

Affordability of Healthy Diets in South Asia: Challenges and recommendations

A workshop hosted by the One CGIAR initiative Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia ([TAFSSA](#))

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Tamarind Hall, Habitat World at India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road. New Delhi – 110003

Healthy diets are unaffordable across most of South Asia. The UN FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) [report](#) (2022) estimates that as of 2020, 1331.5 million people across South Asia could not afford to purchase a healthy, nutritious diet. 973.3 million of these were in India, 184.4 million in Pakistan, and 121.1 million in Bangladesh. The magnitude of the problem calls for urgent, innovative, and at-scale solutions across the region.

This two-day workshop on the Affordability of Healthy Diets focusses on the challenges before us and on recommendations for public and private sector partners to address these challenges. It makes a case for moving beyond acknowledging this issue to critically consider tradeoffs involved in various approaches to making healthy diets more affordable.

As with most difficult problems, we need a combination of solutions that work at multiple levels and are differentiated across commodities and contexts. Our workshop will focus on four distinct pathways to ensuring affordable healthy diets:

First, **the income pathway**, that of relieving income constraints for consumers. This would include direct cash transfers, workfare, and other social protection programs.

Second, **the expenditure pathway**, exploring ways in which the cost of healthy diets both in absolute terms and vis-à-vis unhealthy foods can be reduced. These include cost-saving efficiencies in the supply chain, access to uncultivated foods, state interventions such as “sin” taxes and consumer subsidies on nutritious foods.

Third, **the behavior change pathway**, examining consumer-centric approaches to reallocating existing budgets in a healthier manner. This includes behavioral change communication, interventions that create food environments that constrain or enable healthy food choices and shape consumer perceptions of what constitutes healthy foods.

Fourth, and perhaps least well-studied, **the production pathway**, examining ways in which we can expand the availability and accessibility of nutritious and healthy foods, including the reduction of food wastage, improving the nutritive content of foods and food safety, animal-sourced foods, novel foods and innovations.

Any discussion of food systems in the context of South Asia must acknowledge the importance of cross-cutting pathways of gender and climate change that present considerable challenges shared by countries across the region. We recognize that the diverse stakeholders in the food system – government, policy makers, researchers, citizens, civil society organizations, businesses – need to work together, but often find themselves on opposite sides of this debate. Focus on the tradeoffs faced in decision making on this front are of particular interest.

The goal of this workshop, hosted by the CGIAR initiative Transforming Agricultural Food Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA), is to foster a discussion that actively engages with ongoing controversies and debates around many of these choices and, through the process of dialogue, to document the current state of the food system as well as emerging opportunities.