’s diet and a major livelihood source.

Figure 2: Nominal Price Change for a Gallon of Palm oil in LRD March 2023 and March 2024

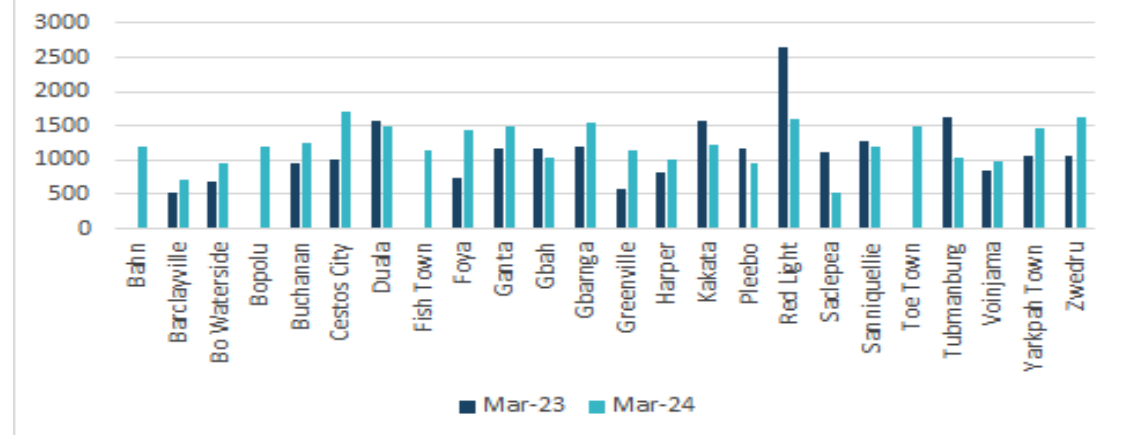


Cassava

In March, the price for a 25Kg bag full of cassava increased by a marginal 3% on average from LRD 1,190 to LRD 1,220 respectively between March 2023 and March 2024. Significant price increases were observed in Greenville (93%), Foya (90%) and Cestos (71%) when compared to the same period a year ago, mainly attributed to higher than usual demand coupled with limited supply to the markets.

Red Light, Duala, Gbarnga, Ganta and Cestos City markets are notably expensive areas to purchase cassava which can be explained by the huge demand by restaurants and consumption by the population in these urban centers. Observations shows that price for a 25kg bag full of cassava is LRD 1,710 in Cestos City, LRD 1,610 in Redlight, LRD 1,540 in Gbarnga, LRD 1,500 in Ganta and LRD 1,490 in Duala. Saclepea market in Nimba County and Barclayville in Grand Kru County are cheapest areas to purchase cassava at LRD 530 and LRD 710 respectively.

Figure 3: Nominal Price Change for 25Kg bag of Cassava in LRD March 2023 and March 2024



Cash Crop Prices

Sugarcane Juice

Sugar Cane Juice is Liberia’s favorite local beverage that is sold in nearly every county and is used for a variety of local festivities. It is widely known for its authentic nature in the preparation of several beverages or as a spirit on its own. The national average price of one gallon of sugar cane juice showed a year-on-year increase of LRD 230, 23% higher than what a gallon was sold for in March 2023. The commodity price showed an increase across most markets with few markets recording stable prices between the period. Similarly to the last publication, Foya market in Lofa County and Cestos City Market in Rivercess County recorded the highest prices of sugarcane juice at LRD 1,910 and LRD 1,680 per gallon respectively. On the other hand, Gbarnga Market in Bong County and Gbah Market in Bomi County are the cheapest markets to purchase sugarcane juice at 720 and 860 LRD respectively.

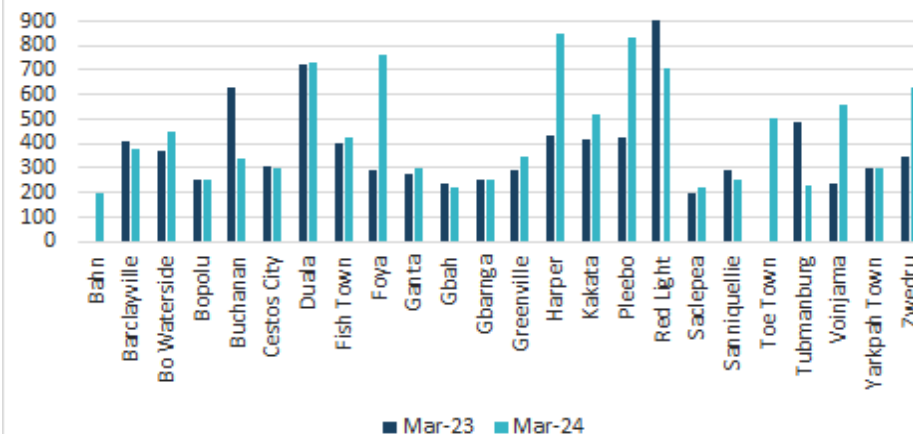
Charcoal

The average price for a 25Kg bag full of charcoal in March is LRD 440, up by 13 percentage points compared to levels in March 2023. Most of the markets recorded increase in prices for a 25kg bag full of charcoal between March 2023 and March 2024, with the most dramatic price increase witnessed in Foya (162%), Voinjama (133%), Harper (98%) and Pleebo (95%) markets. The increase can be explained by the huge demand coupled with the high transportation from production sites to the markets as well as the devaluation in the local currency.

Charcoal is a standard source of cooking fuel for around 95% of Liberian households. People also cut down trees to produce charcoal and sell them to make some money to take care of themselves, send their children to school, and live a viable life without considering the environmental effect.

The average per-capita charcoal consumption in Liberia is estimated at 64.3kg per annum. With a population of a little over 5 million, this results in annual charcoal consumption of 340,790 tons which corresponds to more than 25 million trees being cut per annum for charcoal production.

Figure 4: Nominal Price Change for a 25Kg bag of Charcoal in LRD March 2023 and March 2024



Fuel Prices

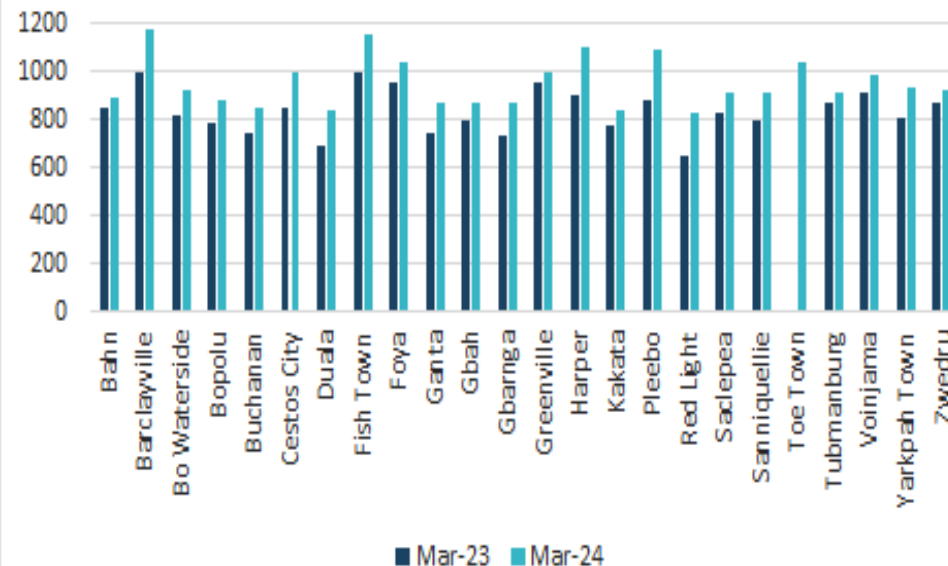
Gasoline

Gasoline prices also have profound impact on household budget. It impacts on transportation costs which also affect prices of basic commodities. The price of gasoline continue to rise since January 2024 as a result of increase in global fuel prices and the depreciation in the local currency against the US dollar.

The national average price for a gallon of gasoline increased from LRD 840 to LRD 950 between March 2023 and March, 2024, showing a rise of 13% change. This increase was evident across all markets monitored, ranging from 5% to 28%. Figure 5 shows that Red Light market in Montserrado county recorded the biggest increase of 28% followed by Pleebo (23%), Harper and Duala (22%). In spite of the year-on-year increase, Red Light and Duala markets in Monrovia, the main port of entry is still the cheapest place to buy gasoline at LRD 830 and LRD 840 respectively.

Relevant to note that Barclayville, Fish Town, Harper, Pleebo, Foya and Toe Town markets remains the most expensive markets to purchase gasoline at LRD 1,180; LRD 1,160; LRD 1,100; LRD 1,090; LRD 1,040 respectively. This is because of the distance between Monrovia and far-off markets, and the associated cost of transporting the commodity from Monrovia, main port of entry to these locations. Additional contributing factors to the increase is the terrible state of the roads coupled with the devaluation in the local currency, a situation which is putting serious pressure on staple food and prices of other basic commodities.

Figure 5: Nominal Price Change for a gallon of Gasoline in LRD March 2023 and March 2024



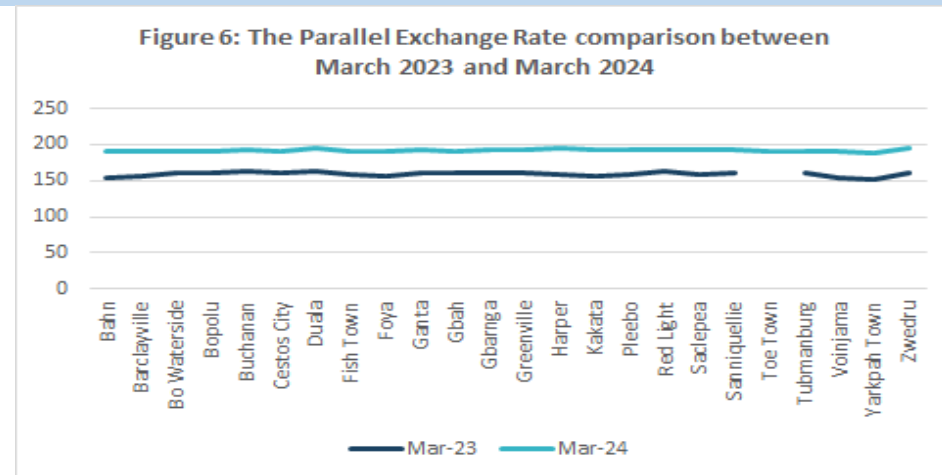
Source: WFP

Inflation, Exchange Rates and Wage Labour

Inflation and Exchange Rate 

According to the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services (LISGIS) Consumer Price Index (CPI) report for February 2024, an increase in the annual inflation rate 10.74% in a year was observed. The month recorded 2.5 percentage points increase from 8.27 in February 2023. The report indicated that the general price level increased by about 11% on a year-on-year basis.

As seen in figure 6, the exchange rate depreciated by 21% when compared to the same period last year. The exchange rate for 1 US dollar moved from LRD 159 in March 2023 to LRD 192 in March 2024. Local currency depreciations were reflected across all markets ranging from 19% to 24%. The devaluation in the local currency signals additional pressure on the prices of food and basic commodities, a situation which is expected to constrain households food access due to weak purchasing power, especially the poor and vulnerable who rely on unsustainable livelihood incomes.



Source: WFP

Wage Labour

Nationally, in March, men were paid slightly higher wages than their female counterparts for similar unskilled agricultural jobs including, brushing, clearing, weeding, planting, etc. Wage labour data shows that on average, men received LRD 670 per day while women get LRD 540. The highest agricultural wages are earned by men in Kakata, Margibi county up to LRD 990 followed by Buchanan in Grand Bassa County where men received LRD 960 for daily wages. Wage rates are slightly different for women in Harper, Maryland County and Kakata, Margibi County who received LRD 900 and LRD 860 respectively. On the other hand, the average national wage for unskilled construction work is LRD 780. However, higher wages are paid to construction workers in Kakata, Barclayville, Fish Town, Harper, Pleebo and Tubmanburg ranging from LRD 950 to 1,100. Saclepea and Gbarnga has the lowest wages for construction workers at LRD 410 and LRD 425 respectively.

Methodology

Prices were collected for 17 food and non-food commodities on a weekly basis in Liberia's 24 main markets spread across 15 counties.

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