



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2023, hybrid conference  
“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:  
Trade-offs and synergies”

## Role of food choice motives in socioeconomic disparities in food consumption and nutritional outcomes

CECILIA MAINA

*University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Germany*

### Abstract

The rise of overweight and obesity prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa is concerning due to the increased risk of non-communicable diseases. Poor diets from unhealthy food systems are the primary cause, driven by income growth, urbanisation, and technological change. Multinational food industries have played a role in this shift, by manufacturing, distributing, and promoting highly processed foods that have a strong sensory appeal. These foods are usually high in fats and sugars as these components contribute to the taste, texture, and overall enjoyment of the food. Income and education create variations in dietary behaviours and weight outcomes among different socioeconomic groups. As income rises, individuals have greater resources to purchase diverse foods and consume more calories, leading to overweight and obesity prevalence. Consumer behaviour also plays a key role in the variations seen in food consumption patterns and weight outcomes. The paper's main aim is to understand the role of food choice motives in explaining differences in diet diversity, and weight outcomes among different socio-economic groups in Kenya.

Data used for this study sampled participants from 4 counties in Kenya to collect socioeconomic, food consumption, and anthropometric data. Food choice motives were collected using the food choice questionnaire. The data was collected in 2022 and comprised 381 men and women above the age of 18. Mediation analysis was conducted using the Karlson-Holm-Breen method for linear and non-linear probability models.

Empirical results show that the probability of an overweight and obese BMI level increases by 19% for a standard deviation change in the asset score and by 8% for a standard deviation change in years of schooling. These relationships were significantly mediated by sensory motives. Sensory motives explained 28.97% of the wealth-BMI association and 29.50% of the education-BMI relationship. Higher education was associated with increased diet diversity mediated by higher health and sensory concerns.

Findings suggest that higher sensory motives are driving the prevalence of overweight and obesity among high socioeconomic groups. Strategies should be geared towards restricting the marketing of energy-dense foods, implementing sugar taxes to deter consumption, and other nudge policies to curb the growing burden of overweight and obesity.

**Keywords:** Diet diversity, food choice motives, non-communicable diseases, overweight and obesity, socioeconomic disparities