

2.16 Food-based dietary guidelines

Leveraging Food-Based Dietary Guidelines through Public Procurement

What problem is your solution addressing?

Many countries globally (although few low- and middle-income countries) have had food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) for years. A 2019 review¹ indicated that 90 countries around the world had FBDGs. Yet FBDGs globally have not had their intended effect, and unhealthy diets continue to cause many millions of people sickness and death every year².

Few countries' FBDGs consider sustainability issues, such as environmental aspects, food waste, food safety, access, affordability, the important roles of traditional foods, or cultural acceptability. FBDGs should consider sustainability concerns in addition to dietary nutrition. Moreover, the dietary nutrition perspective should be evaluated (with sustainability and context in mind) to ensure that FBDGs contribute to reducing the double burden of malnutrition.

National and city governments have a responsibility and a unique opportunity to lead by example and leverage the FBDGs. All public policies should align to act on the FBDGs, including public procurement (the large amount of food served or sold in public settings, such as school meals), relevant fiscal policies (subsidies, taxes) and regulations on marketing. Well-developed FBDGs would also provide a solid foundation for educating citizens about sustainable and healthy diets in their given context.

How does your solution address the problem?

All countries should have FBDGs, based on sound science, tailored to their specific context, and in line with the UN SDGs and international commitments. The dietary nutrition aspect of existing FBDGs should be evaluated, including with consideration to intertwined sustainability perspectives such as equity, access, and cultural norms. Overall, all FBDGs should be developed to account for a broad range of sustainability issues; environmental, social, and economic. FBDGs may also have to be updated over time as new knowledge becomes available.

Once well-developed FBDGs are in place, they set the standard for what a healthy diet through sustainable food systems entails in a specific context. This standard should be acted on by governments, who should align all public policy to leverage the FBDGs. In this way, governments will be enacting a systematic promotion of healthy and sustainable diets, with major effects on entire food systems at all levels. Depending on context, FBDGs could for

¹ Anna Herforth, Mary Arimond, Cristina Álvarez-Sánchez, Jennifer Coates, Karin Christianson, Ellen Muehlhoff, A Global Review of Food-Based Dietary Guidelines, *Advances in Nutrition*, Volume 10, Issue 4, July 2019, Pages 590–605, <https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmy130>

² WHO, 2020: 1.9 billion adults are overweight or obese, 462 million underweight. Of children under the age of 5, 47 million are wasted, 14.3 million severely wasted, 144 million stunted, 38.3 million overweight or obese. (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition>)

example be designed to promote locally produced foods³, directly traded foods, foods produced by women, or foods produced by independent or smallholder farmers⁴.

In addition to being implemented through government policy, FBDGs can serve as a standard for private sector to commit to and give guidance to consumers. Since FBDG adoption ultimately depends on consumers' food choices, it would be impactful to work with chefs and activists, as well as experts in marketing, communication, and consumer behaviour to further leverage the FBDGs. The private sector has strong expertise on the latter, which is one of many reasons why it would be impactful to get private sector commitment to the FBDGs.

At the national or city level, a forum can be set up between government bodies, research institutions, schools and universities, private sector, and other relevant stakeholders, to have an action-oriented conversation about implementing new science-driven ideas to promote sustainable and healthy foods in line with the FBDGs.

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

An existing solution that needs scaling.

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

Governments⁵, especially Ministries of Health and Agriculture and associated institutes. Cities⁶. Relevant (civil society) organisations and initiatives⁷. Educational institutions and academia⁸. UN organisations, including WHO, UNICEF, FAO, WFP, UNEP⁹.

If selected as a game-changing solution, how will you leverage the UN Food Systems Summit to scale your solution?

(a) As an arena to create commitment from national and municipal-level government officials, for example setting a goal that 50 countries will implement the solution by 2030, (b) to facilitate network and sharing about how this can work in practice¹⁰, (c) to discuss the science that supports such an approach, (d) to form a dedicated mission group before the Summit and use the Summit to advocate and recruit for the group¹¹.

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

³ Brazil is one example, with their Food Acquisition Program (2003), since 1009 also integrated into the National School Feeding Program.

⁴ Example: Home-grown school meal initiatives (e.g. WFP).

⁵ Example: Japan is working on integrating sustainable food into food and nutrition education ("Plan for Shokuiku").

⁶ Relevant initiatives: C40 Cities (www.c40.org), Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org).

⁷ Examples: Vital Strategies (www.vitalstrategies.org), Resolve to save lives (www.resolveetosavelives.org), The Good Food Purchasing Program (www.goodfoodpurchasing.org), SUN movement (www.scalingupnutrition.org), World Resources Institute, The Cool Food Pledge (<https://coolfood.org/pledge/>), The Good Food Pledge (<http://www.goodfoodpledge.net/>).

⁸ Such as the National Institute of Public Health (www.insp.mx) (Mexico).

⁹ For example, FAO could contribute with scientific knowledge to develop standards for sustainable eating (especially for LMICs). Relevant resources are already available, including on dietary guidelines and sustainability.

¹⁰ Another example: Copenhagen.

¹¹ Press briefings, marketplace, awards for impact, build a timeline with milestones and targets.

The idea would be applicable globally. The idea can be universal because FBDGs are (should be) context specific.

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

Policymakers (government), private sector, cities, public health authorities.

Source and process

- Seiichiro Kato, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan, AT2 Member States Affiliated Group
- Ana Cecilia Fernandez, María Cristina Ayala, Mishel Unar and Anabelle Bonvecchio; National Institute of Public Health (Mexico) through public survey
- Bob Phelps, Gene Ethics through public survey
- Eileen Kennedy, Tufts University, member of AT2 cross-cutting solutions working group
- Lina Mahy, WHO, WS1 and WS2 member
- Tina G. Sanghvi, Alive & Thrive initiative, WS1 member
- FHI Solutions through public survey
- Mia MacDonald, Brighter Green, WS1 Deputy Lead
- Samantha Hoffmann, City of Copenhagen through public survey
- Patrick Webb, Tufts University, WS1 member
- Edwina Hughes, World Resources Institute through public survey
- EB Wang, Good Food Fund, CBCGDF, through public survey
- Rafi Taherian, Yale University, WS1 member