

Welcome Message from the MEALS4NCDs Project Team
Delivered by Professor Amos Laar, *Principal Investigator MEALS4NCDs Project*

Thank you Professors Aryeetey and Holdsworth, moderators for today's sessions.

Pro Vice Chancellor, RID, UG (Professor Felix Asante), HOD PFRH (Professor Kwasi Torpey), other Senior Members from the University of Ghana who are joining us today, the MEALS4NCDs Project Team, the MEALS4NCDs Advisory Board (which includes international subject experts, Representatives of MOH, NDPC, FDA, UN agencies of (WHO, UNICEF), CSOs, and a Member, Parliamentary Select Committee on Health. Hon. Dr. Sebastian Sandaare), distinguished meeting delegates, ladies and gentlemen, Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening wherever you may be joining us from. It is an honor to welcome all of you to this meeting. I do this on behalf of the MEALS4NCDs Project team, and partners.

As you may be aware, this meeting was scheduled to hold in September 2020 as a face-to-face event. COVID-19 told us we could not do that.... We had to re-strategize, retool ourselves so as to go virtual... During this challenging time, you have remained true to us... Thank you. We are thus grateful, and delighted to welcome everyone to the First Africa Food Environment Research Network meeting (#FERN2020). The meeting aims to connect researchers in whose work relates directly or indirectly to improving food environments in Africa

In recent decades, rapid urbanization, globalization, coupled with changes in food environments, is driving a nutrition transition in Africa. Dietary habits of people are shifting towards unhealthy foods high in calories and low in nutrients, which is contributing to increasing rates of obesity and associated diet-related non-communicable diseases (DR-NCDs).

Africa needs policies designed to create supportive food environments for healthy food choices for everyone. Research on how food environments are experienced by people can be policy-influencing. Elsewhere, evidence show that food environments inside our homes, schools or communities routinely influence our food consumption. Generation of local evidence can provide insights into which policies may be more effective in combating DR-NCDs in Africa.

THE MEALS4NCDs project pays heed. That is why, over the next three days, the distinguished subject experts we have carefully selected from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America, will share experiences and opportunities in food environment research; help build capacity, in particular among younger

researchers. Indeed, capacity building is engrained in the DNA of the MEALS4NCDs project as you see soon when we outline the project's actions.

We hope that your participation in FERN2020 will result in new knowledge and research collaborations towards creating healthier food environments in Africa

We never could do what we are doing now, without the generous financial support from IDRC, CANADA. Please join me to say thank you to IDRC for making this possible. On this note, please receive my wishes for a stimulating, and a productive meeting.

Before I proceed to present to you the meeting agenda, with your permission Moderators, can we observe 1-minute silence in honor of our friend, and colleague, Professor Razak Abizaari. He has been on the forefront of our fight against malnutrition in all its forms. [...] May his soul rest in peace.

Thank you.