



Improving diets in an era of food market transformation: Challenges and opportunities for engagement between the public and private sectors

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Diets are changing rapidly around the world. Leaders in almost all low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) today face a complex policy challenge – how to resolve persisting undernutrition and vitamin and mineral deficiencies while simultaneously preventing the global escalation of overweight and obesity. Urgent action is essential because healthy diets are key to addressing the growing health crisis. In fact, poor quality diets now threaten the successful achievement of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs).

Some LMIC governments are stepping up their efforts to improve diets for all. For example, by focusing on improving consumer knowledge and shaping demand through price and trade policies. But there are very few successful examples where governments have harnessed the market power of private sector actors to achieve positive gains in nutrition. This is a huge missed opportunity which must be rectified.

Policymakers need to be realistic about their own limits in shaping consumer behaviour. Similarly, they need to be pragmatic in seeking to persuade industry partners to play a more active role in improving diets. The food industry already does much to meet the nutritional needs of a rapidly growing global population. However, its activities are typically focused on delivering individual food products rather than on enhancing diets and larger food systems per se. There is profit in responding to current consumer demand for convenient, tasty, ultra-processed food products which do not contribute to a high-quality diet. Therefore, a policy focus is needed to encourage and enable firms to shift the balance of their activities in favour of products as well as fresh produce which are more nutritious, affordable and accessible to all.

The key is to establish a common understanding of the critical role of diet quality in nutrition. Circumstances should then inform two broad classes of action: incentives – so that companies have confidence in taking decisions and risks associated with sourcing and supplying nutritious foods and products; and enabling measures – so that the business environment works to encourage rather than inhibit innovative approaches.

Regulation is a powerful tool at the disposal of policymakers for influencing food and beverage companies, although policymakers need to be wary of potential negative side-effects. There are also opportunities and benefits for both public and private interests to move forward in partnership. Appropriate partnerships would enable firms to inform and help shape the design and implementation of policy actions. For this to take place, open dialogue is essential to building trust. In this brief, the Global Panel sets out six key questions which need to be addressed and resolved as part of any new partnership approach. They are intended to be used as a basis to promote dialogue aimed at achieving more ambitious and effective links between the public and the private sectors.



ENCOURAGING INVESTMENTS IN FOOD SECTOR SMEs

How can SMEs access loans to invest in food products which enhance dietary diversity and quality?



PROMOTING CONSUMER DEMAND FOR HEALTHY DIETS

How can consumer demand for high-quality diets and nutritious food products be created and promoted so that companies have confidence to invest and take risks in delivering more nutritious foods?



PUBLIC INCENTIVES FOR APPROPRIATE ACTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

How should governments incentivize private companies to improve the quality of food products?



MANAGING RISKS – A ROLE FOR INSURANCE

How can risks associated with developing, producing and selling more nutritious foods be minimized?



BUILDING TRUST

How can governments ensure that engagement with for-profit companies to promote universal access to healthy diets is underpinned by core principles of transparency and accountability?



INFRASTRUCTURE

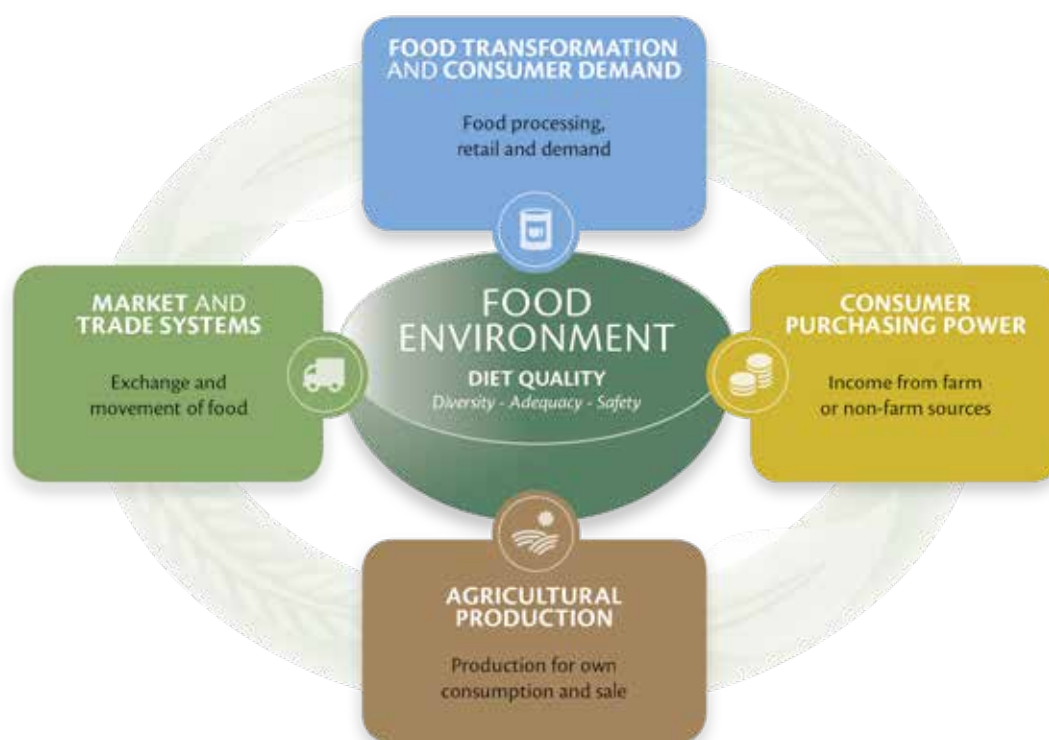
How can infrastructure planning be better geared toward reducing food losses and promoting year-round access to enhanced diets?



How can Agriculture and Food System Policies Improve Nutrition?

The multiple burdens on health in low – and middle-income countries due to food-related nutrition problems include not only persistent undernutrition and stunting but also widespread vitamin and mineral deficiencies and a growing prevalence of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. These different forms of malnutrition limit people's opportunity to live healthy and productive lives, and impede the growth of economies and whole societies.

The food environment from which consumers should be able to create healthy diets is influenced by four domains of economic activity:



In each of these domains, there is a range of policies that can have enormous influence on nutritional outcomes. In the Global Panel's first Technical Brief, we explain how these policies can influence nutrition, both positively and negatively. We make an argument for an integrated approach, drawing on policies from across these domains, and the need for more empirical evidence to identify successful approaches.

Find out more here: Glopan.org/nutrition



Although the private sector is involved in all segments of the food system, this policy brief focuses predominantly on the role it plays in shaping diets and provisioning consumer choice through its activities in food transformation and food retail.



Download *Policy Brief No. 11* here: glopan.org/privatesector

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