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Identifying policy-level blockades for healthy food systems in Ethiopia

Fikadu Alemayehu^a, Samson Gebreselassie^b, Kaleab Baye^c

a Department of Human Nutrition, Hawassa University, Hawassa, Ethiopia Email: fikadureta@gmail.com

b School of Public Health, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Email samson.gebremedhin@aau.edu.et

c Centre for Food Science and Nutrition, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Email
kaleabbaye@gmail.com

Introduction: In Ethiopia, the extent to which national policy and strategies are geared towards addressing the challenges related to health and sustainable food systems has not been explored. The purpose of this study was to identify policy-level blockades for healthy and sustainable food systems in Ethiopia and examine the commitment of the policy environment for gender equity and social justice.

Material and Methods: Descriptive policy analysis was used to explore complex determinants of food systems including consumer factors, food environment, supply chain and external drivers. All relevant strategic documents compatible with the framework were identified by searching FAOLEX and GINA databases. Ultimately, 70 national strategic documents relevant to Health, Food and Nutrition, Agriculture, Multisectoral Development, Social Protection, Trade and Industry sectors were included in the analysis.

Results and Discussion: Most of the existing policies in Ethiopia envisage to increase foreign currency earnings from export of agricultural products. Ethiopia is implementing multiple measures for controlling food prices. Yet, most of these decisions are temporary. Health and nutrition policies provide limited attention to diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The agriculture strategies implicitly promote government monopoly. Other major blockades are: lack of strategies to mitigate the impacts of urban encroachment, absence of provisions to promote availability of healthy foods in public facilities, and lack of standalone policies in key sub-systems including food safety, fortification, and urban agriculture. The existing agricultural policies promoted equitable access of women and youth to agricultural resources, technologies and services. Development policies pledged to create decent job opportunities to women and socially disadvantaged groups including youth. Conversely, trade policies lack fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to support socially disadvantaged people including women and provide no directions to assure financial access to women-led small and medium size enterprises. The policies provide no protection to peri-urban farmers being dislodged from their livelihood by the uncontrolled expansion of major cities.

Conclusions and Outlook: Trade policies should assure reasonable balance between export and import of healthy foods. Health and nutrition policies should adequately address the key risk factors of diet-related NCDs.

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