

SDC 2018 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: Institutional and data limitations to operationalizing sustainable diets: The experience of Kenya and Vietnam

There is an urgent need to reshape food systems to safeguard human health, the livelihoods of marginalized groups, and use of the planet’s natural resources – interconnected goals that are integral to the concept of “sustainable diets”. This type of systemic change would be achievable if decision-makers worked towards the Zero Hunger Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2) alongside many other SDGs that focus on poverty, human health and environmental sustainability. The United Nation’s vision of implementing the SDGs in an “integrated and indivisible” manner and the growing number of sustainable diets guidelines, however, do not provide practical policy guidance for actors on the ground, overlooking the evidence needed for local decision making and the institutional challenges inherent to cross-sector collaboration. Our paper aims to understand the barriers and possibilities of achieving sustainable diets based on case studies of Kenya and Vietnam, two countries with unique policy contexts that face dynamic diet-related disease burdens and challenges related to equitable and sustainable resource use. Our methods include a comprehensive document review and semi-structured interviews with over 100 food systems researchers, policymakers, private sector leaders, and development organizations in rural and urban sites in each country. We find that development projects – regardless of the location – rarely address agricultural production, nutrition, livelihoods and environmental impacts simultaneously, though many link two of these issues. Conversely, our findings also suggest the potential for more holistic interventions because of cross-sector collaborations that already exist. The lack of partnerships with government agencies, however, limit the ability of organizations to adopt more integrated approaches, as do issues with data quality, access, and disaggregation at the sub-national level. As the SDGs and sustainable diet guidelines continue to be promoted globally, our findings reinforce the need for strategies to increase and improve the quality of data being collected locally and to overcome the intra-organizational politics that limit collaboration, such as collective impact models, data sharing platforms, and shared measurement agreements.