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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Food environments in transitioning economies in Africa and Asia

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Abstract

Agricultural value chains are crucial to food supply to urban areas, influencing, among other things, the food environment and the diets of urban populations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In these emerging economies, dietary habits are undergoing major transitions, resulting in all forms of malnutrition and consequently in an increase in non-communicable diseases as well as diseases associated with inadequate intake of nutrients. The poor communities in urban areas of Africa and Asia are more affected by this phenomenon. As the relationship between food environment exposures, nutritional status and health outcomes in LMICs is not well understood, our Food Environments in Transitioning Economies (FETE) project is investigating this relationship in poor urban communities in Ghana, Malaysia, South Africa and Tanzania to understand the associations among these factors. Food environments, categorised as personal and external domains, are defined as the consumer interface with the food system, encompassing the availability, affordability, convenience, desirability and sustainability of foods and beverages in wild, cultivated and built environments, influenced by the socio-cultural and -political environments and ecosystems in which they are embedded. The core research question of the FETE project is how we can shape the personal and external food environments to promote availability and consumption of nutritious diets and improve health. The project team is investigating how the local food environment shapes individual food choices and the links between accessibility, affordability, convenience and desirability through an inter- and transdisciplinary approach. The methodological toolkit includes time-series analysis of food and nutrient supply, Participatory Geographical Information System (PGIS) combined with community mapping of food environments, complex systems models and stakeholder engagements. The project aims to develop policy recommendations for local governments and stakeholders, a reference model for improving food environments in the Global South, and a data and map dashboard of project results. This conference will provide an opportunity to present the project's approach and, where available, to give a first insight into preliminary results.

Keywords: Food environments, global south, healthy nutrition, transdisciplinary research, transitioning economies