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

Southern African diet: Developing a regional diet for better health for people and planet

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Abstract

The decline in nutritional value of many food products, progressively limited diversity of crops and livestock, as well as recent price and production shocks, are emphasising that a large-scale transformation of our global food systems is urgently needed to ensure that it becomes more equitable and sustainable.

Rather than continuing to back a global diet that is heavily fixated on a handful of crops and breed, such as wheat, rice, maize, rapeseed, and Holstein cows, we need regional and local diets. In practice this means to progress regional diet concepts such as the widely known Mediterranean Diet, or the Nordic Diet, promoted by chefs in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. Local adaptations of the Mediterranean Diet could be an Australian Diet, a Southern American Diet and yes, a Southern African Diet, with scope for dietary sub-regions. A key advantage would be that these local diets will be more diverse and culturally-relevant - both in terms of production and consumption. The list of benefits is long: the local and seasonal produced foods would consist of crops and livestock breeds that are native and hence better adapted to the regional climate, pests, and disease than introduced types. Shorter value-chains means reducing transport emissions. A higher biodiversity of native crops and breeds – produced via agroecological production systems – will decrease homogeneity in global food products, while moving regions towards higher food and nutritional security.

For many countries, adopting a more local food system means a decreased dependency on global food prices. For example, the local breads in Southern Africa are made with sorghum or millet rather than wheat.

Moreover, when merging this concept with the basic ideas of a Planetary Diet, as drawn up by the EAT-Lancet Commission, a food system and eating plan emerges that protects both human health and the planet alike. In my oral presentation I will highlight the many steps, (behavioural) changes and stakeholders necessary to promote and adopt the concept of regional diets such as the Southern African Diet.

Keywords: Behaviour change, diversification, local food systems, Southern African diet, transformation