

CONFERENCE PAPER 2

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IDRC Grant/ Subvention du CRDI: 108983-001-Measuring the healthiness of Ghanaian children's food environments to prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases

“Improving nutrition, unlocking potential, and accelerating change in Africa”:
The role of measurement, evaluation, accountability, and leadership support
(MEALS).

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Invited Keynote Speaker: The International Congress of Dietetics (ICD). 1-3 September 2021 in Cape Town South Africa

Abstract

Ghana, like other African countries, is experiencing a rise in the prevalence of obesity and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases (NR-NCDs). A recent analysis covering the period, 1980–2015, reveals >500% increase in prevalence of adult obesity in Ghana. Over 40% of current adult deaths in Ghana are attributable to NCDs. This tidal wave of obesity and NR-NCDs is a consequence of both market, government, and food system failures. Such failures require a decisive, and effective response. To identify an effective and contextually appropriate response, we engaged individuals, communities, local, and national stakeholders so as to:

- assess the healthiness of foods and non-alcoholic beverages marketed on popular Ghanaian televisions channels;
- assess the healthiness of foods on promotional-flyers of major Accra-based supermarkets;
- determine the existence of nutrition standards and assess the nature of foods sold at eateries located on the campus of Ghana’s largest university;
- examine the extent of commercial food marketing on the campus of Ghana’s largest university;
- assess how food and beverages are sold and advertised in urban Ghana;
- explore how unhealthy food and beverages are embedded in everyday life in urban Ghana;
- characterize dietary behaviors of urban dwellers in Ghana;
- identify social and physical environmental drivers shaping dietary behaviors of urban dwellers;
- determine how ready Ghanaian communities are to reduce unhealthy food and beverage consumption;
- identify priorities for policy and interventions to improve the food environment in Ghana

These studies reveal that, to create or improve healthiness of the Ghanaian food environment, policies are required that account for people’s lived environments that encompass regulatory, legislative, and fiscal measures supported by leadership and accountability nationally. Our efforts so far are focusing on a project providing measurement, evaluation, accountability and leadership support (MEALS) to the Ghanaian government for preventing NCDs.