

Towards healthy diets from sustainable food systems

Food systems should provide food security for all: adequate dietary energy for the global population, adequate nutrients alongside calories and be affordable. A triple burden of malnutrition affects all countries worldwide: hunger from insufficient energy intake, insufficient consumption of adequate nutrients and the consumption of excess calories. The prevalence of diet-related non communicable diseases is increasing. Furthermore, the pressure on food systems is increasing to meet projected global population needs by 2050. This paper explores how food systems can transform to become sustainable, providing greater food security for all.

There are various diagrams that visualise food systems. The exact content of diagrams can vary depending on the intended focus. This paper refers to a diagram from the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition which depicts links between food systems and the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Food systems include activities, outcomes and drivers. Activities relate to the food chain, from production to consumption. Outcomes relate to food security, socio-economic goals (income, employment, health) and environmental impacts. Drivers influence food system change relating to the environment or socio-economic factors (economics, culture, population characteristics).

A sustainable food system has four domains: health/nutrition, economic, society and the environment. This paper provides an overview of the research conducted on measuring the nutritional and environmental aspects of healthy diets from sustainable food systems. The social and economic domains are only covered briefly as there is a lack of research in this field. All these domains need to be combined for sustainability, but this is complex and not fully understood.

The authors conclude that more research is required on how to move towards healthy diets for a sustainable food system. This includes the comparable sustainability of different diets, and where interventions in the food system should occur for effective impact. It is important that people with different perspectives and expertise work together on research projects.

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