Using the Food Systems Dashboard to better understand dietary changes and the multiple forms of malnutrition across Asia for development practitioners
Purpose and Use

These briefs demonstrate how various stakeholders can use the Food Systems Dashboard to inform their work.

- The purpose of this brief is to show how development practitioners can use the Food Systems Dashboard (FSD) to understand trends across a region and over time relating to nutrition transitions.
- The FSD includes many indicators that can be used to assess the multiple burdens regions and subregions may face around malnutrition.
- Malnutrition includes undernutrition (e.g., underweight and vitamin deficiencies) and excess calorie intake, which can lead to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes.
- Challenges arise when diets change in ways that do not support sufficient nutrients and/or calories consistently over time.
- Practitioners can learn about what actions are needed at each nutrition transition stage, how to promote positive outcomes, and avoid negative consequences by examining trends and taking a holistic approach.
Diets in Asia are shifting

Dietary energy in the food supply (kcal/capita/day) has steadily increased since the 1960s, worldwide and in every subregion in Asia.

Yet, the share of dietary energy from cereals, roots, and tubers (%) has decreased since 1998.

*This suggests that the additional energy in the food supply is not from cereals, roots, and tubers but from other sources.*
The supply of some nutritious food groups has remained relatively steady over time, though regional variations exist.
The cost of a healthy diet (PPP dollar/person/day) has been steadily increasing. Three of Asia’s subregions are above the global average cost, while two are below.

- This means a diet composed of diverse and nutrient-rich foods is largely out of reach for many people. Instead, people may be consuming more affordable or convenient foods in greater proportions.

**What other clues can the FSD provide on why diets are changing?**
Growth in the number of supermarkets from 2012–2017 was higher in each Asian subregion than the global rate...

...though a lower average number of meals are reportedly cooked at home in nearly every Asian subregion (vs. the global average).
There was marked growth in the retail value of ultra-processed food sales between 2012 and 2017.
Adult consumption of sweet foods (2021) is high in some countries in Asia
Diet-related NCDs have increased alongside changes to the region’s food systems.

Adult diabetes prevalence (%) is increasing at a staggering rate in some Asian subregions.

Percent of NCD deaths that are premature is slowly decreasing worldwide but remains higher than the global average in all subregions except Eastern Asia. In Central Asia, it has risen dramatically in the last 10 years.

This data suggest that intake of excess calories may be a challenge in the region.
Yet undernutrition also persists, coexisting with a high burden of NCDs.
The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity (%) is higher than the global average in Southern Asia.

While the Southern Asia subregion continues to experience higher than global average food insecurity, all other subregions are considerably lower.
Key Messages and Recommendations

**Key Messages**

- Shifts in diets across Asia can be attributed to many factors, including:
  - increased dietary energy in the food supply without a corresponding increase in the supply of nutrient-dense foods
  - an increase in the cost of a healthy diet
  - a decrease in cooking at home, despite an increase in the number of supermarkets
  - a reliance on widely available, unhealthy ultra-processed foods

**Recommendations**

- Efforts should be made to increase availability and affordability of foods that improve undernutrition and protect against NCDs (e.g., fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds).
- Taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and ultra-processed foods could help curb the increase in their consumption.
- Companies, restaurants, and other vendors should be encouraged to add healthy options for street foods and fast foods.