

Market Monitoring Bulletin

Highlights



25% price differentials between Monrovia and southeastern markets

Relatively stable imported rice prices on the domestic markets but price differentials between Monrovia and far-off markets are up to 25% for a 25kg bag of imported rice



34% increase in Red Light market in Monrovia for a gallon of palm oil in the past one month

Month-on-month comparison for a gallon of palm oil shows significant increase of 34% in Red Light market while the rest of the markets are showing stable to lower prices.



2% decline in gasoline prices between November and December 2023

Stable to lower prices for gasoline across most markets expected to ease the pressure on prices of basic commodities and transportation costs.



Food Prices

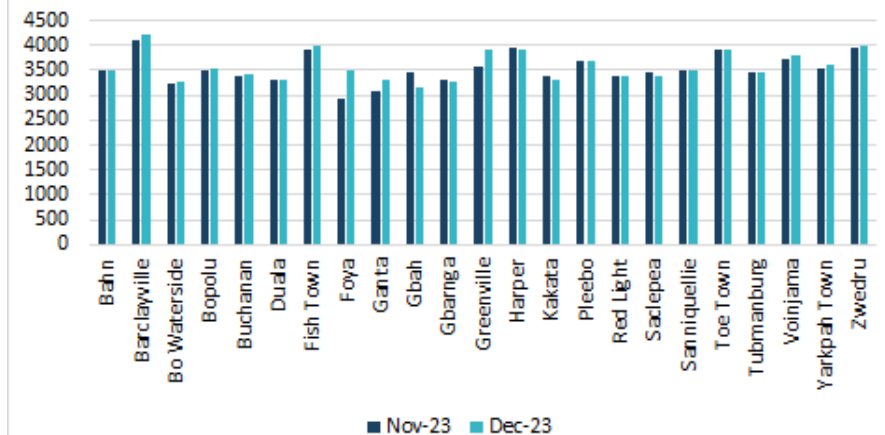
Imported Rice 5% Broken

In December, prices of imported parboiled rice remained relative stable with the exception of few variations across the markets. Foya market in Lofa County and Greenville market in Sinoe County reported higher prices of 19% and 10% respectively between November and December 2023. While the national average remained relative unchanged, price differentials between Monrovia, main port of entry and far off markets are reportedly higher, primarily due to local currency depreciations. For example, the price for a 25Kg bag of imported rice sold for 4,225 LRD in Barclayville is 845 LRD or 25% more expensive for the same 25kg bag of imported rice in Red Light market in Monrovia.

Similar observations for other markets in the south east like Fish Town 4,000 LRD, Harper 3,930 LRD, Greenville 3,925 LRD, and Pleebo 3,900 LRD continue to report relative higher prices for imported rice compared to markets closer to Monrovia.

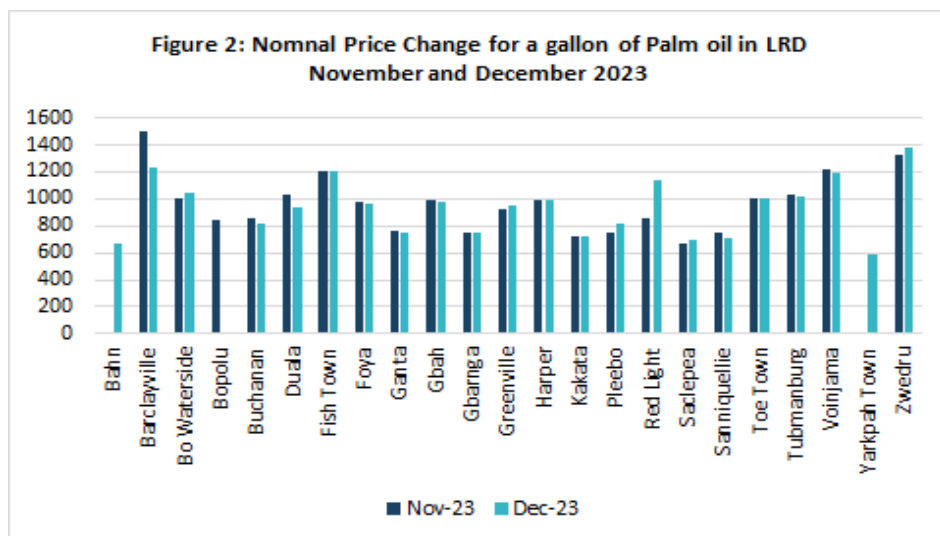
Meanwhile, markets across the country remain well supplied with imported rice. However, the in-county distribution remains a challenge and the remote areas may still find it difficult to access the available rice—mainly due to poor transportation networks in addition to the low purchasing power of vulnerable households.

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



Palm Oil 

Nationally, the price of palm oil dropped slightly from LRD 940 to LRD 935 between November to December 2023 showing a -1% decrease. However, month-on-month comparison across all monitored markets shows that Red Light market in Monrovia recorded the most significant price increase of 34% or 290 LRD for a gallon of palm oil in November compared to price levels in December. Figure 2 shows that Zwedru market in Grand Gedeh County is the most expensive market to purchase palm oil in December at LRD 1,380 per gallon from LRD 1,330 in November 2023, an increase of 4% change. The rest of the markets are showing stable to lower prices for a gallon of palm oil which correspond to the main harvest of palm nuts and peak period of palm oil production in the country.

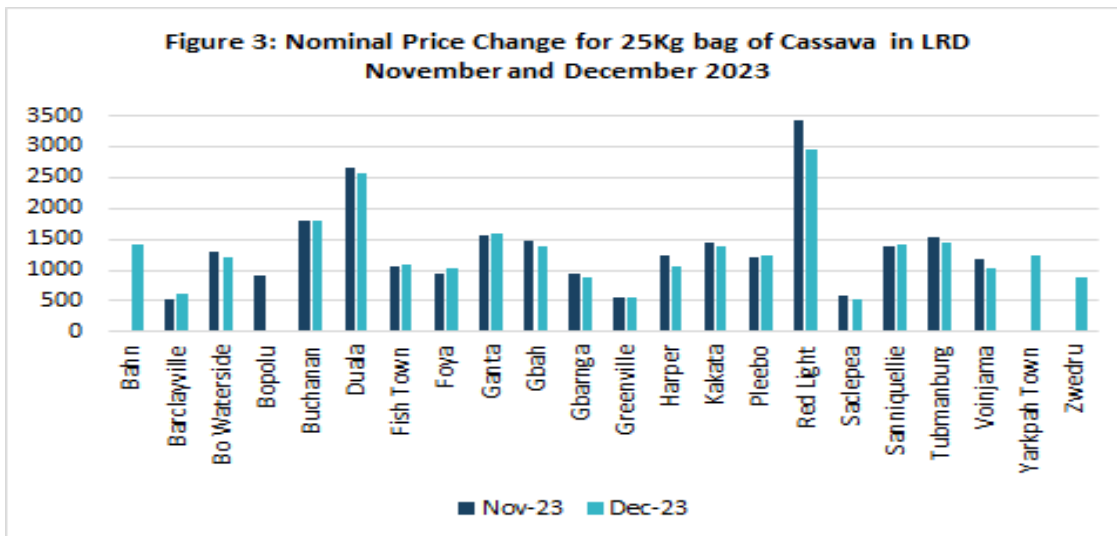


Cassava 

In December, the price for a 25Kg bag full of cassava increased by a marginal 5% on average from LRD 1,240 to LRD 1,300 respectively between November and December 2023.

High production areas like Greenville, Sinoe County and Barclayville, Grand Kru County recorded the cheapest prices for the commodity at LRD 560 and LRD 610 respectively in December 2023.

Figure 3 shows that Red Light, Duala and Buchanan markets are notably the most 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 2950 in Red Light, LRD 2,560 in Duala and LRD 1,800 in Buchanan. Moreover, most households especially vulnerable households in the rural areas use cassava as a cheap substitute for rice to bridge the shortfall in their food gap.



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 different local festivities. It is also 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 decline of -8% or 1,190 LRD in November to 1,100 LRD in December 2023. Similarly to the last publication, Foya market in Lofa County and Fish Town Market in River Gee County recorded the highest prices of sugarcane juice at LRD 1,500 per gallon respectively. On the other hand, Voinjama Market in Lofa County and Ganta Market in Nimba County are notably the cheapest markets to purchase sugarcane juice at 620 and 780 LRD respectively.

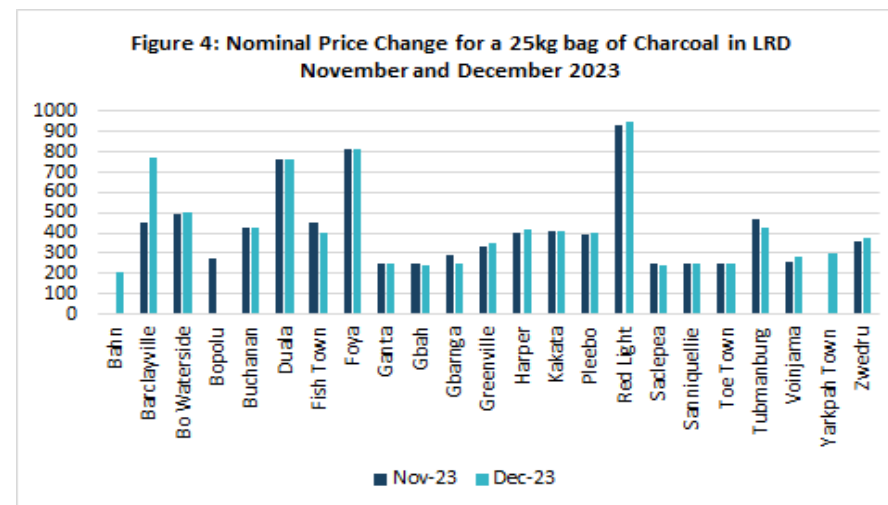
Charcoal

The average price for a 25Kg bag full of charcoal in December is LRD 420, slightly up by 2 percentage points compared to levels in November 2023.

Majority of the markets recorded stable to lower charcoal prices between November and December 2023, the exception was Barclayville market which recorded the most dramatic price increase of 72% when compared to price levels in November 2023.

The decline in charcoal prices across almost all monitored markets can be attributed to seasonality (peak of the dry season). Charcoal production is usually high during the dry season (November –April) in addition to the relatively good state of the roads which makes it easier for charcoal producers to move the commodity from their production area to the markets.

Nimba, Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties are high production areas and usually the cheapest areas to purchase charcoal. Red Light market in Montserrado is still the most expensive place to purchase charcoal in Liberia. Charcoal remains the most dominant source of cooking energy in many homes around Liberia. It is also a major livelihood source for most households, especially in the rural areas.



Fuel Prices

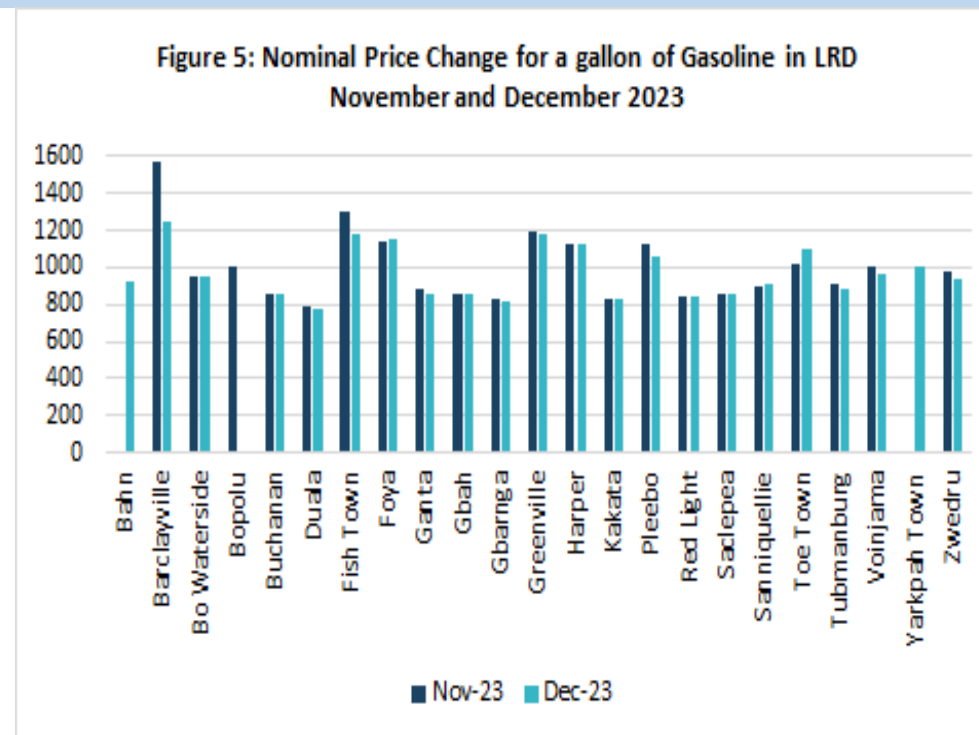
Gasoline

Gasoline prices also have profound impact on household budget. It impacts on transportation costs which also affect prices of basic commodities. Since October 2023, all domestic markets have witnessed modest decrease in the price of gasoline.

The national average price for a gallon of gasoline decreased from LRD 990 to LRD 970 between November and December, 2023, showing a slight decline of 2% change. Figure 5 shows that Barclayville market in Grand Kru county experienced a decrease in the price of the commodity from LRD 1,535 in November to LRD 1,250 in December, but still remains the most expensive market compared to the rest of the monitored markets. On the other hand, Toe Town market showed a modest increase in the price of the gasoline from LRD 1,020 to LRD 1,100 with a 7.8% change between November and December, 2023.

The stable to lower prices for gasoline witnessed in almost all markets could ease the pressure on basic food commodities and transportation costs. Similar to the previous publication, Duala Market in Monrovia, main port of entry, remains the cheapest place to purchase gasoline, from LRD 790 to LRD 780 between November and December 2023.

The price of gasoline have been relatively stable in the last quarter or 2023 and is expected to decline going into the first quarter of 2024 due to global supply and demand factors.



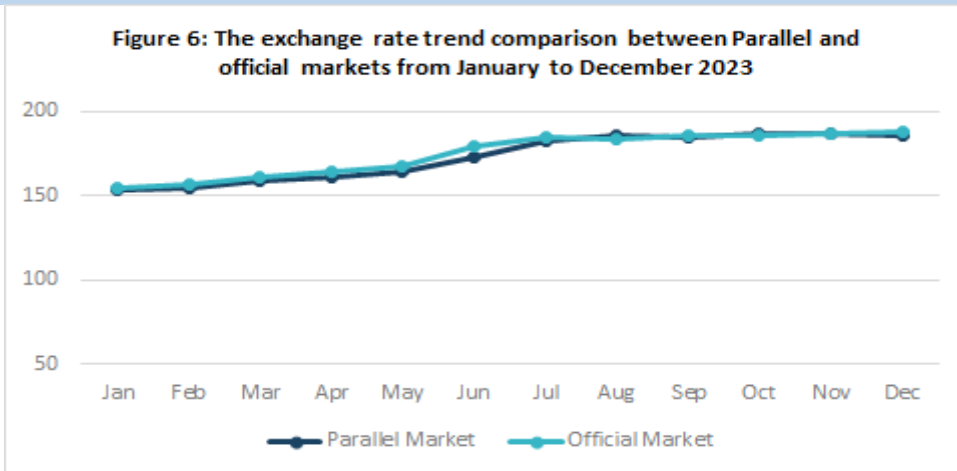
Source: WFP

Exchange Rates and Wage Labour

Exchange Rate

As seen in figure 6, both the parallel and official exchange rates slightly increased beginning January at a corresponding level intercepting up to February and March 2023 at nearly similar rates. In the second quarter of the year, the exchange rate took a slight shift upwards and then continue to increase in May and June and reached its all time high in July and August. It stabilized again in September, October and November nearly at a relative similar level with a modest decrease observed in December. Although the exchange rate continuously followed similar patterns through out the year, it seemed to reach a stable point particularly in October and November compared to other months. However, the official rates have had very little increases in March, April, May, and June.

With month-on-month local currency depreciations, households continue to experience decline in their real wages and disposable incomes, resulting to weak purchasing power which usually leads to serious constraints in their food access.



Source: WFP

Wage Labour

Nationally, in December, men were paid slightly higher wages than their female counterparts for similar unskilled agricultural jobs including, harvesting, weeding, brushing, planting, etc. Wage labour data shows that on average, men received LRD 590 per day while women get LRD 535. The highest agricultural wages are earned by men in Fish Town, River Gee county up to LRD 925 followed by Barclayville in Grand Kru County where men received LRD 956 for daily wages. Wage rates are slightly different for women in Fish Town, River Gee County and Gbah, Bomi County who received LRD 900 and LRD 800 respectively.

The average national wage for unskilled construction work is LRD 870. Observation shows higher wages are paid to construction workers in Bahn, Barclayville, Duala, Zwedru and Fish Town ranging from LRD 1,025 to 1,275. Saclepea, Yarkpah Town and Voinjama has the lowest wages for construction and agricultural workers.

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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