



Improving Urban Nutrition in Africa and Asia Through Policy Change

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The need to focus on urban nutrition

Poor-quality diets are now the leading contributor to the global burden of disease. Therefore cities need to place more focus on policies and practice which improve the consumption of safe and nutritious foods. Urbanisation goes hand in hand with shifts in lifestyle, consumption patterns and economic activities, many leading to adverse outcomes. For example, urbanisation plays an important role in the 'nutrition transition' - a shift from diets with high cereal and fibre intake to animal-source foods, sugars and fats, and processed foods - and subsequently is a cause for overweight, obesity and diet-related disease, for example through driving the consumption of highly processed foods. Urban areas in both Africa and Asia are increasingly characterised by the double burden of malnutrition, which is undernutrition on the one hand, and overweight / obesity on the other. While this double burden also exists in rural areas (in lower proportions on average), urban environments have characteristics, ranging from higher shares of processed foods to environments that facilitate more sedentary lifestyles, that make that they require different solutions.

“Tanzania is experiencing a rapid change of lifestyle as its economy improves, especially in urban areas. But the adverse nutritional outcomes associated with these changes are often costly. We must harness the rapid urbanisation in Tanzania as a chance to improve nutrition.” Vincent Assey, Acting Managing Director, Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre

Making urban food systems more nutritious

City governments have a leading role to play in solving these urban nutrition challenges. As designers of city policies and implementers of national and regional policies they are well placed to find solutions for malfunctioning urban food systems. Their policies can address demand, availability, affordability, convenience and desirability of foods. They can have a direct impact on nutrition outcomes: through their public procurement policies, for example, which directly influence food offerings in city run institutions.

“A modern city has to position itself around achieving food security for its residents.” Tri Rismaharini, Mayor of Surabaya

New urban nutrition initiatives in Indonesia and Tanzania

As part of its Urban Governance for Nutrition program, GAIN is currently focusing its efforts on two cities: Surabaya City in East Java, Indonesia and a city in Tanzania (currently under

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) was launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition. GAIN, with its partners, aims to make healthier food choices more affordable, more available, and more desirable. We aim to support and advise governments, businesses, and development partners as they build and mobilise food and nutrition plans to advance nutrition outcomes. GAIN's purpose is to improve nutrition outcomes by improving the consumption of nutritious and safe food for all people, especially the most vulnerable. GAIN is a global, Swiss-based foundation that mobilises public-private partnerships and provides financial and technical support to deliver nutritious foods to those people most at risk of malnutrition. GAIN's programs in Africa and Asia enable better diets via nutritional products, such as fortified staple foods, including cooking oil and flour, and condiments like salt and soy sauce.

selection). Both countries have national strategies to address nutrition issues. In Tanzania, the National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan of Tanzania recommends double-duty nutrition actions to address chronic undernutrition problems as well emerging overnutrition challenges. In Indonesia, a National Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan is in place, and implementation is devolved to cities and districts. GAIN, along with other actors in the food system, will support municipal government to successfully operationalise these strategies.

“The Regional Food & Nutrition Action Plan was created as a guide for all sectors related to food safety from end to end, in order to collectively achieve food sovereignty and welfare for Surabaya residents and its surrounding areas.” Agus Imam Sonhaji, Head of Surabaya Development Planning Agency

Conclusion

The link connecting poor diet and nutrition to the strong impact of urbanisation means that nutrition should be central to any urban food policy. Key to this is multi-stakeholder alliances, especially with the private sector, to improve the governance of nutrition. This is how we can make people healthier, and their cities too.

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