



## Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition

Report summary<sup>1</sup>

The third annual Food Security and Nutrition report, jointly written by the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the World Food Programme explores the progress of countries in the Asia and Pacific region towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and World Health Assembly (WHA) targets on nutrition. Split into two parts, the report firstly tracks progress on key SDG targets up to 2019 and explores some scenarios which highlight the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second part of the report focuses on potential solutions to improve the diets of mothers and children in the Asia and Pacific Region as well as noting some of the challenges. The report aims to raise awareness of the importance of maternal and child diets as well as to support conversations around shaping policies and practices across the region in order to achieve food security and nutrition for all.

Five years on from the launch of the SDGs, the report reveals that, overall, the region is not on track to achieve the 2030 targets. In 2019, 350.6 million people in the region were estimated to be undernourished, more than half of the global total. An estimated 74.5 million children under five years of age were estimated to be stunted and a total of 31.5 million children under five years of age in the region were classified as wasted. The prevalence of overweight and obesity is also growing.

While the true impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition is yet to be established, it is projected that these 2019 estimates will be driven even higher as a result of the pandemic. There is thus a clear need for governments and partners to intensify commitments to implement evidence-based policy and programmes to accelerate progress towards the SDGs as well as building resilience against future disasters and epidemics.

Since the causes of undernutrition are multifaceted and broad-ranging, the cost of a healthy diet is a critical factor to ensure food security and nutrition for all. In the region, 1.9 billion people are unable to afford a healthy diet; therefore, integrated policies and approaches to address food affordability, availability and accessibility are needed.

Globally, there is consensus that to address these issues, an integrated and coordinated systems approach is needed, involving institutions and actors across the water and sanitation, health, social protection and education systems. Social behaviour change communication needs to be mainstreamed throughout these systems for greater uptake and sustainability of healthy behaviours and diets. Strong political will, commitment and leadership are needed to mobilise stakeholders in a multi-sector approach. To make the most efficient use of scarce resources, it is important to invest in the most cost-effective and impactful interventions to improve maternal and child diets. With only 10 years left to achieve the 2030 agenda, a combination of these efforts is needed to support the active promotion of maternal and child diets.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/12181/file/Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific%20Regional%20Overview%20of%20Food%20Security%20and%20Nutrition.pdf>

## The effects of food systems interventions on food security and nutrition outcomes in low- and middle-income countries

Report summary<sup>1</sup>

There is a significant global focus on improving food systems to address malnutrition and food insecurity in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, the complicated and disorganised nature of the evidence base makes navigating it a challenge for policy makers, donors and practitioners. To address this, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), with support from Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions, was commissioned by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit to develop an evidence gap map (EGM) on the literature relating to food systems interventions to food security and nutrition outcomes in LMICs.

An interdisciplinary approach was used to identify a total of 178 systematic reviews and 1,838 impact evaluations. The majority of the impact evaluations were conducted in sub-Saharan Africa (33%), South Asia (20%) and East Asia and the Pacific (17%) with over half focusing on rural areas. The most common interventions had

over 100 impact evaluations each and at least 20 systematic reviews. These predominantly focused on direct food provision or targeted consumer behaviours by providing supplements, fortification, classes, peer support and counselling.

The literature predominantly focused on randomised trials (approximately three quarters of all impact evaluations) at local and sub-national levels. Mixed methods approaches were less commonly used and interventions at national and transnational levels were lacking, despite their wide reach. There was also a lack of qualitative data to inform the context-specific impacts of interventions. Few studies conducted cost analyses which are important in understanding how to best allocate resources. Several interventions were under researched, with no impact evaluations identified for advertising regulations, food waste education programmes or food packaging. While women play a major role within food systems, limited evidence was available for interventions to support their decision-making and for those that measured outcomes related to their empow-

erment. The majority of studies examined either final or intermediate outcomes with only one fifth exploring outcomes along the causal chain.

While this EGM was primarily developed as a tool to identify relevant literature, it also provided some useful recommendations for future research to fill the identified evidence gaps. For example, for widely implemented interventions, such as those related to labelling and advertising regulations and governmental price manipulations, evaluations are needed to explore their potential for negative consequences and ensure the efficient use of funds. More research into the effects of interventions on different populations should also be explored. Furthermore, qualitative research or impact evaluations that examine the intermediate steps in the theory of change, together with the final intervention outcomes, are needed to develop more effective interventions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Food-system-EGM-brief.pdf>