



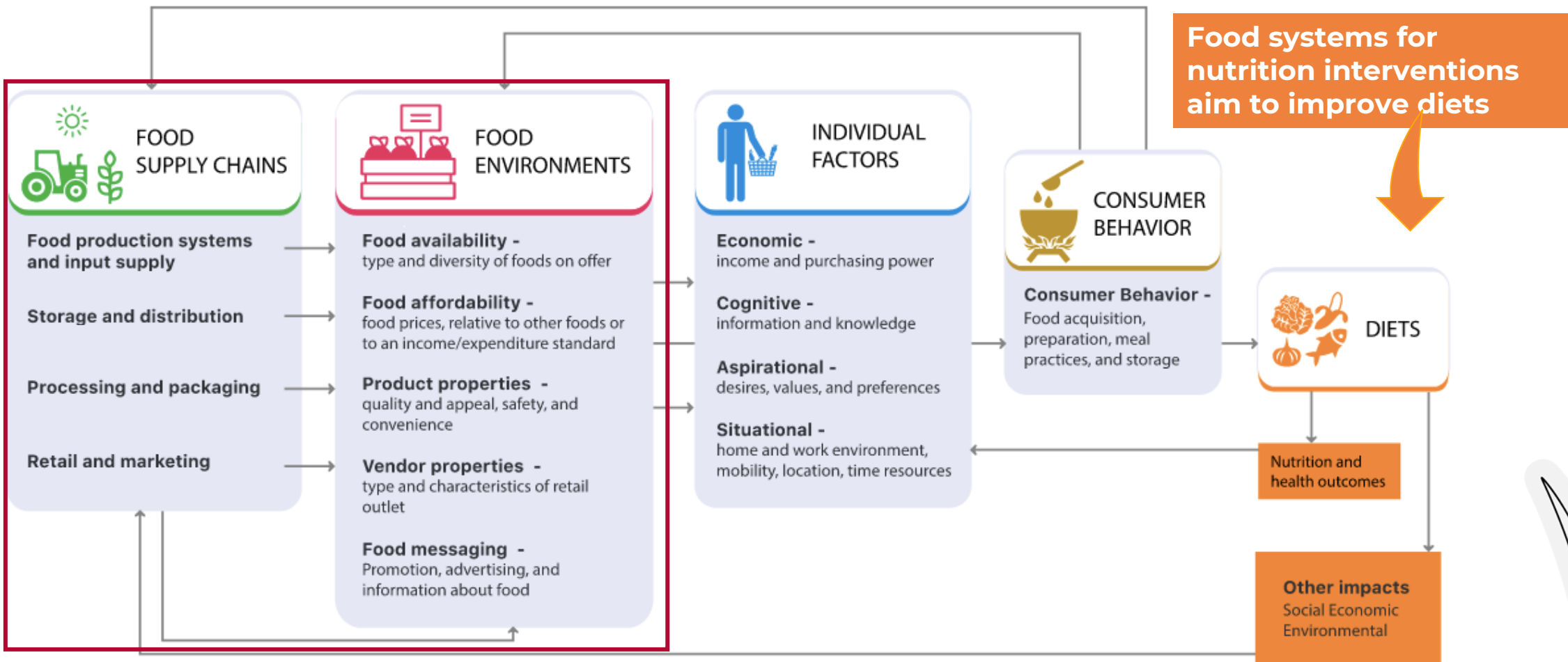
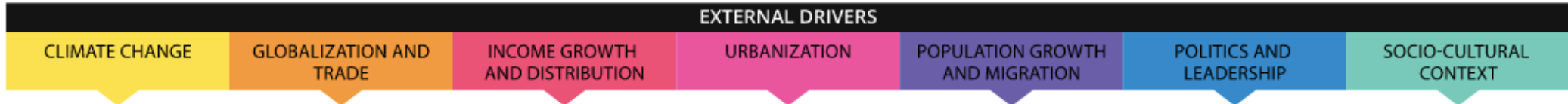
MEASURING IMPACT IN FOOD SYSTEMS FOR NUTRITION PROGRAMMES: CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

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Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

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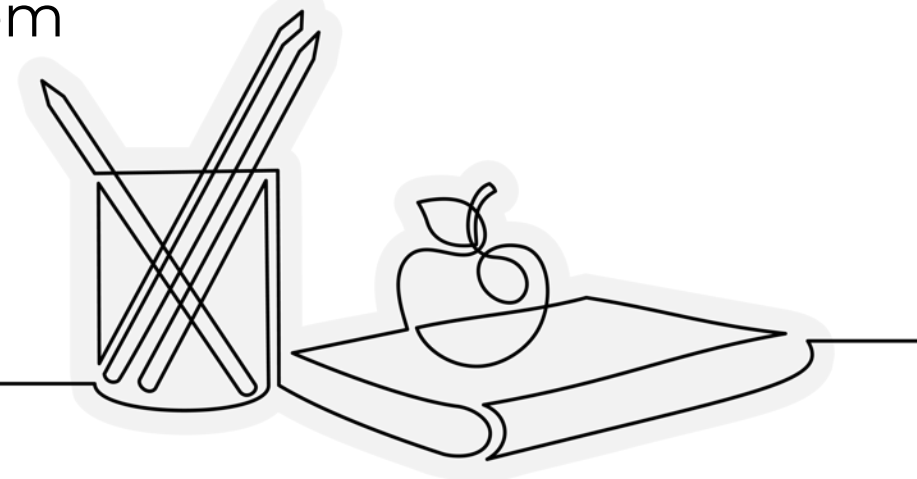


**But they often do so by intervening far upstream of diets...
...and at multiple places**

METHODOLOGY



- **Six interventions** and evaluations in **12 LMICs**: grants and TA to food SMEs; business networks for food SMEs; supporting access among vulnerable workers; stimulating demand for nutritious foods
- **14 researchers** from nutrition, economics, other social sciences + practitioners
- Workshop to synthesise lessons learned across all of them



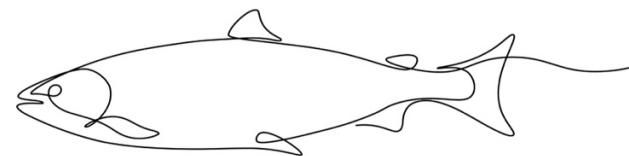


FIVE CHALLENGES

1 LACK OF EVIDENCE BASE

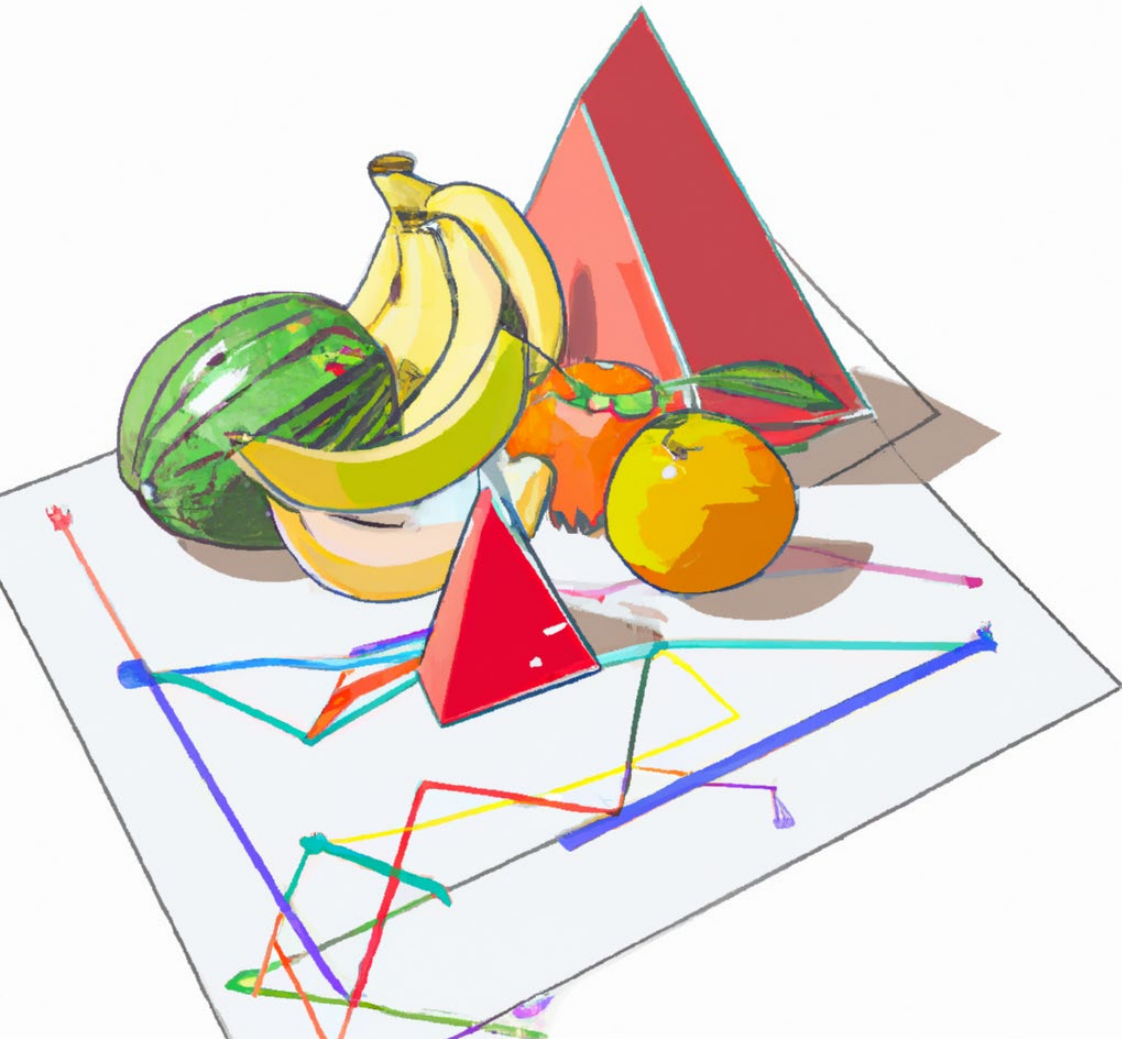
Interventions are often novel; designed based on theoretical or intuitive understandings, but without a strong evidence-base

- **Need for ‘leap of faith’ in theory of change**
 - More, stronger assumptions
- **Can’t rely on prior evidence to interpret results (esp. when unexpected)**

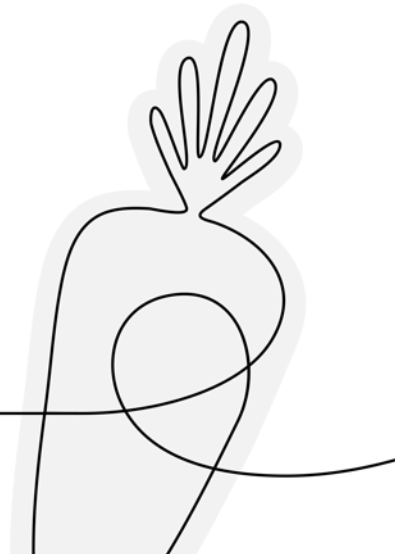


2 INTERVENTIONS TEND TO BE DYNAMIC AND MULTI-FACETED

The intervention that is implemented may not be the one the evaluation was designed for



- Incomplete understanding at outset
- Private-sector (and other) partners may make rapid changes
- Participatory approaches

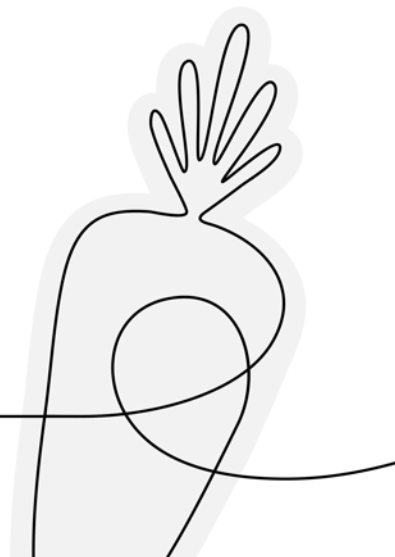


3 ADDRESSING ATTRIBUTION

Fundamental challenge in impact evaluation: what would have happened in the absence of the program (counterfactual)

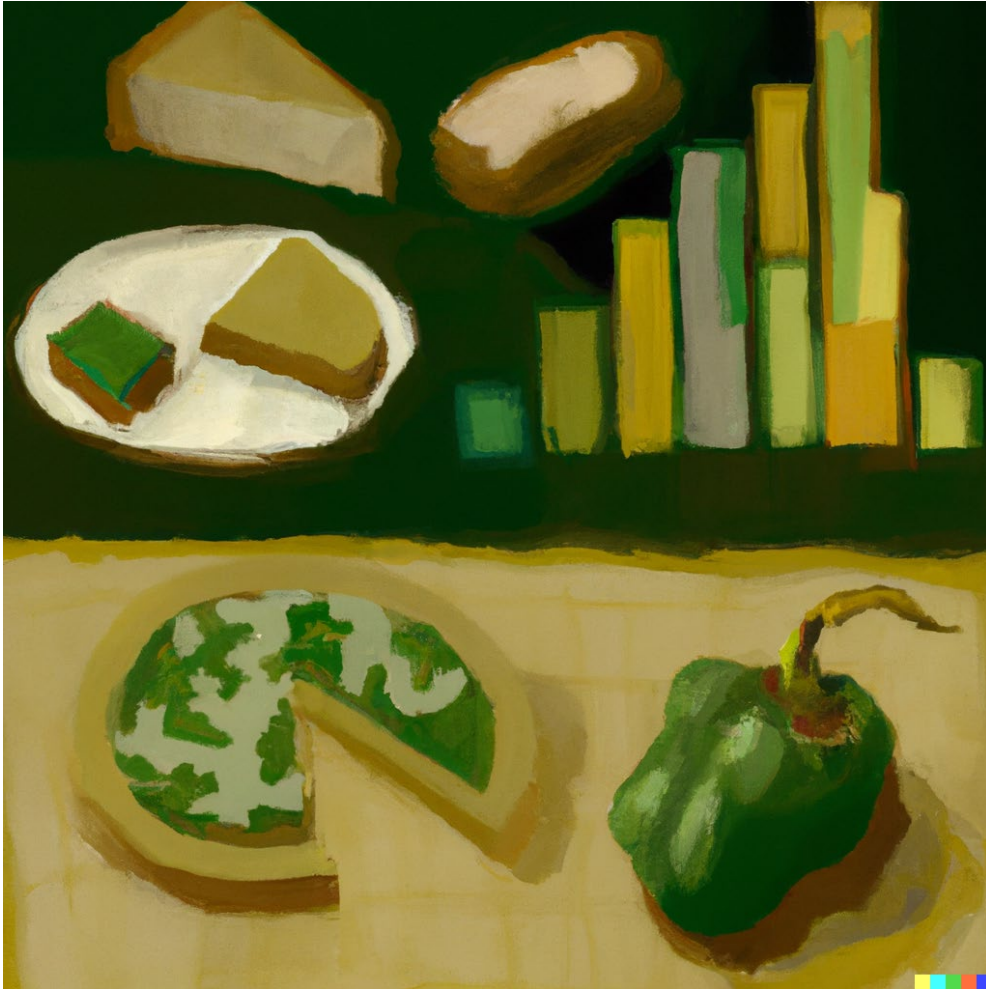


- System-based interventions may not allow for easily assigning a ‘control’ and ‘treatment’
 - esp. supply side or policy interventions

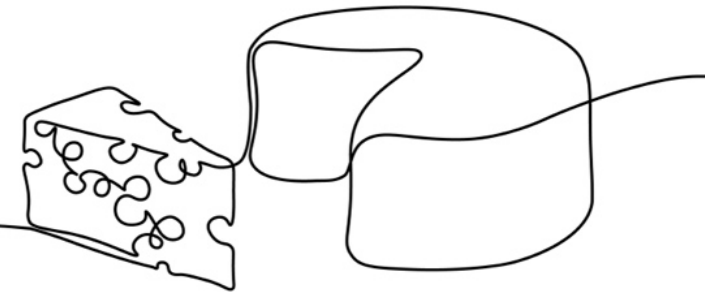


4

OBTAINING TIMELY, ACCURATE DATA



- Long, complex, unpredictable links to activities, outcomes and impact
- Tracking food as it moves through the supply chain (care about end consumer and circumstances of consumption: diet quality contribution aligning with nutritional needs)

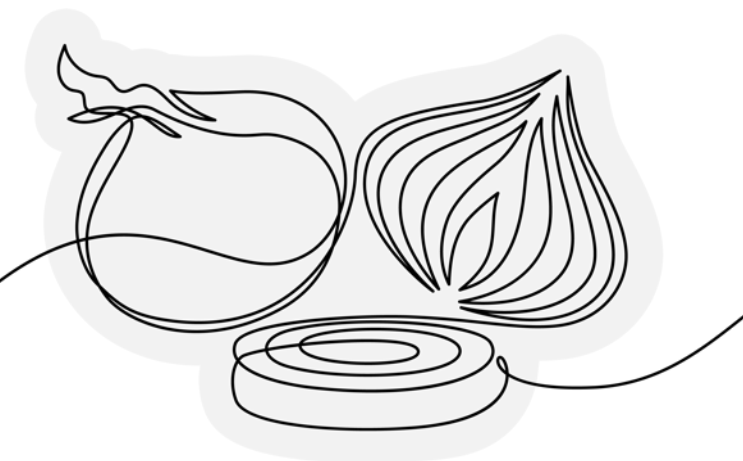


5

DEFINING AND MEASURING APPROPRIATE OUTCOMES

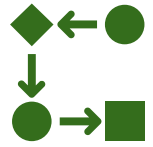


- Multiple endpoints (e.g. business viability + food access)
- With participatory interventions, perspectives on key outcomes vary across stakeholders
- Practicality limits on multiple outcomes
- Ambition of change vs. reality of evaluation: What can reasonably be expected to change in a statistically measurable amount, within evaluation timeframe?





SIX CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS



Guided by strong theory of change

- Analyse critically
- Focus in on assumptions
- Be clear when an intervention is not evaluation-ready



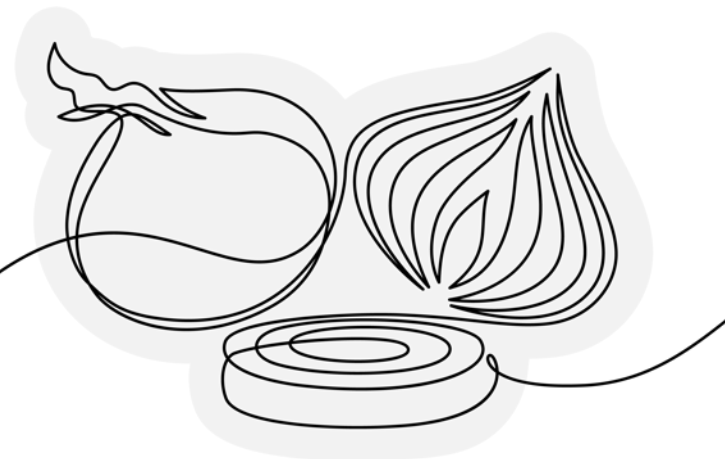
Adaptive and flexible

- Expect, welcome adaptations
- Consider studying the changes themselves



Transparently document methods and changes

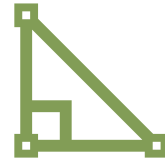
in project ToC,
assumptions, and
study protocol





Assess a range of outcomes, incl. unintended consequences

- Be realistic in effects and their sizes
- Ensure adequate power (or seek out alternative methods)



Combine and triangulate methods

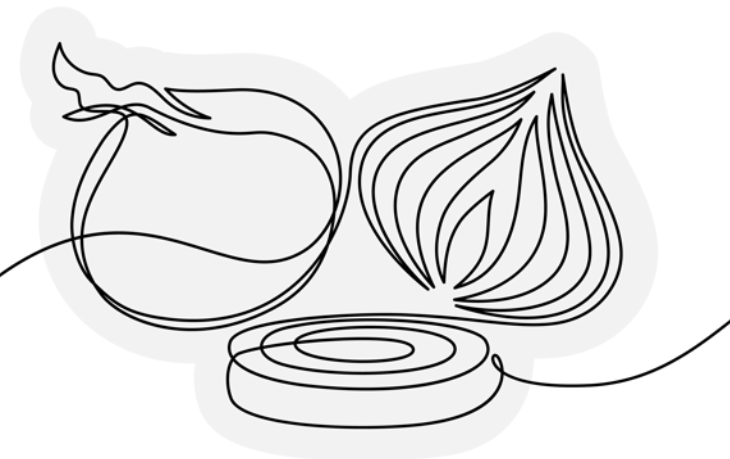
- Break down ToC
- Consider contribution analysis where attribution not feasible



Reach across disciplines to find them (incl. economics!)

Regression discontinuity, natural experiments

Don't let methodological limitations constrain ambition of programme design.





Thanks to paper co-authors: Lynnette M Neufeld, Jef L Leroy, Noora-Lisa Aberman, Inka Barnett, Eric Djimeu Wouabe, Amy Webb Girard, Wendy Gonzalez, Carol E Levin, Mduduzi NN Mbuya, Eduardo Nakasone, Christina Nyhus Dhillon, Dave Prescott, Matt Smith, David Tschirley



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Perspectives

Food Systems Interventions for Nutrition: Lessons from 6 Program Evaluations in Africa and South Asia^{1,2}

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ABSTRACT

Although there is growing global momentum behind food systems strategies to improve planetary and human health—including nutrition—there is limited evidence of what types of food systems interventions work. Evaluating these types of interventions is challenging due to their complex and dynamic nature and lack of fit with standard evaluation methods. In this article, we draw on a portfolio of 6 evaluations of food systems interventions in Africa and South Asia that were intended to improve nutrition. We identify key methodological challenges and formulate recommendations to improve the quality of such studies. We highlight 5 challenges: lack of evidence base to justify the intervention, the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the interventions, addressing attribution, collecting or accessing accurate and timely data, and defining and measuring appropriate outcomes. In addition to more specific guidance, we identify 6 cross-cutting recommendations, including a need to use multiple and diverse methods and flexible designs. We also note that these evaluation challenges present opportunities to develop new methods and highlight several specific needs in this space.

Keywords: methods, project impact, theory of change, complex interventions, systems interventions

Introduction

The past few years have seen a flurry of publications, presentations, and calls to action related to food system transformation for human, animal, and planetary health [1–5]. These messages coalesced around the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, resulting in consolidation of evidence on a variety of food system-related topics [6], new coalitions, and new commitments and investments [7]. This included the recognition of the importance of a healthy diet to prevent all forms of malnutrition [8]. To support access to healthy diets, development donors have funded, and implementing partners have designed and implemented, a range of different food systems for nutrition interventions in recent years.

There is limited evidence, however, on how to make healthy diets accessible to all: the evidence base on effective actions to “transform food systems for nutrition” is tenuous and its urgent need of expansion. As a result, although strong evidence is

Abbreviations: DALL-E, stability-adjusted life span; FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; GAIN, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition; LMIC, low- and middle-income country; MMSI, meter, small, and medium-sized enterprises; RCT, randomized controlled trial; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal.

¹ The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of FAO.

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