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Access to Nutrition

How can we Make Nutritious Food Affordable for All?

Chaired by Sophie Healy Thow

KEY MESSAGES

- Currently **3 billion people can't afford the least-cost healthy diet** recommended by national Governments
- Actions are needed in social protection and in agricultural investments to improve access to nutritious food; **social protection transfers need to increase**
- The **cost of nutritious foods should be reduced by diversification and connection**, not by externalising the true cost of food
- Some **community-level solutions** can help address affordability and access, including home garden production of nutritious food, nutrition-sensitive aquaculture, developing recipes based on locally available foods, improving infrastructure and market access
- The **perceived low value of some nutritious and lower-cost foods needs to be challenged**
- The **food environment needs to be changed** to incentivise healthy foods and disincentivise wide availability of highly processed unhealthy foods, including working through corporate governance mechanisms
- We need to **work on multiple game-changing actions collectively** to bring about a fundamental shift in how food systems operate and achieve co-benefits across food system outcomes.

THE CHALLENGE

How can nutritious diets be affordable for all? What is the current situation? **Anna Herforth, Senior Fellow of the Food Prices for Nutrition Project at Tufts University**, presented findings from her recent global overview study. Using the World Bank's 2017 International Comparison Program (ICP) dataset, the study estimated that 3 billion people globally can't afford to purchase the least-cost form of healthy diets recommended by national governments. On average it costs $3.68 per day to meet dietary recommendations (which differ by country): healthy diets cost far more than the international poverty line of $1.90 per day.

World Bank data estimate that the poorest people in Low Income countries spend an average of 63% of income on food. Based on comparing the cost of diet with 63% of incomes, 1.3 billion people in South Asia, 829 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 556 million in E. and SE Asia can't afford a healthy diet.

More diverse diets cost more: staples and oils comprise just 16% of the cost of a healthy diet, but fruit and veg cost 40% and protein foods plus dairy comprise 44%. Therefore low-income consumers find it impossible to achieve healthy diets based on current cost structures.

What can we conclude from this analysis? First, there are implications for poverty lines: these are clearly set too low and need to be adjusted to allow for the cost of a nutritious diet.

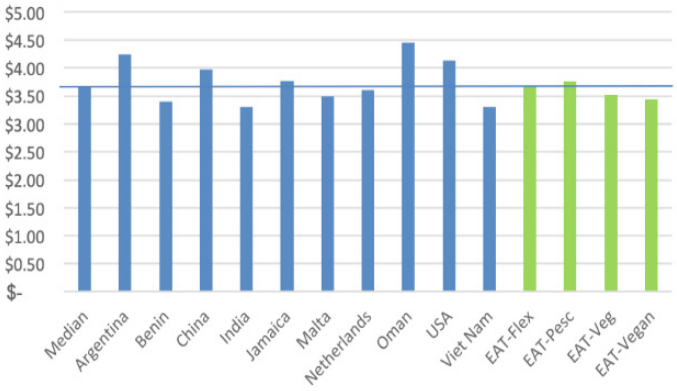


Figure 1. Cost of healthy diets in different countries (Source, A. Herforth (2021)

Second, agriculture and rural development programmes need to prioritise reducing the cost of vegetables and fruits, and protein-rich foods including dairy, in ways which improve livelihoods and the environment.

Third, social protection programmes need to be re-designed to have a stronger focus on nutrition, possibly including assistance for home-based production of nutritious foods.

Examples from Liberia, Niger, Malawi and Zambia

Case studies conducted by different NGOs using the Cost of the Diet methodology highlighted some of the affordability issues in different contexts.

Joseph Odyek, presented a study undertaken in Liberia by **Concern Worldwide** in three livelihood zones. The study found that most poor and very poor households would need to spend more than 100% of their annual income to achieve a nutritious diet. The price of fish has a significant impact on affordability. Seasonal price fluctuations, currency depreciation/import dependency and production constraints also influence affordability. Potential solutions include a focus on community-level food demonstrations, home-garden production, nutrition-sensitive aquaculture and snail-rearing, promoting recipes incorporating nutritious local foods, and increased use of micronutrient powders.

Livelihood zone	Avg daily diet cost RAINY (LRD)	Avg daily diet cost DRY (LRD)	Avg daily diet cost (LRD)	Annual diet cost (LRD)
LR02 North/Central rice with cassava & market gardening	378.37 (1.92 USD)	464.29 (2.35 USD)	410.75 (2.08 USD)	149,923.69 (759.07 USD)
LR04 Coastal Plain Cassava with Rice & Inland Fishing	382.12 (1.93 USD)	349.73 (1.77 USD)	370.49 (1.88 USD)	135,230.00 (684.67 USD)
LR08 Rubber & Charcoal with Food Crops (2019 dry season retrospective data)	411.93 (2.14 USD)	290.74 (1.51 USD)	368.43 (1.91 USD)	134,478.04 (697.13 USD)

Figure 2. Daily and annual diet cost, 3 livelihood zones, Liberia (Source: J. Odyek (2021)

Save the Children (UK) pioneered the Cost of Diet and Household Economy approaches. **Lilly Schofield** presented recent work in Malawi and Niger combining both approaches to explore the impact of COVID-19 on diet affordability. The likely causes of impact are restricted movement, curfews, market disruptions, disruption of livelihoods, border closures, and food price increases. In Niger (Zinder District) grains comprised about 50% of the cost of a nutritious diet. Prices and affordability increased in January-February 2021 compared with the previous year: in February 2021 the affordability of a nutritious diet was 129% of the income of very poor households. In Malawi's Chilwa Lake Zone the cost of a nutritious diet was 250% above average incomes of very poor households. The second wave of COVID-19 was contributing to a worsening of affordability and increased malnutrition in both countries.

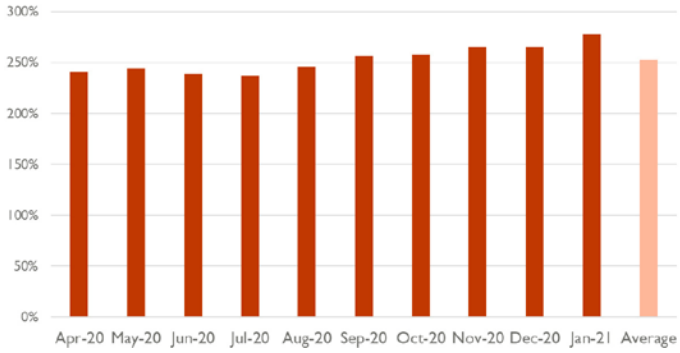


Figure 3. Cost of Diet vs HH income for very poor households in Chilwa Lake Zone (Source: L. Schofield (2021)

Mary Corbett presented findings of work on affordability by **Self Help Africa** in their Local Development Programme implemented in two remote Districts of the Northern Province of Zambia, with high prevalent stunting rates (about 50%). The cost of an energy-only diet was estimated at 58% of average income, but the minimum cost of a nutritious diet was 14 – 18 times more expensive than the energy-only diet – far out of reach of most households. Factors influencing affordability included limited availability of vegetables in the cold season, the high cost of sources of Vitamin B12 (mostly animal-source foods), poor infrastructure and remote location, and food preferences - millet is considered a food of poor people although it is a better sources of micronutrients than maize.

MCBZ				
Age group	Rainy season (166 days)	Cold season (123 days)	Dry season (77 days)	Annual Cost
12-23 month old child	13.28	0	6.16	19.44
Rest of family	287.18	0	129.36	416.54
Overall cost	300.46	0	135.52	435.98
LHZ2				
Age group	Rainy season (166 days)	Cold season (123 days)	Dry season (77 days)	Annual Cost
12-23 month old child	13.28	0	5.39	18.67
Rest of family	287.18	0	120.89	425.08
Overall cost	300.46	0	126.28	426.74

Micro-Nutrient Diet		
Livelihood Zone	Daily Cost (ZMW)	Annual Cost (ZMW)
MCBZ	11.49-20.15	5,973
LHZ2	19.31-22.66	7,873

Figure 4. Cost of energy-only diet and micro-nutrient diet, Northern Province, Zambia (Source: M. Corbett (2021)

What Actions can be used to improve Affordability?

Corinna Hawkes presented five propositions about the nature of the affordability problem, and potential solutions emerging in the Action Track 1 process of the Food Systems Summit.

Problem 1 is low and variable incomes of poor households: rational management of such incomes drives households to choose staples and cheap, often less healthy options. Potential solutions include women-led enterprise for neglected crops, nutritious social safety nets and school food programmes.

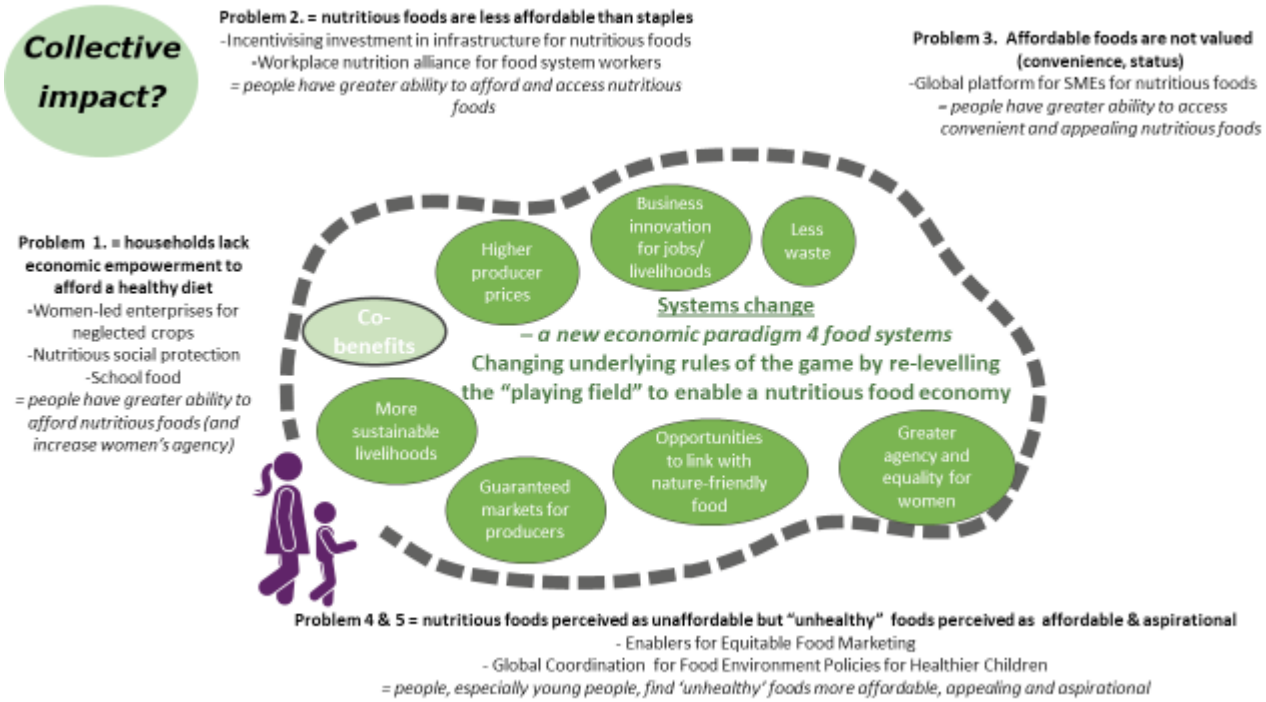
Problem 2 is that nutritious foods that people want to eat are more expensive. Potential solutions include investment in infrastructure for nutritious foods and expansion of food at work actions.

Problem 3 is that there may be low-cost nutritious foods available which are perceived as having low value, e.g. millets. Potential game-changing solutions include developing an innovation platform for SME manufacturers of convenient nutritious foods.

Problem 4 is the perception that nutritious foods are more costly when they may not be. A potential solution is public awareness campaigns with commercial knowhow.

Problem 5 is the wide availability of appealing "ultra-processed" sugary drinks and snacks, fried street foods, oils and sugar, which people are willing to pay for even when they may be more expensive than more nutritious alternatives. Potential solutions include clearly defining "unhealthy food", a package of food environment policies, and disincentives for unhealthy food marketing.

Bringing these game-changing solutions together to achieve systems change will achieve greater collective impact. This involves changing the "rules of the game" to provide an environment which enables a nutritious food economy.



Note: Recording of the webinar on Access to Nutrition – How can we Make Nutritious Food Affordable for All? Is available on YouTube at **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se6Dlui_n9U&t=5013s**

All presentations are available at **http://www.ifiad.ie/food-systems-and-nutrition/**