

Building Healthier Food Systems

The Food, Environment, and Health (FEH) program supports evidence, innovations and policies to improve health and prevent chronic diseases through healthier food systems in low-and middle-income countries.

We are enabling leadership and change for:

- Policies for healthier food environments
- Community healthy food initiatives
- Reducing salt, sugar & fat
- Food marketing & labelling

Policies for healthier food environments

Food policies and regulations influence the affordability, availability, accessibility, and diversity of healthy foods and shape food choices made by consumers.

IDRC-supported research is contributing to fiscal and policy solutions:

In the Caribbean, researchers are helping Health Ministers and Heads of State from across the region to sustain, improve and advance regional policy commitments to prevent and reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases.

In Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand, researchers are investigating government and food industry policies and their impact on promoting healthy diets. Their work will help to understand the successes and failures of current policies, and will inform the development of healthier and more sustainable food policies.

In Chile and Mexico, evidence from the first-ever systematic evaluation and comparison of food environments and policies in developing countries is helping benchmark and compare the impact of government and private sector action. Results on progress and recommendations for improvement will be shared directly with government and private sectors, and made publicly available.



CADEN CRAWFORD

Community healthy food initiatives

Poor dietary consumption is associated with adverse health outcomes and the risk of food-related chronic diseases.

IDRC-supported research is exploring and testing market and community innovations with population-wide impacts:

In Peru, researchers demonstrated the feasibility and economic viability of including more fruit and vegetables in lunches served by Comedores Populares - community kitchens which provide over 500,000 meals weekly to low-income individuals.

In Ecuador, research is helping to understand how civil society-led marketing campaigns and citizen action can help government agri-food policies and programs, as well as families and neighbourhoods from all socio-economic sectors, tackle pressing food-related chronic diseases and associated social and environmental concerns.

In Bangladesh, low vegetable and fruit intake has been identified as a major risk factor for the rise in NCDs. In an effort to promote healthy diets, researchers are reaching at least 1,000,000 consumers with messages on the nutritional value of indigenous vegetables and providing training to 28,000 smallholder farmers to meet consumer demands for indigenous vegetables.



Reducing salt, sugar & fat

High quantities of salt, sugar & fat intake is associated with increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

IDRC is contributing to the efforts of reducing salt, sugar and fat:

In Costa Rica, salt reduction targets were established with the help of research results and the collaboration of researchers, civil society, government, and industry and helped with implementation and evaluation of Costa Rica's current national salt reduction intake plan. Following Costa Rica's experience, a consortium of five Latin American (LA) countries are now conducting research to implement and evaluate the expansion and scaling-up of current and future salt reduction programs. The salt content of packaged foods and street food is being assessed and compared against national and regional sodium reduction targets, with the goal of improving policies and diets for reduced salt consumption.

In South Africa, influential research conducted by the Wits Health Consortium helped provide the evidence for a new sugar-sweetened beverage taxation in South Africa, announced by the Finance Minister in his 2016 budget speech.

In Argentina, scientific evidence helped inform and influence salt and trans-fatty acids (TFAs) policies in the country, which passed into law in 2014, positioning Argentina as food policy regional leader in salt and TFAs reduction.

Food marketing and labelling

Food marketing and labelling used on high-energy, low-nutrient, prepackaged foods has been recognized as a substantial driver of obesity and other related non-communicable diseases in LMICs.

IDRC-supported research is improving food marketing and labelling practices:

In Peru, research on the impact of TV food marketing and the influence of unhealthy eating behaviours influenced the government to pass a law in 2013 to regulate food marketing to children and adolescents as part of efforts to reduce and control the rise of cardiovascular diseases.

In Guatemala, research has proved that the use of licensed characters, such as cartoon characters, on food labels affects consumers' buying choice and eating patterns. With this scientific evidence, the national Chronic Disease Commission has expressed interest in taking action on current marketing techniques that target children.

The Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defense (IDEC) has identified barriers and opportunities for improved regulation of unhealthy food marketing, particularly for adolescents and children in the interest of improving Brazilian policies to regulate the promotion of unhealthy packaged and prepared food.

International Development Research Centre

A key part of Canada's foreign policy efforts, IDRC supports research in developing countries to promote growth and development.

Food, Environment, and Health

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