



DEVELOPING A FOOD POLICY PACKAGE FOR HEALTHIER DIETS IN GHANA: A CONSULTATIVE MEETING

POST-MEETING REPORT

30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

CONVENERS

The meeting was convened by the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability and Leadership Support for NCDs prevention (MEALS4NCDs) Project, and the Coalition of Actors for Public Health Advocacy (CAPHA).

PLACE AND DATE OF MEETING

The meeting was held virtually on Zoom on the 30th of September, 2021.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

A total of 62 stakeholders were present at the meeting. The stakeholders included relevant government sectors - Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Ghana's Development Partners including United Nations Organisations, as well as local academics and international subject experts.



Background

The Ministry of Health (MOH), with support from the Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability and Leadership Support for NCDs prevention (MEALS4NCDs) Project, and the Coalition of Actors for Public Health Advocacy (CAPHA) convened a meeting to explore the possibility of developing a food policy package for healthier diets in Ghana. The meeting took place virtually on the 30th of September, 2021, from 10.00am to 2.30pm (Accra Time = GMT + 0.00).

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- provide update on the DFC/TACLED & MEALS4NCDs Projects
- provide update on the Ghana Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) development & Food Composition Databases
- offer stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to the food policy package for healthier diets initiative

The meeting thus provided stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to the development of a food policy package for Ghana. The meeting was designed to be interactive and to stimulate conversation and exchange across relevant sectors. Over sixty relevant stakeholders from Academia, Government institutions, United Nations agencies, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participated in the meeting.

The meeting was in two parts. In the first session, participants were briefed on the purpose of the meeting after which solidarity messages were received from partnering institutions. A number of updates were received from previous and ongoing research projects and initiatives such as the Dietary Transitions in Ghanaian and/or African Cities Projects (DFC/TACLED Projects), the Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability and Leadership Support for NCDs prevention Project (herein after MEALS4NCDs Prevention Project), the Ghana Food-Based Dietary Guidelines Multi-stakeholder Technical Task Team (FBDGs MTTT), and the Ghana Food Composition Data Team. During the second session, presentations on the development of a nutrient profiling models to underpin food and nutrition policies were delivered by resource persons. Participants had the opportunity to contribute to the meeting during discussion sessions.

PART I: UPDATES FROM SELECTED PROJECTS/INITIATIVES

Presentation Summaries

Opening Remarks

The meeting started with a welcome address (which included an overview and purpose of the meeting) from Dr. Emmanuel Odame, the Director for Policy, Planning, and Monitoring & Evaluation (PPME) at MOH. Professor Amos Laar, of the School of Public Health, University of Ghana and Principal Investigator for the MEALS4NCDs Project and Hon. Dr. Sebastian Sandaare, a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health / Representative of the Coalition of Actors for Public health Advocacy (CAPHA) also gave brief opening remarks.

In his welcome address, Dr. Emmanuel Odame expressed his appreciation to all stakeholders for the commitment shown through their presence and anticipated contributions to the day's agenda. During his presentation, he reiterated the ministry's commitment to improving health outcomes for all Ghanaians—through the promulgation of policies, regulations, and legislations. Citing an example, he mentioned that, in response to the alarming rise in NCDs, the MOH and partners developed the Ghana NCDs policy and accompanying strategy in 2012 aimed at reducing the burden of NCDs to its barest minimum. He added that a revised version of the policy published in 2021 recognizes interventions including regulating advertisement of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children; limiting the level of trans fats and salt in industrially processed food, as well as food-related health taxes. He further emphasized the multi-sectoral approach the government has adopted to improve nutrition and health outcomes for the population. He illustrated this by referencing an inter-ministerial dialogue organized in 2019 which produced a government 'consensus statement' that acknowledged the value of improving the Ghanaian food environment to deliver healthy diets and better nutrition, and a call for a paradigm shift that repositions the Ghanaian food system from "feeding" to "nourishing" the population.

Professor Amos Laar lauded the idea of bringing together policymakers and academia to engage at the initiation stages of the process towards developing policy bundles for healthier diets for all Ghanaians. Such meetings (involving policymakers and academia), he noted rarely occurs when planning for policy initiatives hence leading to policymakers not being able to use research evidence generated from academia, and academia not being able to share evidence to enact relevant policies. This meeting, he noted, was thus a step in the right direction. In providing some examples that Ghana could learn from, he cited lessons from other countries that have already initiated policies and interventions towards promoting healthier food environments like Spain, Argentina, South Korea, South Africa, and Chile.

Hon. Dr. Sebastian Sandaare, delivered a message on behalf of the CAPHA. He indicated CAPHA acknowledges the increasing morbidity and mortality resulting from NCDs across countries in Africa including Ghana. Ghana's NCD's profile reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2018, accounted for 43% of all deaths in the country, he said. As a coalition, he indicated that they believe most NCDs are preventable, especially diet-related NCDs and can be prevented through promoting healthier diets and improved nutrition among populations. On behalf of the coalition, Hon. Sandaare expressed their full support and pledged their contribution to see the realization of having a food policy package for healthier diets in Ghana.

Solidarity Messages from Partners

Partnering institutions had the opportunity to present messages of solidarity. Representing the University of Ghana's School of Public Health was the Dean, Professor Kwasi Torpey. He reiterated the public health problems in Ghana attributed to unhealthy diets – the increasing burden of overweight and obesity, and diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, stroke, and diabetes. He noted that the cost of inaction towards addressing unhealthy diets and its associated diseases could result in dire consequences for the country if urgent measures are not put in place.

According to Professor Kwasi Torpey, the School of Public Health, as part of their contribution to ensuring a healthy population will continue to train public health practitioners who will be leaders and change agents for health development in Ghana in particular and in the wider African context. He further indicated the school will continue to work with the MOH and its agencies to contribute to policy development (having previously contributed to the National Nutrition Policy). He assured participants at the meeting that, the University of the Ghana School of Public Health remains committed to their mission and very much welcomes this initiative by MOH and its partners.

The State Agency in-charge of regulating food and drugs – the Ghana Food and Drug Authority (FDA), participated in the meeting. Representing Mrs Delese Darko (CEO of FDA) was the Deputy Chief Executive Officer in charge of Food Registration, Mr. Roderick Daddy-Adjei. He noted that the aim of the meeting synergizes with FDA's efforts to protect the health and safety of the Ghanaian public by ensuring the safety, quality, and efficacy of foods through monitoring of food systems and products among others, and also the enforcement of relevant standards and regulations. He indicated FDA's policy efforts towards good nutrition and healthy diets need to be tackled at a multi-sectoral level and by multiple stakeholders given the complexity of the food system. He applauded the efforts of MOH and its partners and indicated that the FDA is supportive of the policy development initiative and will play a lead role in its development and implementation.

Mrs Mary Mpereh, delivered a message on behalf of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC). She noted that the drive for policy bundles that have the potential to improve food environments, and healthier diets in Ghana is in the right direction given that NCDs are a threat to Ghana's social and economic development. She added that the NDPC remains focused on its mandate to provide a platform for coordinated programs and policies for the betterment of Ghanaians. The NDPC, she added will contribute fully to the multi-stakeholder technical task team that will be constituted towards the development of a nutrient profiling model for Ghana, as part of the policy bundle initiative.

The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), was represented by Ms. Paulina Addy. During her speech, Mrs. Addy outlined some of MOFA's efforts towards the realization of healthier diets in Ghana. For instance, MOFA according to her is playing a lead role in the development of the national Food-based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs). The Food-based Dietary guidelines when completed will provide guidance to policymakers, the private sector, and consumers toward choosing healthier diets. She added that under the Women in Agricultural Development Directorate (WIAD) of MOFA, interventions such as bio-fortification, food fortification, food enrichment, and nutrition education in relation to food production, post-production, and food consumption have led to improved nutrition. She also mentioned that continued efforts are needed to develop promising and sustainable interventions to achieve optimal diets for all Ghanaians. On this premise, she said the ministry wholly welcomes the development of policies for healthier diets which will be significant in efforts towards healthier diets for Ghanaians.

Dr. Joanna Ansong, from the World Health Organisation, Ghana, who was represented by Ms. Leveana Gyimah. She indicated that the development of a policy package for healthier diets for Ghanaians resonates with the recommendation by WHO for member

states to develop country-specific relevant food policies to promote good nutrition outcomes for its citizenry. She added that resources already developed and published by the WHO, citing the nutrient profile model for the African region, could be an important tool to guide Ghana's efforts at developing policies especially on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

Finally, a senior program specialist with the Global Health Division of Canada International Development Research Center (IDRC), Dr Samuel Oti in his speech called for urgent action to save ourselves and the planet from going extinct because of our own actions leading to unsustainable food systems. He highlighted Ghana's good political will to transform its food system as shown by the president's participation in the United Nations Food System Summit in September 2021. He noted he was confident in the team leading this initiative - describing Ghana as an intellectual giant in food environment research on the continent. He ended his speech by indicating IDRC's willingness to support the development and implementation of a transformational food policy package aimed at ensuring that Ghanaians have access to healthier diets and a more sustainable food system.

Project Updates (DFC/TACLED/MEALS4NCDs)

The MEALS4NCDs Project and the DFC/TACLED Projects team presented updates from their research works which focus on the food environment, and share findings from studies implemented in relation to the topic of discussion. Professor Amos Laar, the coordinator of the MEALS4NCDs Project introduced the MEALS4NCDs project indicating that the Project was informed by calls to generate evidence, use such evidence to inform advocacy, and policy – in response to the rising burden of NCDs in Ghana.

The DFC/TACLED Project update was presented by Michelle Holdsworth, a Professor and Senior Researcher in Public Health Nutrition at the Research Institute for Development, France. She indicated that the project sought to determine the factors shaping dietary behaviors of people in Ghanaian cities, how food is sold and advertised in Ghana, what are the priorities for policy and interventions to improve diets at the national level, and the gaps in nutrition policy implementation. The project engaged stakeholders at different levels - from individuals living in communities as well as local and national stakeholder consultations. In summary, the study found that there was high consumption of energy-dense foods, and nutrient-poor foods. Also, in terms of level of implementation of food environment policies in relation to international best practice, restricting marketing of breast milk substitutes was the highest, followed by listing of ingredients /nutrient declarations in terms of food labelling. Unfortunately, all the other food environment related policies that were assessed had a low level of implementation which means there is an opportunity to move forward and do something across all the different food environment sectors including issues such as food labelling, taxation, subsidies, food advertising, etc. Prof. Michelle Holdsworth highlighted that top policy priorities to promote healthier food environments in Ghana should include legislation to control promotion /advertising of unhealthy food and beverages in and around school, and in the media, government support for nutrition advocates for nutrition labelling, compulsory healthy meal planning for school caterers, mandatory front of pack labeling scheme and cost subsidy of healthy foods. Other recommendations from the DFC/TACLED studies targeting actors at the national, community and individual levels included the following:

At the national level, food safety issues were of serious concern as indicated by stakeholders. There were other recommendations regarding regulating and legislating unhealthy food and beverage promotion and sponsorship in various media. Food safety issues were of serious concern at the community or neighbourhoods level. Other recommendations were in regards to Ghana coming out with a Food based dietary guidelines. Also families and parents should be considered when coming out with these policies given that they have a strong influence over dietary behaviour.

Next, Prof. Amos Laar highlighted key findings from studies conducted by graduate students that received research support from the MEALS4NCDs Project. One of such studies which examined commercial food advertising on the Legon campus of Ghana's largest university, the University of Ghana found a high prevalence of unhealthy food marketing on the University's campus. A related study conducted by another graduate student on food advertisement aired/telecast on Ghanaian television channels reported a dominance of unhealthy foods advertisement, with a quarter of them been sugar-sweetened beverages. Within Accra-based shopping malls, another study found 100% of all foods advertised on promotional flyers were unhealthy.

Concluding the session, Prof. Amos Laar indicated that those findings support the current policy bundling initiative. He noted that we shouldn't just look at a single policy but policies that address the different determinants of unhealthy food consumption.

Next were a series of presentations from the MEALS4NCDs project team. The project was introduced by Mrs. Akua Tandoh, a doctoral student at the School of Public Health and a project associate on the MEALS4NCDs project. She indicated that, the MEALS4NCDs has been running for the past 2 years and counting and that the project seeks to measure and support public sector actions that create healthy food marketing, retailing and provisioning environments for children in Ghana. To achieve this overall aim, the project adapted two modules (Food promotion module, and Food provision module) developed by the International Network for Food and Obesity/non-communicable diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS) and also adapted an existing net-mapping and community readiness model tool to the Ghanaian context. The study was conducted in six districts in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A component of the project/research involved 200 public sector basic schools in the region.

Preliminary findings from the MEALS4NCDs Project were presented by Gideon Amevinya, MPH, a research assistant on the MEALS4NCDs project, Akosua Pokua Adjei, MPH, research assistant on the MEALS4NCDs Project, Krystal Rampalli, PhD Candidate at the School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, USA (the Candidate received support from the MEALS4NCDs toward implementing her PhD research), Wilhemina Quarpong, PhD student, School of Public Health, Emory University, USA (and MEALS4NCDs Associate), and Prof. Richmond Aryeetey, School of Public Health, University of Ghana and Co-investigator on the MEALS4NCDs Project. Overall, the findings indicated extensive marketing of unhealthy foods around the schools surveyed and retailing of unhealthy foods in supermarkets. In addition, school children, specifically, junior high school students who participated in the study, admitted peer pressure and food advertising claims informed their food choices and demonstrated minimal knowledge of misleading marketing tactics targeting their age group. In terms of food provisioning programs, the Ghana School feeding program was doing well in a number of

areas, but needed improvements on several other areas. The study found opacity regarding details about nutrition standards (e.g. portion sizes, food-group inclusions and exclusions, nutrient levels). Also, food safety-related risks around the school meal environment needed to be addressed. The Net-Mmapping tool found that, there are diverse actors involved in promotion and provision of food for children/adolescent and that Government agencies are the most influential in both promotion and provision.

Dr. Phyllis Ohene-Agyei, a public health doctor and project associate on the MEALS4NCDs Project, presented recommendations from the findings of the MEALS4NCDs Project for policy and intervention. Recommendations included zoning regulations around child-serving institutions like schools to protect children from exposure to unhealthy food environments, adopting strategies that can be used to educate students and parents about diet-related NCDs. Towards a healthier food environment; she recommended that the Government must ensure that authorities are equipped with the requisite resources to monitor unhealthy foods sold in supermarkets. Also, the need for relevant actors such as MOFA, Local Government, FDA, private sector, etc., to institute measures that improve availability of healthy foods within supermarkets, empower the media with adequate food environment and nutrition information and also establish a coordination mechanism for promoting optimal diets. Dr. Ohene-Agyei ended by acknowledging the Funders of the MEALS4NCDs Project. She thanked the IDRC for their continued support in the project implementation and with the stakeholder meeting engagements and meetings as well. She also acknowledged the MEALS4NCDs partners for their contributions to the success of the project. She further thanked the funders/coordinators of the Drivers of Food Choice Program - Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO-UK), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and / the University of South Carolina for supporting the Dietary Transitions in Ghanaian Cities Project, and also the Global Challenges Research Fund Foundation for funding the TACLED project.

Updates from the Ghana FBDGs MTTT

After the MEALS4NCDs presentation, was a presentation by Prof. Richmond Aryeetey on Ghana's Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) development process - done on behalf of the national multi-sectoral technical task team (MTTT). The FBDGs, as he explained, is a document that captures recommendations that can be used for multiple purposes. He said that it can be used as a tool for helping the lay public and all those who provide guidance on how to achieve desired consumption patterns. It can also be used as a policy and guidance tool to guide the implementation of programs to prevent and control malnutrition in all its forms. According to Professor Aryeetey, Ghana is yet to have a FBDGs but have attempted in the past to look at how to provide guidance. He added that there is a process for developing the FBDGs and Ghana has followed the process provided by FAO. According to him, Ghana started by engaging MOFA and through that engagement a national MTTT has been set up. Thus, the MTTT is made up of representatives from several government ministries, departments and agencies, academia, and Ghana's development partners provide technical and financial support. Although the team was officially inaugurated last year, it had been working on the initiative since 2017. They have gone through review and validation of the process and eventually the team is prioritizing the evidence that will be used to formulate the technical recommendation. He said just recently, the team finalized diet modelling that would

inform portion sizes such as “how much is okay to consume?” Prof. Aryeetey mentioned that they are at the stage of preparing messages and then convert it into graphics that people can identify with for easy understanding.

Updates/Status of Ghana’s Food Composition Data

The status of the Ghana Food Composition Data was then presented by Dr. Godfred Egbi, a Research Fellow in the nutrition department of Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, College of Health Sciences, University of Ghana. He started off by indicating that, Ghana’s Food Composition database was first created in 1975, which includes both raw and processed foods, as well as homebased and street foods. It was published by the Food Research Institute through the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR). Representative portions of edible parts of all food materials from markets across the country were taken based on the local cooking practice at the time and analyzed in the laboratory to determine the nutrient content. With time, new food databases were introduced (West African Food database, the Ring database, and the Infoods database). Institutions such as Noguchi, University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), University of Development Studies (UDS) and Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC) also provide some information on food. He added that, there are ongoing discussions to update the existing Food database for Ghana through the FDA, that is, a proposal has been presented looking at the deficiencies of the database. The challenges include inadequate information on the micronutrients of public health importance, essential amino acids, fatty acid composition, fibre (soluble and insoluble fibre), and water soluble and fat soluble vitamins. There is also no food composition database for processed/prepackaged foods. Dr. Egbi stated that moving forward, “we need to urgently update the national Food Composition database by analysing the amino acids, fatty acids (long or short fatty acids and important fatty acids like omega-3), trace minerals and vitamins composition of our food so that giving information on the meals that we have in Ghana will be appropriate in respect to our food guidelines. He ended by stating the importance of discussing these issues in meetings such as this one to be able to have an adequate composite database for Ghana.

Discussion Session 1

Integrated into the meeting were two discussion sessions. Following the presentations, stakeholders shared their thoughts and suggestions. There was also an opportunity for further questions to be asked. Details of the discussion can be found under questions, answers and comment session in appendix I.

PART II: DEVELOPING A FIT-FOR-PURPOSE NUTRIENT PROFILING MODEL TO UNDERPIN FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICIES: EXPERIENCES FROM DIFFERENT SETTINGS

The WHO Nutrient Profiling Model for Africa

The second session of the meeting, began with a presentation from Dr. Hana Bekele, the Programme leader for Nutrition Information Systems at the World Health Organization (WHO). Her presentation focused on the WHO Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) for Africa, and its application in the African region. She explained that the nutrient profiling (NP) is a model that can rate the nutritional quality of individual foods according to their

nutritional composition, particularly for reasons relating to preventing diseases and promoting health. She emphasized the nutrients of concern in relation to non-communicable diseases, which are total fats, added sugar, added salt and saturated fats. The NPM is used to check if any food product or pre-packed food meets the criteria to be classified as healthy or not healthy. It is a tool that can help in the development of the FBDGs as well. According to her, there are other set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children which is being implemented in many countries to restrict unhealthy diets and non-alcoholic beverages.

She mentioned that the NPM is available online (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/329956>) and that it is not applicable to street foods and traditional foods. The model defines the threshold for total sugar, total saturated fat and added sugars. If the product exceeds the threshold for any one of the items in the model, then the product cannot be marketed. She said, if Ghana is interested in adopting this model, they will have to first of all, define what the biggest problem is and then decide which policy they will like to take forward. She emphasized that, the NPM is not a policy, but rather a tool that will help in identifying healthy and non-healthy food.

Developing a nutrient profiling model for categorising food and beverages in Ghana
Mrs. Zakia Abdul-Haq, from the University of Sheffield presented on her research work that is towards the development of a nutrient profiling model for categorizing food and beverages in Ghana. She started off by acknowledging that increasing evidence has recognized the multiple burden of malnutrition in Ghana. However, the development of reliable and validated tools tailored to categorize the nutritional quality of foods and beverages is required to implement some policies or interventions such as taxing or controlling advertisement of unhealthy foods. The aim of her research was to develop a reliable and validated tool that will assist in implementing Nutrition Policy in Ghana. She presented findings from three studies and provided evidence of a reliable and validated nutrient based profiling tool that can contribute to addressing the multiple burden of malnutrition in Ghana. The model, referred to as Ghanaian Nutrient Density Index NRF11.3 index (Nutrient Rich food) is a holistic model that incorporates 11 positive nutrients and 3 negative nutrients. The Ghanaian NRF model includes multiple beneficial nutrients to encourage and shift the emphasis from negative nutrients to positive nutrients and better foods. This approach was considered suitable for the Ghanaian context. Public health agencies seeking to balance the risk of excess against the persistent danger of insufficient dietary nutrient uptake in Ghana may require such optimised nutrient profiling tools. For example, this reliable and validated Ghana NRF11.3 index will facilitate the introduction and implementation of the policy package for healthier diets in Ghana, she said. According to Mrs. Abdul-Haq, the model is considered a balanced and holistic approach to classifying Ghanaian foods.

Developing a Fit-for-Purpose Nutrient Profiling Model to Underpin Food and Nutrition Policies: Experience from South Africa

Ms. Tamryn Frank from the School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape, South Africa. She lead stakeholders through the processes that were followed to underpin front-of-package warning labels in South Africa. According to her, in order to have an appropriate profiling model, an evidence-based scientific process must be followed.

The first step is to determine the purpose & target population, followed by selecting nutrients & food components and then selecting the NPM base, type and criteria. The fourth is to select numbers & thresholds and finally, validate the NPM. She mentioned that, it is necessary to collect data on packaged food supply such as nutritional information, ingredients and general information. Algorithms were developed to analyse the various nutrient profiling models that were considered against the packaged food supply. During, analysis, the study found high percentage of ultra-processed foods (76%), which showed that the South African food environment is skewed towards unhealthy food choices. The South African department of health has identified restriction of ultra-processed foods, front-of-pack labelling and child directive marketing restrictions as policy priorities based on this. Thus, the recommendation for step 1 is to identify unhealthy packaged foods to restrict for all South Africans. For step 2, a decision was reached to only include nutrients to limit in a NPM. The study identified sodium, saturated fat, total sugar (free sugar qualifier), and non-sugar sweetener as appropriate nutrients to limit in a NPM. For step 3, they identified across the board, NPM that had cut off points per 100g/100ml rather than category specific. Identified cut points rather than a complex calculated score were found to be more appropriate hence much easier for those involved in Monitoring & Evaluation. Ms. Frank indicated that, it is genuinely accepted to adapt an existing NPM rather than developing one from scratch given the cost of developing NPM as well as the existence of numerous successful NPMs. The most appropriate NPM to adopt should be based on the decisions made or discussed in steps one to three. According to her, once the NPM has been proposed, it needs to be validated. To conclude, she mentioned that the research results confirmed that the proposed NPM is a fit-for-purpose, and appropriate for use in restrictive food policy in South Africa.

Developing a Fit-for-Purpose Nutrient Profiling Model to Underpin Food and Nutrition Policies: Experience from CHOICES International

Mr. Herbert Smorenburg, Managing Director, Choices International Foundation, an organization based in the Netherlands but working internationally on Front-of-pack labelling (FOPL). He began by stating that, Choices organization was developed in 2007 based on WHO's call on NCD prevention. Different from what Ms. Frank presented, Choices was developed from voluntary products. He added that, although they work with international standards, there is always a process of national adaptation, and several countries have included the addition of micronutrients on top of the nutrients related to the NCDs. According to him, to shape practical food and health policies, a differentiation is needed between healthy and unhealthy food products or better between food products that do and those that do not contribute to a healthy diet. This difficult job is called nutrient profiling, he added. He further stated that, over the years Choices has developed its own nutrient profiling methodology, which forms the basis of the Choices international criteria as developed by the Choices International Scientific Committee. The overall objective is to have healthier food options for all customers based on a science based criteria coherent with national nutrition policies. Impact of positive logos include validation, consumer awareness, healthier food purchases, product improvement and a faster turn-over for logo products. Mr. Smorenburg mentioned that, FOPL alone are unlikely to change to a large extent, the desires of consumers and so at Choices, they believe that having multiple food systems actions that work hand in hand as discussed in the meeting is necessary. One nutrient profiling system that is both suited for positive and incentive measures but also for restrictive measures is needed. And therefore,

Choices have extended their criteria from a logo criterion to multiple levels so that they can identify not only the best thing for us but also less healthy products. Concluding his presentation, Mr Smorenburg indicated that they plan to organise three online sessions in the fourth quarter of 2021, to provide detailed information about Choices nutrient profiling methodology and how it can be adapted by Ghana and used to support nutrition policies in Ghana. They also plan to organise a two-day workshop in Accra during the first quarter of 2022 to facilitate the development of a fit-for-purpose nutrient profiling system.

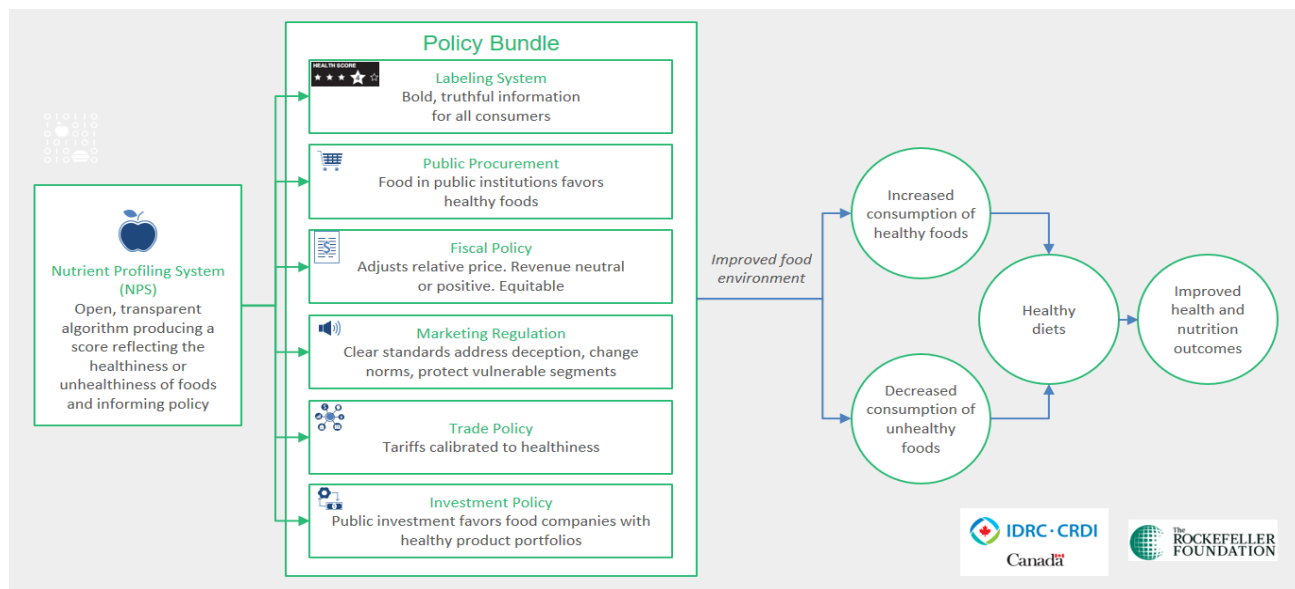
A Fit-for-Purpose Nutrient Profiling Model to Underpin Food and Nutrition Policies in Ghana

The Director, Center for Public Health Nutrition and a Professor of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, University of Washington, Seattle, Adam Drewnowski, PhD, also presented on the methods and techniques of nutrient profiling. His presentation, which was pre-recorded indicated that, the purpose of nutrient profiling is to facilitate adherence to dietary guidelines. He mentioned that, in high-income countries (HIC) NPMs address a public health problem which is obesity. Therefore, HIC NP models penalize calories, fat, sugar and salt. But for lower-middle-income countries (LMIC), following the WHO principle that NPM must address a public health problem, LMICs NP models ought to address inadequate vitamin A, B vitamins, folate, calcium, iron, iodine, and zinc and the frequent lack of high-quality protein, as well as the rising burden of obesity and NCDs. He suggested that NP models be country specific, nutrient and food-oriented, balanced, simple, affordable, culturally relevant and linked to dietary guidelines and to health outcomes. He emphasized that government leadership is critical in developing a Nutrient profiling model and also the need for the food industry to play a responsible role. In concluding, he reiterated the need to balance the future threat of excess empty calories against the continuing danger of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies and the importance of affordable nutrient density.

Developing a Healthy Food Policy Package for Healthier Diets in Ghana

Ushering participants into the second discussion session that was to receive input on policy bundles for healthier diets in Ghana, Professor Laar reiterated – providing highlights of the various presentations, the Ghana’s policy context, as well as current food environment improvement efforts (achievements, gaps, and opportunities). He noted that the presentations and deliberations at the meeting all support the current proposal to develop a double-duty food-based policy package to assure healthier diets in Ghana. The options he indicated may take into consideration “food composition policies, food marketing policies, food labelling policies, food retail policies, fiscal policies, food provisioning and public procurement policies. He further noted that although there is evidence this policies when implemented as individual policies show promising results, they are even more impactful when delivered as a cluster of interventions (as summarized in the figure below).

Fig. 1. Tentative double-duty food-based policy package to assure healthier diets in Ghana



Source: Used with permission from the IDRC/Rockefeller Foundation

Discussion Session 2

Prof. Aryeetey moderated the 2nd discussion session. Details of the discussion can be found below:

Key Suggestions

- Members of Parliament should get involved and take promotion of healthy food bundles to political manifestos as it takes a political will to support researchers because there must be that balance between research and policy. This engagement should not be limited to this platform.
- When it comes to healthy food environment, a lot has been done but at different engagements at different levels is urgently needed. If we want to get the political button, then we want to start making an economic argument. In order to have policy-makers buy-in, we need to make political arguments. We should look at what next if we are able to get healthy food out there. How is it improving our NCDs challenge and how is that impacting our national health insurance scheme. In the case of South Africa they were successful with the sugar tax because a strong economic argument was made and so we could also go that angle. It is economically viable putting in this kind of intervention.
- We need to impress the FDA to make it mandatory for processed package foods to be labelled or declare everything on their labels, for example, added sugar, trans fat or saturated fats which is not separated so come together as total fats.
- Issue of coordination and a roadmap with timelines is needed. We need leaders in the various sub-sections. And then have a central point of coordination.
- We cannot look at only health and forget the economic benefits. We can learn from countries like South Africa and look at best practices we can adapt.

Gaps Identified

In Ghana there are so many good policies but implementation is a challenge and I hope that all of us will support when this policy package comes to implementation.

The biggest challenge encountered working on Obaasima is labeling. If food are not labelled, regulating them is a huge challenge.

Legislature: According to FDA, there is no law currently mandating any food production company to label. Labelling is not mandatory but if one attempts to label his/her product, the Codex Alimentarius format must be followed.

Also if a food producer makes a claim, then the company must provide the evidence to support that claim. The FDA representative also indicated that local policies need to balance health interest and livelihood arguments. For example, if a policy requires all foods to be labelled, most of our local SMEs are going to be affected. If we want it to be mandatory then the law will have to be changed. About SMEs not been able to afford food labelling, we could start from somewhere. We could make it mandatory for the bigger industries and then start with other regulations for the SMEs.

Laboratory capacity: The reason for the lack of legislature on mandatory FOPL is that the capacity of the labs to analyse foods e.g. trans-fat component of foods is not available in country. And companies have to travel as far as South Africa to have it done.

Prof. Laar and the team can put together a brief concept note and share with the various government agencies that are involved and then based on that we can make some decisions about how we move forward on the various aspects to keep the conversation going so that it doesn't just fall off and then this becomes just a one-day meeting.

Summary of Closing Remarks

In delivering the closing remarks, Dr Odame of the MOH stated that this is the time for all stakeholders to get on board and contribute to what he refers to as “turning technical capacities into political capital” which is critical towards the development of a healthier food policy bundle for Ghana. Relating to the next steps, he mentioned a concept note will be drafted, taking into consideration knowledge and policy gaps, as well as local and international best practices relevant to promoting healthier diets, and shared among stakeholders for their input.

Ending the meeting, Prof. Amos Laar, stated on behalf of the Academia that, “We will do our best to provide what we are capable of providing; the evidence that is needed to push this forward and ensure that it becomes reality, not only when the policy or laws have been passed, but we will continue to generate evidence with respect to monitoring the implementation of same such that in the end our food environment would be improved, our health will be improved and then Ghana will be the beneficiary”.

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APPENDIX I – QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

Q= Question	A= Answer	C= Comment/contribution
C	It is important to reference policies that are already in place for NCDs and food value chain to ensure, alignment, coherence and synergy of efforts. E.g. The revised national health policy, 2020, The UHC roadmap for Ghana, 2020-2030 and the NCD policy, 2020.	
Q	In the absence of this comprehensive FBDG, how is the MTTT working around it? Are we using the International Food composition Data?	
A	It is a challenge as we do not have a robust food database, however, aspects of the FBDG that required having food composition database is the diet modelling. We made use of the database with all its limitation which has to be acknowledged.	
C	Deceptive marketing techniques- Most of the time, the advertizers come out promoting fortified foods. we should look at what vehicles we are using for fortification so that we are using nutritious foods as the base for fortification	
C	Who would be checking what? A lot of agencies will have to do the overseeing of what we eat and what we drink. When is that going to start? If we are starting this we have to start on a good footing.	
C	The development of FBDG is a process that is not just focused on the individual. It is also focused on the policies and regulations. For instance, FDA regulates processed foods but who is doing the traceability of those? We see tracks coming with foodstuff, but we don't know where they coming from. So, one of the things the FBDG is doing is the development of standards. Recommendations are being made to take this up. We need CSOs to take the FBDGs and together as a nation agree to do this.	
C	Looking at the operation's manual which is undergoing review with the help of UNICEF, there are other documents that give details or capture the quantity of nutrients that is needed, specifically, quantity of carbohydrates, proteins and fats.	
Q	Are CSOs engaged in the processes?	
A	The role of CSOs is very important, institutions work best when CSOs are involved.	
Q	Would you be able to come out with a user friendly guideline when our food composition data is inadequate?	
A	The FBDG has many components. One aspect that requires information from the food composition table is the modelling of how much people should consume. We can still have a robust FBDG despite the challenges.	
Q	What is the plan for capacity building in the area of laboratory testing? Can our laboratories test for vitamins and the rest?	
A	It is not mandatory to report some of the nutrient content on the labels put on products certified by the FDA. Perhaps the private sector can come in.	
C	Are we interested in addressing a part of the problem and leave a part for some other initiatives to do? Whatever we produce at the end should be comprehensive enough to address all or most of the problem which is the purpose of today's meeting.	
C	To be able to make headway, we need to educate to allow people understand the consequence of their choices.	
Q	We should consider the nutrition coordination mechanism but there are many other aspects that could get missing. What is the best way to bring it all together?	
Q	I support the emphasis on regulation and enforcement with respect to food marketing and the exclusion of certain foods in the school food environment presented by Prof. Laar. My question is, how do we see this realized in the Ghanaian context? I am also curious as to how the FDA is able to control the promotion of products approved by the agency, which may be inappropriately promoted/ marketed.	
A	The FDA has guidelines for advertising food and drugs, however the focus is mostly on alcohol (in strict adherence). Non-alcohol(food) adverts though vetted and approved has more deceptive marketing techniques	
C	I also welcome the drive for health literacy. There is however, a huge gap in nutrition literacy (as was confirmed by the findings of the MEALS4NCD Team in schools). But I see very little Nutrition Education Training in our Universities and Colleges. I am also not sure to what extent nutrition education is done in High Schools. I see opportunities here for our Higher education institutions, especially those involved in nutrition training.	
C	As a potential future direction, would be interesting (if not already) to explore the mapping of the FBDG food groups to the food groups used in emerging global dietary quality metrics such as GDR+ (DQ-Q), as that could facilitate tracking progress in Ghanaian dietary patterns & trends towards the FBDGs.	
C	As a student of DOHaD I have been struggling to see how food a nutrients around the 1000 days has been featured so far. I believe NCDs actually begin at this stage	
C	The nutrient profile model is worth adopting. it has relevance to the issues, guidelines and policies we are discussing here. I strongly recommend that we embrace the model and contextualise. This would help with cross-checking on whether regulations are being followed or not e.g. in the school food environment.	
C	Whilst I agree with the clamp down on sugar and salt content of products, I also wonder how removing these 2 ingredients would affect the preservation, shelf life and food safety of some of the processed food products that are sold especially in local open markets with poor cold storage. This is an issue we have to examine carefully as we seek solutions to the high sugar-high salt products marketed especially to school-age children.	
Q	Does NRF 11.3 distinguish between saturated/unsaturated/trans fats?	
C	NDPC will incorporate key objectives from this exercise into the Medium Term Development Policy Framework with key indicators for monitoring progress through meetings of the cross-sectoral planning group (CSPG) on Food and Nutrition Security and document progress through the Annual Progress Report on the MTNDPF. We will also support key sectors to incorporate their roles in sector plans and ask for accountability based on agreed indicators, while supporting operationalisation of sector commitments.	



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