

Closing remarks from the MEALS4NCDs Project Team

Delivered by Professor Amos Laar, *Principal Investigator MEALS4NCDs Project*

Thank you, Professor Zotor for ably moderating this very important session.

Colleagues from the University of Ghana who have been with us over the past 3 days, the MEALS4NCDs Core Team (the University of Ghana, University of Health and Allied Sciences, the Ghana Health Service, the African Population and Health Research Center, Kenya, National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), France, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, the Scientific Institute of Public Health, Belgium, and the University of Toronto, Canada), esteemed members the MEALS4NCDs Advisory Board, Distinguished Speakers, ladies and gentlemen. There is an old Ghanaian saying which goes like ... *“there is no never-ending feast, and that good things come to an end much more quickly ...* Ours is a happy ending!

On behalf of the MEALS4NCDs partners, I would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to all of you for making time to participate in this meeting. The planning of FERN2020 was initiated over 12 months ago when we received notice of award of the MEALS4NCDs grant from the IDRC, Canada. The planning of the meeting, however, was paved with challenges – in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we weathered the storms, and so, here we are physically distant, yet mentally together. Many, if not all, would agree with me that the meeting has been successful. We have had 3 days of sharing, and mentoring, and learning. However, to others, it's been over 12 months of hard work. And so let me take this opportunity to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all those who have contributed to this

1. Early Career Researchers
2. MEALS4NCDs Core Team
3. MEALS4NCDs Advisory Board
4. Participating institutions and the Funder, IDRC, Canada ...

...and of course, our distinguished speakers and mentors, who have made it possible for us to have in-depth discussions on food environments, build capacity to generate evidence ... to instigate actions that improve our food environments. Yes, thank you to the 20 speakers from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and the two Food Environment Mentors (INFORMAS Module Leaders) who interacted with all or most of the over 600 registrants from 54 countries (*read out list below*). Although the daily average number via zoom was about 160, the daily average number reached via livestreaming on social media has been about 500. There is no doubt that together we can. Together we can mobilize and motivate the needed interest in food environment research, together we are building capacity in the area to generate evidence for advocacy for practice, for policy.

To this end, regionally, we are working closely with, coordinating, and synergizing with others to form what would be Africa's largest network of food environment researchers. e.g. Prof Adama Diouf and her team from Senegal are mobilizing Francophone Africa, whilst the MEALS4NCDs focuses on Anglophone Africa. We are also interested in engaging continental nutrition societies such as ANS, and FANUS.

Globally, we are working closely with INFORMAS, and hope to do so with the Drivers of Food Choice Consortium, the ANH and IMMANA Group, the Netherlands Food Partnership, Rockefeller Foundation, the new Community of Practice being coordinated by Mark Spire of City University of London (just to mention a few).

And so, as we close, I wanted to let you know that the closing of this meeting is not an end, but a beginning for what we hope will be a very fruitful and impactful collaboration with you all. We will be

in touch to share the proceedings of the meeting, and to discuss how you may wish to contribute to FERN.

God bless you all

Amos Laar, Ph.D, Principal Investigator MEALS4NCDs Project

1. *Algeria,*
2. *Australia,*
3. *Bangladesh,*
4. *Belgium,*
5. *Benin,*
6. *Botswana,*
7. *Burkina Faso,*
8. *Côte d'Ivoire,*
9. *Cameroon,*
10. *Canada,*
11. *Congo, the Democratic Republic of the*
12. *Congo,*
13. *Costa Rica,*
14. *Egypt,*
15. *Ethiopia,*
16. *France,*
17. *Gambia,*
18. *Germany,*
19. *India,*
20. *Indonesia,*
21. *Ireland,*
22. *Italy,*
23. *Jamaica,*
24. *Kenya,*
25. *Korea,*
26. *Republic of Lesotho,*
27. *Malawi,*
28. *Malaysia,*
29. *Mali,*
30. *Mauritius,*
31. *Morocco,*
32. *Namibia,*
33. *Nepal,*
34. *Netherlands,*
35. *Niger,*
36. *Nigeria,*
37. *Norway,*
38. *Pakistan,*
39. *Philippines,*
40. *Russian Federation,*
41. *Rwanda,*
42. *Saudi Arabia,*
43. *Senegal,*
44. *Sierra Leone,*
45. *South Africa,*
46. *Spain,*
47. *Sweden,*
48. *Tanzania,*
49. *Togo,*
50. *Uganda,*
51. *United Kingdom,*
52. *United States,*
53. *Zambia,*
54. *Zimbabwe*