

1.1 Demand generation for healthy and sustainable food

What problem is your proposition addressing?

To reach the SDG goals and to transform food systems, nutritious foods from sustainable food systems, must shift from niche to mainstream consumption. We need a radical change in how consumers think and act about food.

It is important to influence consumer consumption patterns through measures that improve choice offering (e.g., reformulation, sustainable sourcing, etc), with sign posting (e.g., choice architecture and front-of-package labelling) or price signals (e.g., taxes or subsidies) at points of sale. Yet deploying these interventions, even in combination, will unlikely shift consumption patterns as quickly and widely as needed to tackle malnutrition, climate change and biodiversity loss, because these do not address the underlying consumer preference at the societal level.

To enable shifts in consumption patterns, nutritious foods from sustainable¹ food systems must become the preferred choice for most consumers in each society.

Unfortunately, many of these foods, e.g., vegetables, legumes, small, dried fish, liver, plant-based meat alternatives, or plant-based dishes, can be perceived as either less palatable, not as enjoyable, not as filling, or not aspirational.

How does your proposition address the problem?

Each **society** has a differing value sets and preferences surrounding food, and this affects how systemic actors and individual actors behave within that society. But social transformation does not only happen organically; it can be helped by changing consumers' mindsets. The key tools available include communication technologies, shared cultural and social experiences, gender identities, social movements that draw on values, and symbols that represent powerful ideas of social norms, social change.

The level of societal change discussed above requires **collective action at society level**. It calls for **multi-sector collaboration** and new ways of working together, because no one actor can change demand on their own. It also means that we **collectively leverage social and cultural drivers** of food preferences.

Changing societal norms and perceptions can enable **better preferences** and better choices. There needs to be a push to portray nutritious and sustainable food as more desirable, or even 'cool'.

By addressing social norms and perceptions, we can complement and strengthen action already underway in food policy (taxes, agricultural subsidies, marketing restrictions), food environment (labelling), and behaviour change. Government's role is to support and ensure alignment between social and cultural initiatives and other policy efforts.

The **Demand Generation Alliance** seeks to enable shifts in consumption of nutritious diets from sustainable production systems by shaping society-wide consumer preferences. The DGA will do this by (a) identifying relevant consumer food preference issues, (b) building evidence & learning from effective social- or culture-change strategies to drive social norms that lead to shift in preferences and choice, and (c) mobilizing cross-sector alliances in countries to deploy these strategies to shift preferences in the right direction.

Is this a new solution or an existing solution that needs scaling?

New solution

Which organisation/s, institution/s or groups of individuals are associated with the solution?

¹ The DGA follows the EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report and defines sustainable foods using economic (i.e., fair wages for producers), social (i.e., human rights, attractive opportunities, support resilience of producers), and environmental principles (minimal negative impact, reduces waste throughout the value chain).

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Global Business School Network (GBSN), EAT, Consumers Goods Forum (CGF), World Food Programme (WFP) Nutrition Division, Thunderbird School of Global Management, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

What is the scientific evidence that supports your proposition?

- Drivers of consumer demand for food reside at individual-level, food environment level, and enabling environment level – which are all impacted by multiple factors and actors^{2,3}.
- This complexity calls for collaboration⁴ because there is no one actor (e.g., government, private sector) who alone can shape or be responsible for shifting consumer demand.
- In the enabling environment, government-led policy and economic interventions tend to be more prevalent⁵. Society and culture are ‘enablers’ for consumer preference and choice,^{1,6} and there are growing calls for addressing culture, perceptions, and social norms^{7,8}.
- Preferences are drivers of consumption patterns for ‘less desirable’ nutritious foods (e.g., vegetables)⁹. Preferences can be actively shaped through culture and social norms^{8,9}.

Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape or other type of setting?

This is a globally applicable idea because it builds on local cultural and social assets.

Who are the main actors that would put this action into place?

This is a multisector initiative requiring the action of the following actors: citizens and consumers, NGOs, academia, government, businesses, media, donors and investors.

Source and process

- Eva Monterrosa & Alia Poonawala, GAIN
- Ashish Deo, GAIN (AT2 Leadership Team member)
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² Committee on Food Security. Nutrition and food systems. HPLE Report #12;2017

³ See Turner C, Aggarwal A, Walls H, Herforth A, Drewnowski A, Coates J, et al. Concepts and critical perspectives for food environment research: A global framework with implications for action in low- and middle-income countries. *Global Food Security*. 2018 Sep 1;18:93–101

⁴ Committee on Food Security. Multi-stakeholder partnerships to finance and improve food security and nutrition in the framework of the 2030 Agenda. HPLE Report #13. 2018.

⁵ Swinburn B, Sacks G, Vandevijvere S, Kumanyika S, Lobstein T, Neal B, et al. INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity/non-communicable diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support): overview and key principles. *Obes Rev*. 2013 Oct;14 Suppl 1:1–12.

⁶ Monterrosa E, Frongillo EA, Drewnowski A, de Pee S, Vandevijvere S. Sociocultural influences on food choices and implications for sustainable healthy diets. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*. 2020;41(2_suppl):59S-73S.

⁷ Vermeulen SJ, Park T, Khoury CK, Béné C. Changing diets and the transformation of the global food system. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 2020;1478(1):3–17.

⁸ Moberg E, Allison EH, Harl HK, Arbow T, Almaraz M, Dixon J, et al. Combined innovations in public policy, the private sector and culture can drive sustainability transitions in food systems. *Nature Food*. 2021 Apr;2(4):282–90

⁹ De Bourdeaudhuij I, te Velde S, Brug J, Due P, Wind M, Sandvik C, et al. Personal, social and environmental predictors of daily fruit and vegetable intake in 11-year-old children in nine European countries. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2008 Jul;62(7):834–41