



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

URBAN FOOD ACTION

Urban Food Environments and Green Spaces

Improving people's access to
nutritious food and green spaces

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The issue

Poorly planned urban public spaces can lead to health hazards, such as air pollution and rising temperatures. Unplanned urbanization, in particular, encroaches on green public spaces, reducing their capacity to improve air quality, mitigate urban temperatures and encourage physical activity. This, combined with poor diets, is fuelling an epidemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), now the leading cause of mortality worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. City lifestyle and dietary patterns are strongly influenced by the types of food available (increasingly energy-dense, processed food products), the accessibility of shops and the extent of green areas. Air pollution and rising local temperatures can increase the probability of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and fuel the spread of new pathogens. To counter these trends, food systems and the green environment need to be planned and managed in synergy to curb pollution and encourage people to consume more nutritious and safe food and be more physically active.

The action

The programme helps cities to improve their food and green environments via smart, targeted and integrated policies and actions to promote the links between green spaces, food systems and health, particularly NCDs. It builds on models of community change that focus on healthy eating and active living. Policies and actions are based on an assessment of green spaces, green infrastructure and food retail outlets in target cities, particularly low-income areas. Food-retail is assessed via (1) on-site reviews of all retail outlets in a given area and (2) geo-referencing of outlets to gauge their relative density and proximity to households. A similar approach is taken to mapping existing and potential green public areas and infrastructure.

These assessments, plus analyses of good practices in other cities, will inform policy, planning and regulatory recommendations. Pilot actions will be implemented to (1) provide public spaces for the sale of nutritious foods, (2) provide incentives to make diverse, nutritious and safe foods accessible to all and to develop zoning regulations to curb the proliferation of unhealthy food outlets, (3) plan and develop safe and accessible green public spaces, (4) improve the maintenance of existing public spaces, (5) educate consumers and foster behavioural change, especially parents with school children, and (6) raise awareness and promote the links between green spaces and the food environment to prevent NCDs and improve health.

The issue in numbers



70%

of global deaths are due to NCDs



80%+

of urban dwellers are exposed to air-quality levels that exceed WHO limits



4 million

premature deaths worldwide in 2016 due to outdoor air pollution

Programme targets



4

plans for low-income urban areas incorporate healthy food outlets and green spaces



4

initiatives for diverse, safe, nutritious food and more green spaces in low-income urban areas



4

networks of safe and accessible green public spaces in operation

The budget



USD 6 million



4 years



4 countries

Expected results

- Assessment and planning for food outlets and green spaces developed, including spatial-analysis tools for assessing the food retail environment and the contribution of green public spaces to healthy lifestyles (including around schools);
- Enhanced capacity of local authorities to plan and implement action;
- Integrated action implemented, potentially addressing green public spaces and green corridors, street-food vendors, mobile vendors in and around schools/slums, and incentives for the sale of nutritious and safe convenience foods that support a healthy diet;
- Zoning and regulation of promotional material developed on foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt;
- Greater awareness of the importance of the various urban elements required for a healthy lifestyle.

Geographic focus

The programme will target four cities in Asia, Africa, the Near East and Latin America with varying levels of NCDs and obesity, in countries where the national governments are willing to support broader, scaled-up national initiatives.

In partnership with

At city level, FAO will liaise with small and medium-sized enterprise associations and local and municipal authorities. At national level, key partners will be ministries of agriculture, environment and health, chambers of commerce, national statistics offices, research institutes and universities.

At global level, FAO will partner with UN-Habitat, UN Environment, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) Research, Monitoring and Action Support (the INFORMAS network).



SDG contribution



From Singapore to LA

Following an assessment of food outlets, Singapore launched the Healthier Dining Programme in 2014. Thanks to a subsidy scheme, food operators (including informal vendors) were encouraged to use healthier ingredients, such as oils with reduced saturated fat content, and to offer lower-calorie meals. In just over a year, the number of healthier meal options had doubled. By boosting the opportunities for recreation and exercise, mitigating heat-island effects and reducing air pollution, parks have been shown to reduce obesity and increase cardiovascular and respiratory health. In Los Angeles, for instance, researchers have found that the more parks there are within 500m of a child's home, the lower that child's Body Mass Index (BMI) will be at age 18.



Why invest?

The cost of inaction is an increase in obesity and NCDs and a rise in public health spending. Globally, the cost of cardio-vascular disease is forecast to reach USD 7 trillion by 2025. In Europe alone, in 2010, the annual economic cost of health effects and mortality from air pollution was USD 1.6 trillion. NCDs are a particularly heavy financial burden for low- and middle-income countries, where finances could otherwise be channelled to social and economic advancement. Investing in sustainable food value chains for nutrition, such as fresh fruit, vegetables and other nutritious food to improve the population's diet, would also contribute to economic development by improving business for small and medium-sized rural producers and firms and generating new job opportunities. In addition, investing in green spaces would provide a wide range of other environmental, social and economic benefits.

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