

Poorer Women in SE Asia Struggling to Cope With Rising Food Prices



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Poorer women in Southeast Asia are experiencing a "Silent Tsunami" – the food crisis. This edition of Indochina Research's I-TRAK™ asks poorer urban women shopping in markets in Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos about how they are coping, giving them a voice in the midst of the crisis.

I-TRAK™ Research Design: Random selection of 601 married urban women aged 25 years and over, with household incomes less than \$300/mth, shopping at food markets in poorer areas of Hanoi and HCMC (Vietnam), Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Vientiane (Laos). Sample 200 women/ country. Household income/mth <\$150 37% of sample, \$150-<\$300/mth 63% of sample. Conducted 24th-30th May 2008.

The scene at the food markets...

These poorer women are typically buying food to cook for 4-5 people, (50% of cases with children aged <5 years).

In Vietnam 90% of urban women & in Cambodia 84%, reported that they viewed higher food costs now as "a big problem" & "worry a lot". In Lao 57% agree despite their lower reliance on market bought food.

Trying to cope & Feed the Family...

As one response poorer women are spending much more than one year ago....

Mean Family Daily Food Expenditure 2007/08			
	May 07	May 08	% Rise
Total	\$3.33	\$4.76	+43%
Vietnam	\$2.97	\$4.33	+46%
Cambodia	\$4.31	\$6.55	+42%
Laos	\$2.71	\$3.40	+25%
Inc. <\$150	\$2.22	\$3.02	+36%
Inc. \$150-\$300	\$3.99	\$5.79	+45%

But spending more on food is often not enough. Many women are reporting they also have to reduce the quantity & or quality of food products they buy (Stinting).

Prevalence of women stinting* on food consumption May 2008 (% of responses)				
	Viet.	Cam.	Laos	Total
Rice	50%	53%	47%	50%
Fish	74%	88%	50%	70%
Chicken	72%	81%	64%	72%
Pork	75%	91%	53%	73%
Fruit/Veg	63%	88%	35%	54%

*Stinting determined as total % of women reporting having to reduce quantity, buy cheaper (likely less nutritious) food products, both reduce quantity & buy cheaper & stop buying this food (multiple response).

Families need sufficient food every day. The proportion of women that reported they could buy enough food every day over the last month was 67% in Vietnam, 32% in Cambodia & only 4% in Laos. Some women, particularly in Vietnam, have been able to keep what they view as sufficient daily food on the table through increasing expenditure and some moderate stinting.

Other women are struggling. In Vietnam 33% & in Cambodia 46% have enough food "most days". In Cambodia 22% enough only "some days". In Laos, 46% enough on "some days" and 43% "rarely" (as purchased & produced food is not enough in total).

Poorer women want action to curb further price rises now ...

The vast majority (84%) say that is "very important" that action is taken to address food price rises. Governments are mainly responsible for these actions say 85% of respondents. Action needs to be taken immediately (79%) or within the next three months (14%). Most common actions suggested are to directly control food prices (56%) & control fuel prices (43%).

Implications...

Fewer & fewer poorer women are likely to be able to cope with further food price rises by continuing to increase food spending.

Rather, stinting will become more common & severe, leading to inadequate daily food supplies, on more days, for more families.

All policy stakeholders need to make positive interventions now to help poor urban families access enough staple foods, by reducing food costs or raising cash incomes or by direct nutritional supplements.

Many rural poor buy much of their food & will also be struggling with high prices now.

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