How to Build Urban Food Systems for Better Diets, Nutrition, and Health in Low and Middle-Income Countries

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Side event agenda

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Why focus on the urban poor?

Most people are in cities…

… especially in Africa and Asia

Urban poor suffer from all forms of malnutrition

The urban poor suffer from all forms of malnutrition

  o **Stunting:**
    o 1 in 3 stunted children lives in a city
    o Rapid decline in rural areas but stable in urban areas
  o **Overweight and obesity:** prevalence higher in urban areas
  o **Micronutrient deficiencies** (very limited data)
Changes in urban diets drive nutritional status
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- Poor-quality diets drive all forms of malnutrition
- “Nutrition transition” faster in urban than rural areas
  - Traditional diets consisting of coarse grains, staple cereals, and pulses → diets high in sugar, salt, saturated fat
  - Increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods
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The share of ultra-processed foods determines the overall nutritional quality of diets in Brazil (Costa Louzada et al, PHN, 2017)
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- Nutrition transition contributes to the double-burden of malnutrition
  - Coexistence of undernutrition with overweight, obesity, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases.
  - NCDs are the leading cause of death globally (71% of all deaths in 2016)
Individual and household factors shape diets of the urban poor
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- Urban dwellers purchase most of their food:
  - Recent 18-country study: 40% of urban dwellers in low-income countries could not afford the recommended fruit and vegetable consumption
  - Livelihoods often depend on unstable informal-sector employment
  - Less access to social safety nets (compared to rural counterparts), leaving the urban poor more vulnerable to income and food-price shocks.
  - Women engaged in the workforce in urban areas with limited childcare options

- Time constraints, housing conditions and limited access to cooking facilities:
  - Drive urban dwellers toward the convenience of processed and ultra-processed ready-to-eat snacks and foods, street foods, and quick meals
  - Increase the risk of overconsumption of energy, added sugar, salt, and saturated fat
Urban diets are inextricably linked to the food environment
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• The food environment in urban areas is rapidly changing
• Urban dwellers generally have access to a more diverse food supply than individuals in rural areas, but…
• …are exposed to
  • aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods
  • modernizing food retail sector, accelerated spread of supermarkets
  • supermarkets which increase access to energy-dense and nutrient-poor ultra-processed foods.
The urban food environment is part of the **food system**
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- Globalization and trade liberalization have changed urban food system
- Urban demand can drive rural transformation in peri-urban areas where foods are produced
- Informal food vendors and processors:
  - Important source of food for the urban poor
  - Poor governance threatens livelihoods of vendors, often women
Addressing the urban poor’s nutrition problems requires better evidence

- **Diets**
  - What do poor urban dwellers eat (especially the poor)?
  - Where do they procure their food/meals?
  - What are the drivers of healthy and unhealthy food choices?

- **Food environment**
  - How does it affect food choice?
  - How can we map and characterize the quality of food environment?

- **Food system**
  - What are the opportunities for leveraging food systems and food environments to improve urban diets?
  - How can urban/rural linkages be strengthened to improve diets in urban areas and stimulate rural transformation?
Urban food systems for better diets, nutrition, and health – a new IFPRI research program