

Food environments in Colombo from a FRESH perspective

Anisha Gooneratne

Colombo Urban Lab together with the Institute of Development Studies



Nicholas Nisbett
Leah Salm
Jessica Meeker
Jessica Gordon



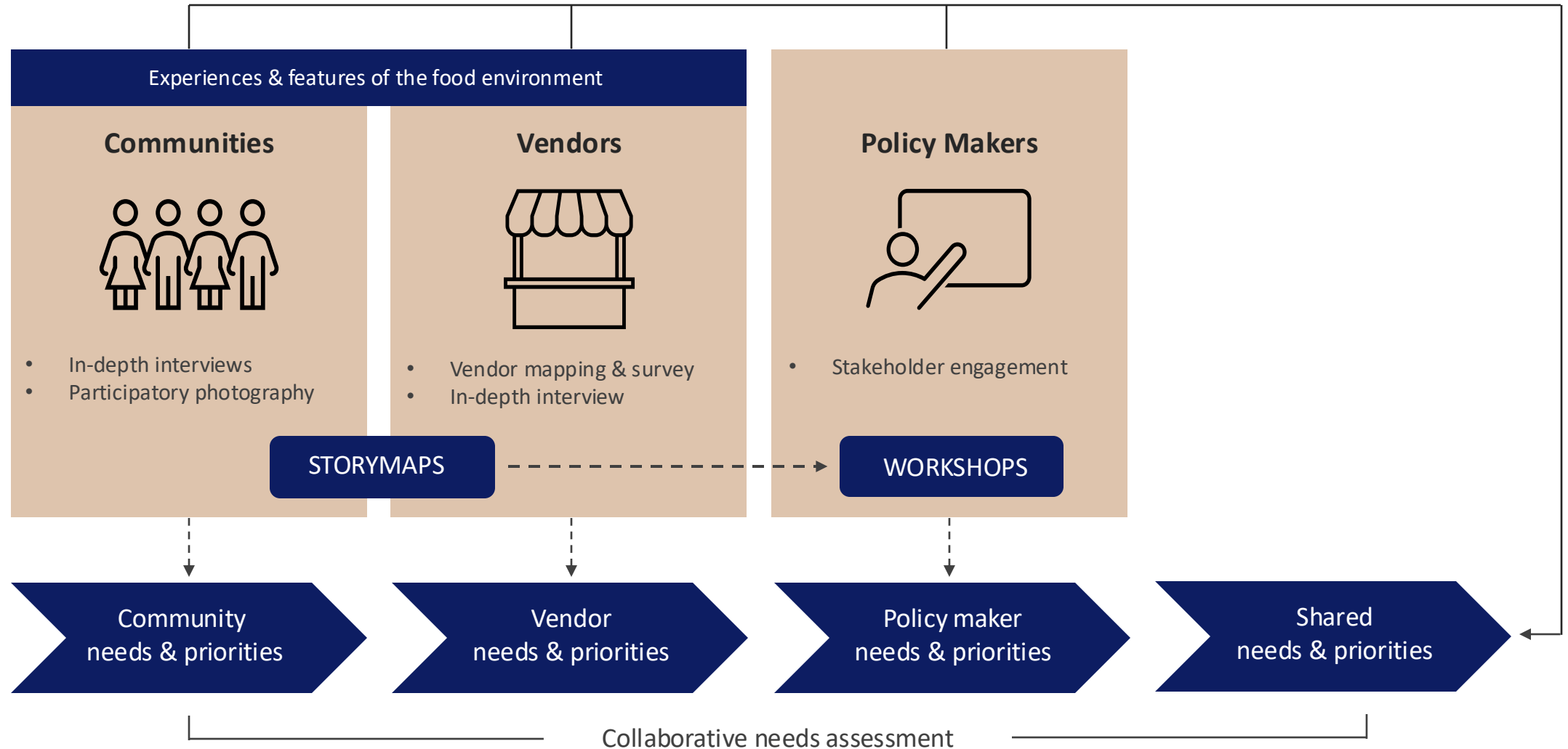
Iromi Perera
Anisha Gooneratne
Meghal Perera
Nimaya Dahanayake
Channaka Jayasinghe
Nadya Perera
Dilini Dombagodage
Kushani Wathugedara

Rationale

How do working-class poor communities in two areas of Sri Lanka's capital city Colombo experience their food environment?



Methodology



Site locations

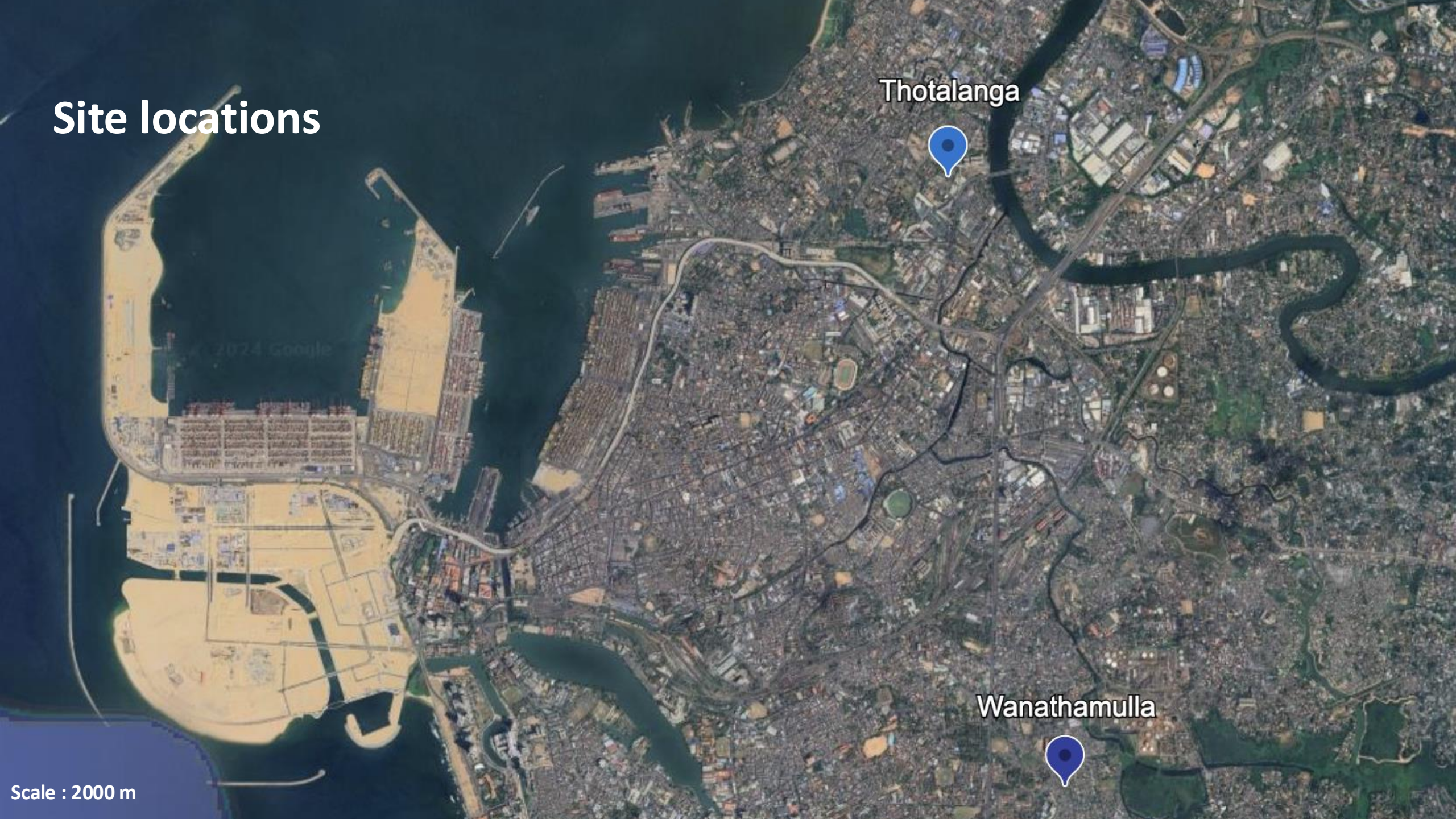
Thotalanga



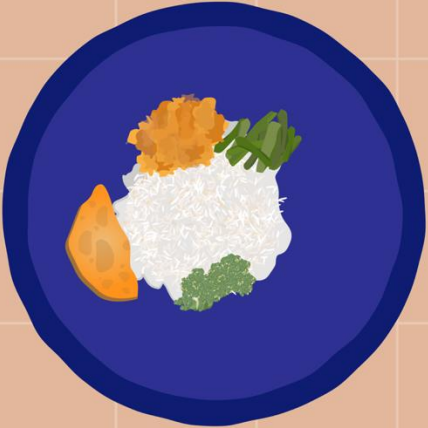
Wanathamulla



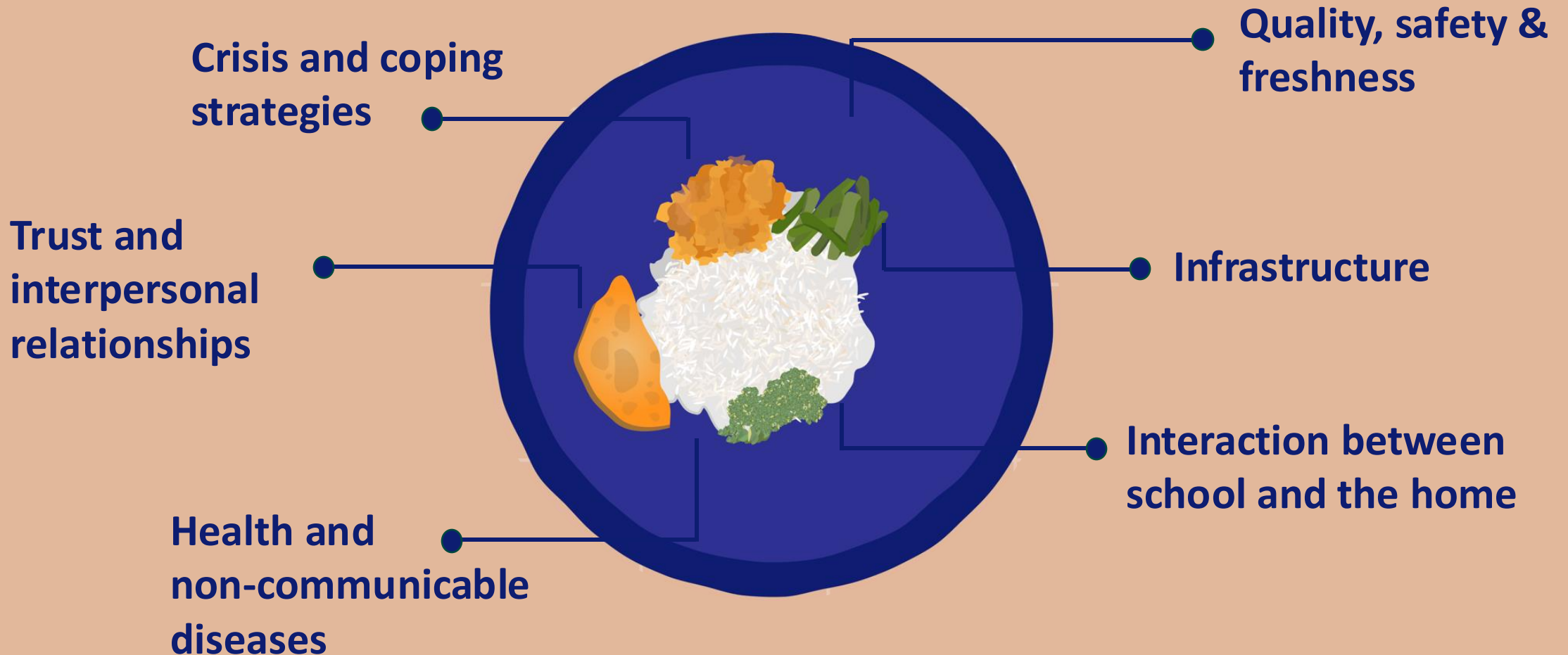
Scale : 2000 m



The changing food plate



Why the food plate looks the way it does





Quality and safety

Price is not the sole determinant of choice - quality of produce plays an important role.

“A fruit shop at night. Although it’s near our home we do not buy fruits here as we are not sure if chemicals have been injected.”

Sharmila, Thotalanga



Infrastructure

Infrastructure determines what is bought, the method of preparation, and the utensils used to prepare the food.

“It’s tasty and nutritious. It’s affordable and it saves both time and gas.”

Nirosha, Wanathamulla

Interaction between school and the home

The mid-day meal programme in Colombo is not widespread.

Families are required to send a nutritious meals from home that is expensive and time and energy intensive.

Children are often penalised when nutritious food is not sent by parents.

“

My son is underweight. The school meal programme has helped him to gain weight, although I have seen his weight reduce again during the holiday period when he is home for about a week.

-Respondent from Wanathamulla



Health & NCDs

Households are aware of good nutritional practices, with many taking care to alter meals to reflect NCDs.

“Vegetables bought for three days. Drumsticks or Moringa (Murunga) I buy often as it’s good for you. I add a bit of it to other things I cook too, like fish for instance. It’s something my grandmother taught me”
Sharmila, Thotalanga



Trust & interpersonal relationships

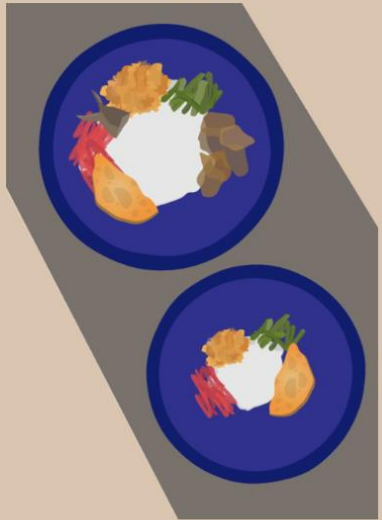
The care extended is also seen on the food plate where mothers are more likely to buy and cook items that their children like to eat, or that are nutritious for their children.

"Eggs are expensive now. So, when we can, we buy one egg and cut it in half for the two boys (sons)."
Niranjala, Wanathamulla

Crisis & coping strategies

1

Reducing the quantity and quality of meals, foregoing meat, fish, fruits and eggs



2

Unplugging devices and in some cases disconnecting from the grid



3

Not sending children to school due to unaffordability of school related costs



4

Pawning jewelry and taking high-interest loans to manage expenses



5

Foregoing essential medicine no longer available for free at Government clinics



6

Undertaking an additional job to help manage household expenditure



Implications

- The methodology used in this study enabled us to understand the complexities of the food plate
- Policy interventions at the household scale need to go beyond communities as recipients of food information alone
- Social protection mechanism such as widening the school meal programme are essential
- Better support for informal vendors who play a key role in making food accessible and affordable to communities



Food Environments in Colombo

How Colombo's working class poor interact with their food environments.

7 December 2023



Fruit and Vegetables
for Sustainable
Healthy Diets

