



AKADEMIYA

The Expertise We Need-The Africa We Want



AFRICAN UNION 2022 YEAR OF NUTRITION: STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Dialogue # 4— Africa's Rapid Urbanization and Growing Middle Class: Challenges and Opportunities to Achieving Healthier Diets and Optimal Nutrition

Thursday, October 6, 2022

Key Messages and Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

1. In support of the African Union (AU) 2022 Year of Nutrition and Food Security, AKADEMIYA2063 and the Senegalese National Council for Nutrition Development (CNDN) are organizing a [series of five continental-level dialogues](#) on nutrition and food security with a wide group of stakeholders including policymakers, civil society organizations, farmers' organizations, research institutions, the private sector, and development partners, to facilitate knowledge exchange and mutual learning and drive required action toward achieving continental and global food security and nutrition targets.
2. The fourth dialogue on October 6 reviewed recent trends and patterns in urbanization, dietary changes, and the growing levels of overweight and obesity in Africa. It also examined the challenges and opportunities to achieving healthier diets and optimal nutrition and explored required actions for urgently addressing malnutrition in all its forms including policy and regulatory options.
3. AKADEMIYA2063's Executive Chairperson, Dr. Ousmane Badiane, delivered opening remarks, noting the growing trend in consumption of processed food stuffs like millet as well as the contribution of processed foods to unhealthy diets due to their content of fats, sugars, and preservatives. He therefore underscored the need to collectively reflect on how best to balance the opportunities and threats so as to have greater accessibility to healthy food while avoiding the excessive consumption of unhealthy products.

4. In her opening remarks Ms. Estherine Fotabong, Director of Program Innovation and Planning at the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), noted that in order to effectively deal with the increasing risk of reduced diet quality and growing obesity there is need for bold transformation of the African agri-food systems and the adoption of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches. She also called for action to support African countries through legal and regulatory reforms and technical strengthening of institutions and investment agencies to address malnutrition.
5. Prof. Amos Laar of the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the University of Ghana delivered the event's keynote address that highlighted the implications of Africa's growing urbanization on health, as well as economic growth, transformation, and sustainability. He noted Africa's changing food environments due to shifts toward more processed foods and the rise in overweight/obesity and non-communicable diseases but also the strong resolve at continental and country level to address the challenges including through policies and regulations that promote healthier diets.
6. The Dialogue expert panel was made up of Ms. Pauline Addy, Director, Women in Agricultural Development Directorate in Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Dr. John Ulimwengu, Senior Research Fellow, Africa Division, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); Prof. Amos Laar, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at the University of Ghana; and Mr. Pierre Ndiaye, Director General of Mamelles Jaboot in Senegal. The panelists shared their perspectives on challenges and opportunities and priority actions for achieving healthier diets and optimal nutrition. The dialogue was moderated by Dr. Aisha Nakitto, Dean and Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health Sciences at Victoria University in Uganda.
7. Ms. Aminata Diop Ndoye, Executive Secretary of the Senegal National Council for Nutrition Development, delivered closing remarks emphasizing the importance of communication and capacity building as well as policies and regulations in ensuring better nutritional outcomes and healthier diets and called on all actors along the food systems to do their part.

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In Africa, urbanization is a mega trend with profound implications for Africa's health as well as economic growth and transformation, and sustainability. Forty (40) percent of Africa's population lives in urban areas and the urban population is expected to triple by 2050, adding 800 million more people (UN, 2014; Güneralp et al. 2017), thus presenting both challenges and opportunities to the continent.
2. Given the multi-dimensional implications of urbanization, it is important that efforts to address urbanization also address health and nutrition in addition to the implications of urbanization for industrialization and economic growth.
3. Africa's middle class consists of 350 million people, earning between \$2--\$20 per person per day (AfDB, 2011).

4. Africa is home to more than half of the world's 800 million acutely food insecure people and has a rapidly increasing rate of obesity and other diet related non-communicable diseases.
5. Africa's food environments are changing in light of dietary commercialization and diversification that has moved more in the direction of processed foods.
6. The recognition that Africa's urban food environments are not healthy, sustainable, and equitable has created an opportunity to catalyze action and has generated strong resolve at the highest political levels. This is evidenced by various nutrition initiatives at the country and continental levels. As an example, Ghana has sought to address its nutrition challenges through projects such as the Healthier Diets for Healthier Lives (HD4HL) that has developed evidence and action toward a food-based policy bundle to assure healthier diets in Ghana.
7. To help address Ghana's increasing trends in obesity and overweight, the country's Ministry of Food and Agriculture has been spearheading food systems-based dietary guidelines, in collaboration with the School of Public Health at the University of Ghana. The Ministry works with the Ministry of Health and Food and Drug Authority on food package labeling to encourage consumers to eat well, rely on local foods, and engage in physical activity. These policies and recommendations target the various stages of the life cycle to ensure that no one is left behind.
8. Sugar tax policies can help to mitigate sugar consumption because they target outcomes of interest such as obesity, attitudinal changes, changes in dietary practices, and changes in practices and responses of industrial actors. Empirical evidence from other parts of the world such as Latin American countries like Chile and Mexico shows that sugar taxes reduced purchases of sugary drinks while industrial actors reformulated their products to be lower in sugar.
9. The theory of change for the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has an inherent food systems transformation approach especially in its principles, values, and expected outcomes. However, CAADP implementation has gaps in ensuring healthy diets, which will require a mapping of each country's food system to help show weak points in delivering healthy diets. There is need to ensure consistency in the different components of the food system and high-level coordination (at the Prime Minister or Presidential levels) of the food system that goes beyond the Ministry of Agriculture to include other key line Ministries. Moreover, the food system will need to be supported by a strong knowledge base and strengthened capacities of all players to ensure that it functions well to deliver on sustainable healthy diets for all.
10. Agri-food processing companies like Mamelles Jaboot in Senegal take it as their responsibility to provide wholesome foods to consumers. The company recognizes the role played by women in feeding families and supports initiatives to train women on producing healthy foods including tasting forums. It also supports strong communications on nutrition and healthy diets using the local language.

11. When it comes to multi-sectoral collaboration in improving diets and nutritional outcomes, the agriculture sector needs to work with the energy sector which is crucial to agriculture as it can impact the availability of fuel to transport food, the price of food, and the ability to transform food and make it available all year round. Other sectors like land, trade, transport, infrastructure, and social protection are also key for agriculture to work effectively.
12. Key risks faced by value chains in terms of ensuring healthy and nutritious foods for consumers include environmental and food safety issues. For example, the use of fertilizer to increase yield may lead to higher carbon emissions and improper storage of food can lead to a higher prevalence of food-borne diseases like aflatoxins. With respect to micronutrient loss, there is need to invest in tracing and mapping micronutrients to identify points of failure along the system and to explore the types of technologies, techniques, and behaviors (e.g., cooking habits) that can reduce micronutrient loss starting from production all the way to consumption.