Sustainable Culinary Practices: Bridging Traditional and Modern Hospitality in Ghana

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Abstract

Ghana's hospitality sector is increasingly shaped by the tension between globalised menu expectations and growing interest in culturally rooted, sustainable food experiences. This study examined how sustainable culinary practices can bridge traditional Ghanaian food heritage and the operational realities of modern hospitality. Using a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 40 establishments across Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast/Elmina and Takoradi through surveys, interviews, menu analysis and non-participant observation. The findings show that Ghanaian cuisine carries strong cultural and sustainability potential, yet its integration into formal hospitality remains uneven. Ghanaian dishes appear widely but rarely occupy central menu positions, particularly in star hotels where international items dominate. Local sourcing is robust for vegetables, tubers and fish but less reliable for grains and meats, reinforcing cautious menu planning. Sustainability practices exist but are inconsistently applied, with waste monitoring and sustainability-driven menu design remaining weak. Despite this, guest interest, especially among Ghanaian diners and environmentally conscious tourists, emerges as a powerful motivator, alongside notable staff pride in heritage cuisine. Key barriers include labour-intensive traditional preparations, skills gaps, supply inconsistencies and conservative management assumptions. Synthesising these dynamics, the study proposes the Sustainable Culinary Bridge Framework, which shows that while cultural inputs are strong, mediating systems such as skills, procurement structures and workflow design determine whether heritage cuisine can support sustainability goals. Strengthening these mediators offers a practical pathway for positioning Ghanaian cuisine as both a cultural asset and a strategic driver of sustainable hospitality.

Keywords: Ghanaian cuisine, sustainable hospitality, culinary heritage, local sourcing, culinary tourism

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Introduction

Ghana's hospitality industry has expanded considerably, transforming food experiences in major cities and tourism destinations (Sanful et al., 2024; Sekyere & Jamgade, 2025). As diners increasingly value both traditional cuisine and continental dishes, hospitality operators must balance cultural identity with evolving consumer preferences (Chukwurah et al., 2025). Although sustainability is now emphasized through local sourcing and waste reduction initiatives (Bernard et al., 2024; Pullman & Wu, 2021), Ghana's traditional food systems have long practiced sustainable approaches, including seasonal eating, low-waste cooking, and community food-sharing (Gössling & Hall, 2021; Legrand et al., 2022).

This tension is reflected in hotel menus, where European and North American cuisines often dominate while Ghanaian dishes remain limited, despite growing global demand for authentic local food (Guptill et al., 2022; Miller, 2021; Zocchi et al., 2021). Although Ghanaian cuisine inherently reflects sustainable food practices (Agyapong et al., 2022), it remains underutilized as a foundation for hospitality sustainability, with many establishments focusing primarily on superficial sourcing and waste reduction initiatives (Nagina et al., 2025).

This study addresses that gap, examining how sustainable culinary practices might bridge Ghana's food heritage and the operational demands of contemporary hospitality, mapping existing sustainability practices, tracing how Ghanaian dishes are incorporated or sidelined, and developing a framework for operators seeking to integrate culinary heritage more deliberately. It contributes to a still-limited body of work linking culinary tourism, food heritage, and sustainability in African contexts, offering practitioners a locally grounded alternative to imported sustainability checklists and speaking to educators and policymakers refreshing hospitality curricula and positioning cuisine as a strategic tourism asset.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Concept of Sustainable Culinary Practices

Sustainable culinary practice generally refers to sourcing, cooking, and serving food in ways that reduce environmental harm, support fair working conditions, and remain economically viable (Alonso et al., 2018; Grèzes-Bürcher & Grèzes, 2024), translating in kitchens into local and seasonal sourcing, reduced waste, and lower-carbon menus (Sanful et al., 2024). The concept sits within wider debates on sustainable food systems (Hall & Gössling, 2013; Lin, 2020): choices such as sourcing locally over importing connect kitchen decisions to farms and supply chains, treating waste as a design problem rather than an inevitable by-product (Huang et al., 2025; Smith & Traynor, 2025). The term is also used loosely, sometimes as marketing, with dishes labelled "sustainable" on the basis of one local ingredient while the rest of the menu remains import-heavy (Camilleri, 2021); critics argue that without attention to labour conditions and supply-chain equity, "green" menus can sit uncomfortably alongside poorly paid staff or farmers with little bargaining power (Greenwood, 2024; Pullman & Wu, 2021). No single model fits all contexts, and the literature increasingly treats kitchen sustainability as situated practice negotiated locally rather than a fixed, transplantable checklist (Sarkissian et al., 2012).

Traditional Ghanaian Culinary Heritage

Ghanaian cuisine, staples such as fufu, banku, kenkey, waakye, and tuo zaafi, encodes regional histories and relationships between ethnic groups and landscapes, from Sahelian millet and sorghum traditions to colonial-era cassava shifts and coastal fishing economies (Brako, 2024; Champion et al., 2021). This heritage extends beyond dishes to communal eating norms, festival foods, and orally transmitted kitchen knowledge (Graf, 2024; Partarakis et al., 2021), and several practices, seasonal greens, fermentation, using "lesser" fish or plant parts, reflect frugality that predates sustainability as a policy concept (Adams et al., 2025; Okech & Timothy, 2023). This heritage should not be romanticised as inherently sustainable or static: some past practices carried environmental or labour costs now rightly questioned, and the cuisine has long absorbed outside influences, palm oil, tomatoes, and chilli all arrived via global circuits, making it a living, evolving repertoire (Asante-Donyinah et al., 2024; Boafo et al., 2021). For hospitality, the challenge is engaging this heritage with more than a token "local corner," considering deliberately which dishes and techniques enter professional kitchens and how they are allowed to change.

Modern Hospitality and Culinary Globalisation in Ghana

Ghana's expanding hotel and restaurant sector has unfolded within broader culinary globalisation (Adzakor, 2024; Simpson Miller, 2022): international brands arrive with standardised menus, and locally owned establishments often imitate these formats as markers of modernity. This global script brings pressure and opportunity: some guests expect recognisable international dishes, making a club sandwich feel safer than an unfamiliar tuo zaafi (Dufie, 2021; Preko & Anyigba, 2024), while growing curiosity among tourists and local diners pulls toward "authentic," sometimes reinterpreted, Ghanaian flavours. The result is a persistent tension where local dishes are often segregated into token sections or staff meals rather than integrated into à la carte menus (Huzaifa, 2024). Training reinforces this: culinary programmes emphasising classical European technique position Ghanaian dishes as an add-on rather than a core field for innovation (Gössling & Hall, 2021; Kulshrestha, 2025). Global and local influences are not mutually exclusive, but the balance of power remains uneven, with global forms treated as default and local cuisine left to justify its place, shaping what is purchased and whose knowledge counts as professional (Marquis & Battilana, 2009).

Culinary Tourism and Food as a Tourism Product

Food has moved to the centre of destination branding, with culinary tourism capturing how travellers organise experiences around eating and encountering place, history, and people through markets, festivals, and street food (Putra, 2021; Visković & Komac, 2021). The literature emphasises authenticity, embodiment, and co-creation between hosts, tourists, and intermediaries (Cooke, 2025; Okumus, 2021). Ghana has significant culinary tourism potential, jollof's international profile and diaspora attachment to dishes like waakye being clear examples, yet integration into tourism offerings remains patchy: hotels often serve more club sandwiches than considered Ghanaian dishes, and food tours remain small-scale, complicated by hygiene and regulatory constraints around street food and chop bars (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Sarfo et al., 2025; Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). Treating food as a tourism product raises questions of power: repackaging local dishes for tourists risks value accruing mainly to formal-sector actors while small vendors become mere "authentic" backdrops (Gonda et al., 2021; Quintero-Angel et al., 2022), though handled thoughtfully it can sustain craft skills and local pride

(Vuksanović et al., 2024). For hospitality kitchens, this suggests both opportunity and a caution against "tasting Ghana" becoming branding detached from those who grow and cook the food.

Cultural Heritage, Food Heritage and Sustainable Development

Food quietly carries much of what makes a community itself, encoding memories of migration and class, and acting as a social mediator: in many Ghanaian households, who eats first or serves signals respect and kinship (Chukwurah et al., 2025; Koohafkan, 2021; Zocchi et al., 2021). In sustainable development debates, culture has often been treated as a late-arriving "fourth pillar," with models ranging from culture as a sector to preserve, to a tool for other goals, to the more demanding view of culture as sustainable development itself, where cultural values are the ground on which progress is built (Cobbina et al., 2025; Jahan, 2023, Nurse, 2006). Food heritage fits this demanding space: it shapes ideas of sufficiency and waste, with hospitality norms encouraging abundant serving sitting alongside older practices of reusing food and organising communal labour around harvests (Ghimire, 2023; Sabatini, 2019). Heritage policy can freeze cuisine into a museum piece focused on "authentic" recipes rather than acknowledging that cuisines evolve through contact and improvisation, and sustainable development agendas need to stay open to that negotiation (Chukwurah et al., 2025). For Ghanaian hospitality, this means asking whose traditions are highlighted and whether some inherited practices need adjusting.

Challenges to Preserving Culinary Heritage in Modern Contexts

Preserving food heritage in modern hospitality faces interlocking challenges. Sourcing is one: many traditional dishes depend on seasonal, regionally bound ingredients, and hotels wanting to serve them year-round face erratic supply and prices, making stable imports tempting even at the cost of menu distinctiveness (Almansouri et al., 2022; Nagina et al., 2025). Urbanisation shifts what counts as an everyday meal for younger generations, more exposed to convenience food, gradually affecting which dishes and skills are passed on (Cobbinah et al., 2015; Songsore, 2009). Culinary training's emphasis on classical European technique leaves limited space for indigenous recipes and fermentation methods, which risk becoming uneven or disappearing without structured training and documentation (Freedman, 2021; Mennell, 2017). Perceptions compound this: indigenous foods are often coded as "home" or "village" food unsuitable for fine dining unless heavily deconstructed (Palat Narayanan, 2022; Rock, 2018), reinforced by curricula that treat Ghanaian cuisine as optional and placements that normalise its secondary status (Okech & Timothy, 2023; Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). Finally, kitchens under tight margins can experience heritage-based menus, with unfamiliar ingredients and longer prep times, as risky, pushing well-intentioned commitments aside (Fine, 2009). These challenges are logistical, economic, and attitudinal at once, and a key contribution of this study is holding them together (Gangiah, 2024; Okech & Timothy, 2023).

Theoretical Lenses

The study adopts four complementary perspectives—sustainable consumption, food heritage and cultural values, gastronomy and culinary tourism, and Triple Helix collaboration—to examine different dimensions of the problem. Sustainable consumption theory views hospitality as part of a broader food system, emphasizing how menu design, sourcing decisions, and waste management influence consumer choices and sustainability outcomes (Garcia-Oliveira et al., 2022; House et al., 2024).

Sustainable food systems thinking adds attention to trade-offs across environmental, economic, and social dimensions, for instance sourcing tomatoes locally while relying on precarious kitchen labour, without offering easy answers but giving a vocabulary for tracing who benefits (Anderson et al., 2021; King, 2022). In Ghana, this usefully surfaces trade-offs such as long-cooked stews raising energy use, or local fish consumption straining pressured stocks.

The second perspective focuses on food heritage and cultural values, recognizing that food reflects identity through regional, social, and generational meanings, which hospitality settings reinforce (Chukwurah et al., 2025; Zocchi et al., 2021). Menu design itself conveys cultural messages, while traditional communal dining practices foster social cohesion that may be altered through commercial adaptation (Cozzio & Furlan, 2023).

This lens reminds us that sustainability efforts succeed or fail partly on whether they resonate with staff and guest identities, not on technical merit alone (Assan, 2023). A third lens treats food itself as a reason for travel, with tourists seeking a blend of familiarity and novelty (Putra, 2021). Authenticity is understood as negotiated rather than fixed: a hotel-buffet waakye and a roadside dawn version can both be experienced as authentically Ghanaian by different audiences (Lee, 2022; Stone et al., 2022). This lens helps explain why some establishments treat local cuisine as a strategic asset worth investing in, while others see it as a minor add-on.

Finally, the Triple Helix model highlights collaboration among universities, industry, and government as essential for driving innovation and sustainable change (Khan et al., 2022). Aligning curricula, industry partnerships, and policy enables coordinated initiatives, such as sustainable menu design supported by education and regulation (Galvao et al., 2019; Midgley & Lindhult, 2021). Together, these perspectives integrate sustainability, cultural identity, guest experience, and institutional collaboration into a conceptual framework for Ghana's hospitality sector.

Conceptual Framework: The Sustainable Culinary Bridge Model

Bringing these strands together, the study proposes a "Sustainable Culinary Bridge Model" as its guiding frame: linked elements moving from what establishments have and know, through what they do, to what guests experience and what societies gain (Appiah & Safo, 2023). On the input side sit four clusters: traditional culinary knowledge (Lee, 2023); local ingredients and food landscapes; cultural values such as generosity and communal eating (Sosseh et al., 2023); and sustainability drivers ranging from global environmental concerns to local economic pressure. Between inputs and outcomes sit mediating mechanisms: chef creativity in adapting tradition, professional training, kitchen technology, procurement systems, and marketing choices about whether heritage options are foregrounded or marginalised. On the output side, the model anticipates sustainable menus balancing local and imported ingredients, guest experience that feels recognisably Ghanaian, reduced environmental footprint, affirmed cultural identity, and improved livelihoods for farmers and small-scale suppliers. The bridge is not symbolic: traditional knowledge of fermented grains becomes a sustainability asset only if chefs are trained to use it and procurement secures suitable ingredients (Lehtinen, 2012); where mediators are misaligned, rich heritage produces only conventional, resource-intensive menus. The framework guides both data collection and the interpretation of findings, tracing how patterns in hotels and restaurants reflect different configurations of inputs, mediators, and outputs.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Setting

The study used a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design, with a structured questionnaire, containing closed and open-ended items, completed by those most responsible for menu planning and kitchen operations across 40 hospitality establishments (Taherdoost, 2022). A smaller sub-sample took part in follow-up semi-structured interviews, brief kitchen observations, and document review, verifying reported practices and adding context that numbers alone could not capture (Dawadi et al., 2021). Data were collected in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana's most active hotel and restaurant markets, alongside Cape Coast and Elmina for their heritage-tourism context, with a few establishments in Takoradi and smaller towns adding contrast, spanning star-rated chains, independent restaurants, hotel restaurants, and coastal resorts.

Sampling and Instrumentation

The target population comprised formal hospitality establishments with active food service, plus a few culinary educators for contextual insight (Stratton, 2021). A stratified purposive strategy selected 40 establishments across city, type, and ownership to ensure variation in market positioning and menu concept, roughly a third star hotels, a third independent restaurants, a fifth hotel restaurants, and the remainder non-star hotels and resorts, providing a strong cross-section rather than a statistically representative sample. The questionnaire, developed from literature on sustainable food systems and Ghanaian food heritage, covered establishment characteristics, menu composition, sourcing, kitchen sustainability routines, guest perceptions, and perceived barriers and enablers, mostly through Likert-type items with space for written responses (Lim, 2025). Open-ended interview prompts and document review followed the same themes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Fieldwork involved onsite visits and face-to-face questionnaire administration, with menus and documents photographed by permission; a subset of establishments took part in 20–40-minute follow-up interviews and observation of kitchen routines, with files anonymised and securely stored (Taherdoost, 2021). Quantitative data were cleaned in Excel and summarised through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations by establishment type, and exploratory correlations between training, policy, and menu integration (Kumar, 2023). Interview transcripts were coded thematically, beginning with expected themes and expanding to emergent ones, then organised around the inputs, mediators, and outputs of the Sustainable Culinary Bridge Model.

Validity, Ethics and Limitations

The questionnaire was pre-tested outside the main sample, with internal consistency checks and triangulation across survey, interview, observation, and document sources strengthening interpretation (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). Ethical approval was obtained before fieldwork, participants gave informed consent, establishments and individuals were coded to protect identity, and files were stored in password-protected folders (Hasan et al., 2021). The purposive, urban-focused sample limits statistical generalisability, particularly for informal or street-based operations, and some responses may reflect social desirability around sustainability practices; even so, the sample offers a credible cross-section of formal venues

where decisions about sustainable practice and Ghanaian cuisine integration are most visible and consequential.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Establishments and Respondents

The study drew on 40 hospitality establishments across Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast/Elmina, Takoradi, and a few smaller towns (Table 1), with Accra accounting for just over a third of the sample, reflecting Ghana's most active tourism and business travel markets (Preko & Anyigba, 2024).

Table 1
Location of Establishments (N = 40)

City	n	%
Accra	14	35.0
Kumasi	11	27.5
Cape Coast / Elmina	8	20.0
Takoradi	3	7.5
Other towns	4	10.0
Total	40	100

Establishment types were well diversified (Table 2), roughly a third star-rated hotels, a third independent restaurants, and the remainder hotel restaurants, non-star hotels, and resorts (Boafo et al., 2021).

Table 2
Type of Establishment

Type	n	%
Star hotel	14	35.0
Independent restaurant	13	32.5
Hotel restaurant	8	20.0
Non-star hotel / guest house	3	7.5
Resort	2	5.0
Total	40	100

Ownership was 52.5% Ghanaian independents, 25% Ghanaian chains, and 22.5% foreign chains, a distinction that matters since sourcing and menu strategy often differ by ownership. Half of establishments had a formal written sustainability policy, a third operated informally, and the rest had none, an uneven policy landscape that shapes later results. Respondents were overwhelmingly those with direct kitchen or menu responsibility (Table 3); executive chefs

made up 57.5% of the sample, with most holding 6–10 years of experience and training split between formal Ghanaian culinary training, on-the-job training, and foreign formal training.

Table 3
Respondent Position

Role	n	%
Executive Chef	23	57.5
Kitchen Manager	10	25.0
Food & Beverage Manager	5	12.5
Sous Chef	2	5.0
Total	40	100

Menu Composition and Integration of Ghanaian Cuisine

Table 4 shows international dishes typically dominate menus (near 50% or more), with traditional and modern Ghanaian dishes together commonly making up 25–50%, confirming a long-observed pattern: even where chefs express pride in traditional dishes, menus tend to foreground continental offerings, largely from assumed guest expectations (Adzakor, 2024; Boafo et al., 2021).

Table 4
Menu Composition Indices (1–5 Scale)

Menu Category	Mean	SD
Traditional Ghanaian dishes	2.80	0.85
Modern/fusion Ghanaian dishes	2.55	0.50
International/continental dishes	3.48	0.51

Star hotels showed lower shares of traditional dishes and higher international shares, defaulting to globally recognisable menus (Visković & Komac, 2021), while independent restaurants integrated Ghanaian dishes more strongly (Okech & Timothy, 2023), with hotel restaurants sitting between the two. Beyond dish share, visibility and branding tell a more nuanced story (Table 5): Ghanaian dishes are present but rarely central to brand identity, often placed toward the middle or back of the menu, and several chefs said they would like to feature them more but remained unsure how international guests would respond, reflecting a documented gap between cultural value and commercial menu representation (Putra, 2021; Stone et al., 2022).

Table 5
Integration and Branding Scores (1–5 Scale)

Indicator	Mean	SD
Visibility of Ghanaian dishes on the menu	3.20	0.61
Ghanaian dishes as part of brand identity	2.98	0.36
Experimentation with modern Ghanaian presentations	2.93	0.66

Local Sourcing Patterns

Local sourcing (Table 6) followed a layered pattern: vegetables, tubers, and fish were sourced locally at relatively high levels, tubers showing the strongest local footprint given their centrality to fufu, ampesi, and banku, while grains and meat showed mixed sourcing reflecting reliance on imports such as rice and poultry (Gonda et al., 2021).

Table 6
Local Sourcing Indices (0–4 Scale)

Ingredient Category	Mean	SD
Fresh vegetables	2.98	0.16
Tubers & plantain	3.35	0.48
Grains & cereals	2.33	0.47
Meat	2.38	0.54
Fish & seafood	2.98	0.16

Independent restaurants and coastal establishments sourced more locally, especially fish and tubers, while star hotels depended more on imported grains and meat, citing supply consistency concerns typical of standardised, import-heavy institutional procurement (Lehtinen, 2012). Local sourcing supports freshness, traceability, cost stability, and local livelihoods (Garcia-Oliveira et al., 2022), but gaps in grain and meat sourcing limit how fully some hotels can embed Ghanaian cuisine within a sustainable framework, leaving significant potential under-utilised.

Sustainable Kitchen Practices

Table 7 shows reuse of trimmings and basic waste separation as the most routine sustainability behaviours, often adopted for operational efficiency as much as environmental reasons, with portion control also common in buffet-service hotels.

Table 7
Frequency of Sustainable Kitchen Practices (1–5 Scale)

Practice	Mean	SD
Portion control to reduce plate waste	2.93	0.35
Reuse of trimmings/leftovers (stocks, staff meals)	3.18	0.38
Separation of organic and inorganic waste	3.05	0.32
Monitoring of food waste	2.60	0.50
Menu planning to reduce waste	2.90	0.30

More systematic practices, waste monitoring and menus designed specifically to reduce waste, were noticeably weaker (Camilleri, 2021; Gössling & Hall, 2021): managers often said they "have an idea" of where waste occurs without measuring it formally. Establishments with formal sustainability policies scored slightly higher on waste-related practices, though even policy adopters remained in the mid-range overall; as one chain-hotel chef put it, "We have the policy, but the team is stretched... during peak service it's nearly impossible," echoing findings that policies often outpace practical implementation (Grèzes-Bürcher & Grèzes, 2024).

Perceptions of Guest Demand

Table 8 shows Ghanaian guests perceived as most enthusiastic about local cuisine, often requesting waakye, fufu, or ampesi; international guests were seen as moderately interested but likely to enjoy Ghanaian dishes more than expected once they tried them (Vuksanović et al., 2024; Yeboah & Ashie, 2024), one chef noted, "Once they taste kelewele or groundnut soup, they're sold. The real challenge is getting them to order it the first time."

Table 8
Perceived Guest Interest (1–5 Scale)

Guest Category	Mean	SD
International guests' interest in Ghanaian dishes	3.10	0.30
Ghanaian guests' interest in Ghanaian dishes	4.00	0.00
Guest interest in sustainability cues	3.93	0.27

Interest in sustainability cues such as "farm-to-table" or "locally sourced" was also strong, especially among younger Ghanaian diners and European tourists, suggesting sustainability storytelling as an entry point for heritage cuisine. Despite favourable perceptions, Ghanaian dishes remained underrepresented on menus, especially in star hotels; one Accra chef admitted, "We assume the expatriates want pasta or grilled chicken. But the few times we push a Ghanaian special, it sells out," while a Kumasi chef described a refined waakye platter becoming popular with business travellers, suggesting operator caution rather than guest demand is the primary barrier (Okech & Timothy, 2023).

Barriers and Enablers

The strongest barrier (Table 9) was the labour and time intensity of traditional dishes (Nagina et al., 2025): preparing omo tuo, northern soups, or slow-cooked stews requires skilled labour and time that understaffed city kitchens often cannot spare.

Table 9
Perceived Barriers to Heritage-Based Sustainability (1–5 Scale)

Barrier	Mean	SD
Labour/time intensity of traditional dishes	3.58	0.55
Limited staff skills in traditional dishes	3.18	0.45
Supply inconsistency of local ingredients	3.08	0.27
Concerns about guest acceptance	3.08	0.27

Skill gaps compounded this, with younger, internationally trained staff less confident in complex Ghanaian preparations, reflecting underdeveloped Ghanaian cuisine curricula (Sekyere & Jamgade, 2025), alongside supply inconsistency for meat and grains (Pullman & Wu, 2021), and persistent guest-acceptance fears despite evidence that guests respond well to Ghanaian dishes (Almansouri et al., 2022). The strongest enabler (Table 10) was positive guest feedback, which built chef confidence, closely followed by staff pride, chefs described heritage dishes as "a way of representing ourselves" (House et al., 2024), management support for local sourcing, and training in Ghanaian cuisine.

Table 10
Perceived Enablers of Heritage-Based Sustainable Practice (1–5 Scale)

Enabler	Mean	SD
Guest feedback / positive reception	4.03	0.16
Staff pride and enthusiasm	4.00	0.23
Management support	3.98	0.16
Availability of training opportunities	3.13	0.33

Synthesis With the Sustainable Culinary Bridge Model

Bringing the findings together, the inputs of the bridge, local ingredient access, staff pride, and guest interest, appear strong (Zocchi et al., 2021), while the mediating systems meant to connect them to menu outputs, training, procurement, workflow, and menu engineering, remain weak, suggesting the core challenge is not cultural resistance but the absence of robust mediating structures. Independent restaurants and coastal resorts, with smaller scale and more flexible management, navigated this bridge more effectively (Vuksanović et al., 2024), while star hotels, especially foreign chains, faced more structural friction between showcasing Ghanaian cuisine and maintaining centralised, standardised procurement (Grèzes-Bürcher & Grèzes, 2024). This points to a refined reading of the model: inputs are strong across Ghana's hospitality landscape, mediators are the weak point limiting transformation, and outputs improve where establishments align cultural pride with operational support.

The Sustainable Culinary Bridge Framework

Findings from the previous chapter reveal a system where Ghanaian culinary heritage, sustainability ambitions, and hospitality operations are all present but not consistently aligned (Hall & Gössling, 2013). This chapter introduces the Sustainable Culinary Bridge Framework to capture how traditional food knowledge, local ingredients, and cultural values interact with contemporary hospitality systems to produce sustainable, market-responsive culinary experiences (Zocchi et al., 2021). The core insight is that Ghana does not lack the cultural raw material for heritage-forward hospitality (Okech & Timothy, 2023); what is missing are the mediating structures that translate heritage into consistent, commercially viable offerings, as independent restaurants demonstrate and star hotels' globalised standards often obscure (Vuksanović et al., 2024). The framework addresses three questions: what inputs already exist, which mediating factors strengthen or weaken the link to sustainable outputs, and how establishments of different types can use these mediators to build a stronger bridge between tradition and modernity.

Components of the Framework

The framework has three interconnected layers. Inputs are strong and largely stable across establishment types: traditional knowledge and pride in heritage dishes (Lee, 2023), locally available ingredients, especially tubers, vegetables, and fish (Gonda et al., 2021), cultural values and identity, and rising guest demand for sustainability. Mediators are where the bridge most often weakens: kitchen skills and labour structure, given gaps in younger cooks' training (Sekyere & Jamgade, 2025); procurement infrastructure, reliable for vegetables and fish but inconsistent for grains and meat; kitchen workflow often organised around Western processes that make Ghanaian preparation feel "extra" (Graf, 2024); management risk aversion that underestimates guest interest (Yeboah & Ashie, 2024); and thin institutional training. Outputs, achievable once mediators function well, are culturally grounded sustainability-oriented menus (Cooke, 2025), reduced environmental footprint (Garcia-Oliveira et al., 2022), and enhanced guest experience and national culinary identity (Agyei-Amponsah & Adjei, 2022), each reinforcing the others.

Typologies

Three broad typologies emerged. Heritage-Forward Innovators, mostly independent restaurants and some resorts, integrate Ghanaian dishes creatively and respond quickly to guest feedback, with strong mediators across skills, management, and procurement (Fusté-Forné, 2022). Cautious Balancers, hotel restaurants and mid-range properties, offer Ghanaian options but keep them peripheral, with moderate, inconsistent mediators (Sanful et al., 2024). Internationally Anchored Systems, mostly star hotels and foreign chains, have strong inputs but standardised global procurement and cautious management that dampen innovation.

Contribution

The framework points to clear leverage points: skills and training offer the quickest route to strengthening the bridge (Gangiah, 2024); procurement reform, particularly stabilising grain and meat supply, would unlock more heritage-based menus (Pullman & Wu, 2021); management mindsets need to shift, since guest demand is higher than many operators assume (Huang et al., 2025); and policy and curriculum design should position Ghanaian cuisine as a strategic national asset. Theoretically, the framework shows hospitality sustainability is as

much cultural and organisational as environmental, reframes Ghanaian cuisine as a living, adaptable system (Asante-Donyinah et al., 2024), and integrates culinary tourism, food heritage, and sustainability theory into a single, empirically grounded model.

Conclusion

The study set out to understand how sustainable culinary practices can bridge traditional Ghanaian food heritage and the operational realities of modern hospitality. The foundations are strong: Ghanaian dishes are culturally meaningful, local ingredients are widely available, staff take genuine pride in heritage cooking, and guests respond positively to well-executed Ghanaian cuisine (Agyapong et al., 2022; Chukwurah et al., 2025). Yet the systems meant to carry these assets into everyday practice remain uneven, kitchens often lack the labour structures or skills for traditional dishes, supply is inconsistent, management remains cautious, and sustainability practices are not systematically embedded in workflow (Pullman & Wu, 2021), so Ghanaian cuisine appears on most menus but rarely occupies a central position (Sanful et al., 2024; Yeboah & Ashie, 2024). The issue is not a deficit of heritage but gaps in mediating systems, skills, procurement, management orientation, workflow, and training. Ghana's hospitality industry possesses the cultural raw materials for a distinctive, sustainability-driven culinary identity; realising it requires intentional investment in the skills, systems, and support structures that let tradition and sustainability work together (Sabatini, 2019).

Main Findings

The findings reveal a system where Ghanaian culinary heritage, sustainability ambitions and hospitality operations are all present, yet not consistently aligned. Ghana does not lack the cultural raw materials needed for sustainability. What is missing are the mediating structures that translate that heritage.

Implications of the Study

For industry, the findings suggest treating Ghanaian cuisine as a strategic asset rather than a nostalgic addition, one that can differentiate market offerings, reduce procurement costs, and deepen guest experience. For tourism development, Ghana's gastronomy tourism potential is significant: well-curated Ghanaian dishes paired with sustainability narratives can strengthen national tourism identity and attract culturally engaged travellers. For sustainability policy, framing sustainability as both environmental stewardship and cultural preservation can help reposition Ghanaian cuisine within national development agendas, aligning with global sustainability frameworks.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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