



Urban diets and nutrition: Trends, challenges and opportunities for policy action

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Recent decades have seen unprecedented population growth in urban areas. In 2014, just over half of the world's population lived in towns and cities; this is expected to rise to two thirds by 2050. Nearly 90% of these additional 2.5 billion urban residents will be located in Africa and Asia.

Malnutrition in all its forms is now a pressing issue in urban as well as rural areas:

- Many urban populations are experiencing undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity simultaneously;
- Approximately one in three undernourished children now live in urban settings;
- Deficiencies of essential minerals and vitamins are estimated to affect half of all pre-school children and 2 billion people worldwide;
- During the last decade urban populations in low- and middle-income countries have experienced accelerating rates of overweight and obesity. In Africa, the number of overweight and obese children under 5 has nearly doubled from 5.4 million in 1990 to 10.3 million in 2014.

Without decisive action, the nutrition crisis in urban areas across low- and middle-income countries will deepen over the next decade in response to multiple pressures such as globalization, migration, population growth, income inequality, pressures on land and water for food production, and climate change. Only by acting now can policymakers avoid locking in future burdens for health, well-being and economic development.

A rebalancing of policy attention which ensures that all urban residents have access to high-quality diets needs to be a key objective.

In view of the above, the Global Panel recommends that policymakers:

- ① Rebalance their efforts in making high-quality diets a priority for both urban and rural populations.
- ② At the local level, take a leading role in championing better diets and nutrition – this requires that urban authorities are both mandated and empowered to act.
- ③ Tackle the challenges of urban malnutrition by capitalizing on the opportunities for influence offered by urban food systems. A high priority should be given to policies which regulate product formulation, labelling, advertising and promotion.
- ④ Connect with wider areas of policy that affect urban food systems and nutrition, such as infrastructure, housing, transport and access to water and sanitation.
- ⑤ Address the needs of different urban population groups to achieve improved consumer access and dietary choice for all.
- ⑥ Change attitudes to the informal food sector, along with action to improve the sector to better address sanitary and health risks.
- ⑦ Give more attention to the specific challenges associated with rising rates of overweight and obesity.
- ⑧ Carefully measure, rigorously analyze and quickly disseminate efforts to tackle urban health and nutrition challenges.

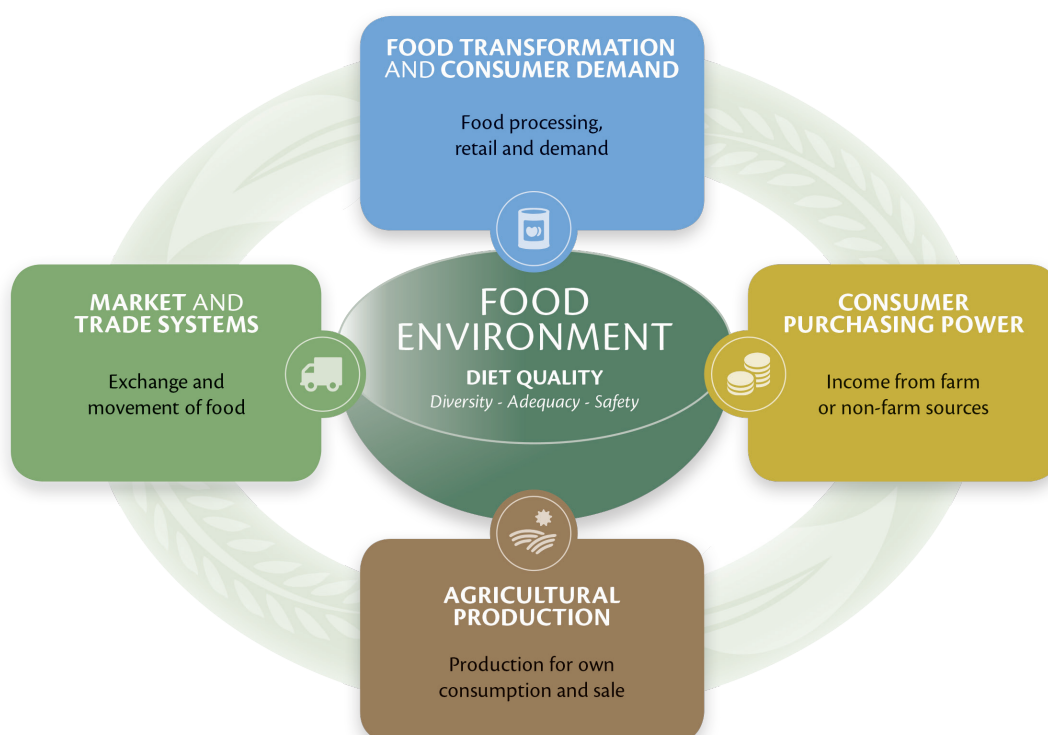


Global Panel
on Agriculture
and Food Systems
for Nutrition

How can Agriculture and Food System Policies Improve Nutrition?

The multiple burdens on health in low – and middle-income countries due to food-related nutrition problems include not only persistent undernutrition and stunting but also widespread vitamin and mineral deficiencies and a growing prevalence of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. These different forms of malnutrition limit people's opportunity to live healthy and productive lives, and impede the growth of economies and whole societies.

The food environment from which consumers should be able to create healthy diets is influenced by four domains of economic activity:



In each of these domains, there is a range of policies that can have enormous influence on nutritional outcomes. In the Global Panel's first Technical Brief, we explain how these policies can influence nutrition, both positively and negatively. We make an argument for an integrated approach, drawing on policies from across these domains, and the need for more empirical evidence to identify successful approaches.

Find out more here: Glopan.org/nutrition



Urban diets and nutrition: Trends, challenges and opportunities for policy action provides eight key policy options within all of the domains of the food system to help governments to address all forms of malnutrition in urban areas.

Download *Policy Brief No. 9* here: www.glopan.org/urbanization

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