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“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

Combating malnutrition in Africa through diversification of the food systems

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Abstract

Africa faces persistent undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and growing rates of overweight, obesity, and diet related diseases known as the triple burden of malnutrition. These nutritional problems not only overburden health care system but also undermine economic growth and development in Africa. HealthyDiets4Africa is a transdisciplinary project with partners from 12 African and nine European countries that aims to harness the potential of food systems diversification to address malnutrition and improve food and

nutrition security in Africa. Our central hypothesis is that diversifying different elements of the food chain will improve nutritional health and reduce malnutrition in Africa, while achieving economic and environmental benefits. Our overall goal is to build sustainable food systems through diversification in Ivory Coast, Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, and Kenya. Diversification can occur at different stages of the food value chain, including production, supply chains, and consumption, and at various levels of organisation, ranging from the farm to scaling at the continental level. The project will engage the different food value chain players, policy makers and key partners and apply interdisciplinary methodology to actualize the project goals. To achieve the overall goal, the project is organised into four clusters. Cluster 1 includes mapping and monitoring of dietary diversity and evaluating determinants of dietary diversity within the food environment. Cluster 2 involves assessing nutrient diversity in traditional, underutilised, and novel foods and diversifying agricultural production and food processing. Cluster 3 entails co-designing and assessing economic acceptability of diversified diets and novel food products, enhancing food safety through dietary diversification, and evaluating impacts of diversification on health outcomes. Cluster 4 involves the establishment of scaling infrastructure to promote adoption of approaches towards diversified food systems and enabling better policy environment and strengthening stakeholders' capacities on all relevant levels to promote informed decision-making processes. In line with the objectives of the EU Green Deal and the global elements of the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, HealthyDiets4Africa aims to contribute to the transformation of food systems in Africa through diversification to make them more resilient, sustainable, and climate-friendly, while improving the supply of safe, nutritious, and affordable food to combat malnutrition.

Keywords: Diversification, food and nutrition security, food systems, food value chains, innovations, interdisciplinary methodology, Sub-Saharan Africa, sustainable diets