

## CHAPTER 8

# Improved Governance

## Creating Supportive Environments for Diet and Nutrition Policies

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### KEY MESSAGES

- Sound governance is essential for successful policy interventions that contribute to improved diet quality and nutrition – these include fiscal and transfer policies, subsidies, regulations, and investments in technology and research.
  - Improving diets and nutrition depends on a state's administrative capacity to develop policy, regulate commercial activities, and deliver public services; and on its ability to raise taxes and mobilize funds for food system investments. Low state capacity limits policy choices.
  - Bundling different policies together is often recommended but may not be feasible given different government incentives. Addressing diverse administrative needs for different policies and managing trade-offs across nutrition goals and other objectives require substantial state capacity.
  - State capacity and political incentives also shape government engagement with food companies and other interest groups, which may either oppose or support government goals. Policies are more likely to be contested when powerful actors lack incentives to implement them.
  - Citizen engagement and grassroots movements can play a transformative role in reshaping food systems. These are most likely to flourish when there is sufficient civic space and committed political leadership.
- Good governance can be fostered by activities to:
- Complement economic analyses of policies for diets and nutrition with governance assessments to ensure policies are sustainable and scalable from both capacity and political economy perspectives.
  - Identify and address government constraints, such as insufficient financing, poor data, and corruption or demoralization in bureaucracy that limit capacity and influence.
  - Build government accountability to citizens – for example, through online transparency tools.
  - Provide an enabling governance environment that fosters the growth of successful grassroots movements that can support better diets and nutrition.



**M**ost policy interventions to improve diet quality and nutrition require sound governance to be successful. In fact, the role of governance increasingly has been acknowledged as fundamental to achieving healthy food systems.<sup>1</sup> Governance encompasses the interrelationships between formal institutions and informal modes of power, across different geographic scales, and among state and non-state actors. This chapter examines how multilevel and multistakeholder governance can be strengthened to improve diets, with a focus on enhancing state capacities, navigating corporate influence, and fostering citizen agency. Throughout, the chapter highlights existing challenges in each of these areas while also discussing approaches that have potential to improve the governance environment at national and local scales.

## STATE CAPACITIES AND POLITICAL INCENTIVES FOR BETTER NUTRITION POLICIES

Several policy approaches, including fiscal and transfer policies, regulations, and targeted investments, are frequently advocated to address different sets of diet and nutrition challenges. Fiscal policies are a common tool for addressing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). For instance, taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) have been adopted in more than 40 countries as well as several regions and US states (see Chapter 5).<sup>2</sup> Transfer policies, such as consumer subsidies and cash transfers, have been used to help poorer households improve their food security or diversify their diets. Historically, governments have allocated subsidies to cereal-based products, such as bread, rice, and maize meal (see Chapter 6). More recently, national and local governments, especially in high-income countries, have begun adopting subsidies on nutritious foods to increase dietary diversity, and existing review studies suggest they can improve healthy eating choices.<sup>3</sup> Almost 25 US states participate in the Double Up Food Bucks program, which doubles the value of benefits for recipients of food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) every time recipients spend on fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>4</sup> Cash transfers, vouchers, and in-kind transfers likewise have demonstrated positive impacts on dietary diversity and nutrition outcomes in

many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>5</sup> Regulations are an important tool for establishing healthy food environments. For instance, regulations on the food industry's marketing and labeling of unhealthy foods have long been deemed necessary to change consumption behaviors (see Chapter 5).<sup>6</sup> Investments in technology and research are another key policy instrument, increasing the affordability of healthy foods. For example, investments in both biofortification and large-scale food fortification are frequently cited as among the most cost-effective means of addressing micronutrient deficiencies (see Chapter 6).<sup>7</sup>

Bundling these different policy options together is often most effective for addressing nutrition problems but may not be feasible given existing state capacities or political incentives. There are multiple facets to state capacity, but two are central to nutrition. The first is *administrative capacity*, which refers to a state's ability to develop policy, regulate commercial activities, and deliver public services. Achieving these goals depends on having sufficient technical staff, transparent and updated data and recordkeeping, coordination mechanisms, and reach across geographic territory and different social constituencies.<sup>8</sup> The ability to provide these functions impartially and autonomously from political interference is the hallmark of a meritocratic civil service.<sup>9</sup> The second key dimension of state capacity is *extractive power* – that is, the ability to raise tax revenue. Extractive power is important not only because it reflects whether states can reach the totality of their populations and exert compliance and oversight, but also because tax payments often serve as a mechanism by which citizens can demand accountability for service provision.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, revenue mobilization is critical to provide funds for sustainable investments in the food system, which is pivotal given that debt accumulation in LMICs has outstripped economic growth over the past decade.<sup>11</sup>

State capacity defined in these terms is essential for improving diets and nutrition for several reasons. First, many scholars advocate combining policy interventions to create the largest impact on nutrition outcomes, such as allocating cash transfers along with nutritional supplements<sup>12</sup> or with behavior change communication programs to change eating habits.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, subsidies for healthy foods are considered most powerful when tied to taxes or regulatory restrictions on unhealthy foods.<sup>14</sup> Yet, these policies have different administrative requirements and political constituencies that can thwart implementation. SSB taxes, for instance, are often implemented through value-added, excise, or import taxes, which can be levied uniformly on specific unhealthy foods or beverages and generate revenue for indebted governments. In contrast, in the constrained resource environments facing many LMICs, subsidies for healthy foods need to be targeted to the poorest to ensure they have the greatest impact on the diets of this population; this targeting requires a higher level of technical competence and recordkeeping. Relatedly, the design of market regulations for the food industry is more complex for the public to understand, and enforcement involves an outlay of state resources for oversight and compliance officers. For both these reasons, regulations are often less galvanizing for the public and less desirable in the view of governments. These intricacies are highlighted in a study that explains why India, Mexico, and South Africa adopted SSB taxes in the mid-2010s but failed to adopt marketing and labeling regulations on ultra-processed foods.<sup>15</sup>

Second, trade-offs across nutrition goals and other economic development objectives can stress state capacity for coordination. For instance, some countries have levied import bans and tariffs on fruits and vegetables to both decrease the size of their import bill and build up their own horticulture producers, but these policies also increase the cost of such healthy foods for domestic consumers. Botswana, for instance, traditionally depends on South Africa for about 80 percent of its fresh produce but implemented a ban in 2022 on 16 such products to protect domestic producers along with an Impact Accelerator Subsidy to support horticultural farmers.<sup>16</sup> The ban has since been extended until 2025 and the number of products doubled, even though it has led to retail shortages in Botswana, as well as price increases for horticulture products and spoilage of domestically cultivated fresh fruits and vegetables, due to a lack of complementary investments in refrigerated storage facilities.<sup>17</sup> Industrial policy and employment goals have likewise been used as a justification to protect sectors producing unhealthy foods – such as sugar, which is protected through sugar master plans in places like Nigeria and South Africa, even while those governments simultaneously implement SSB taxes to reduce sugar consumption.<sup>18</sup> Ultra-processed food

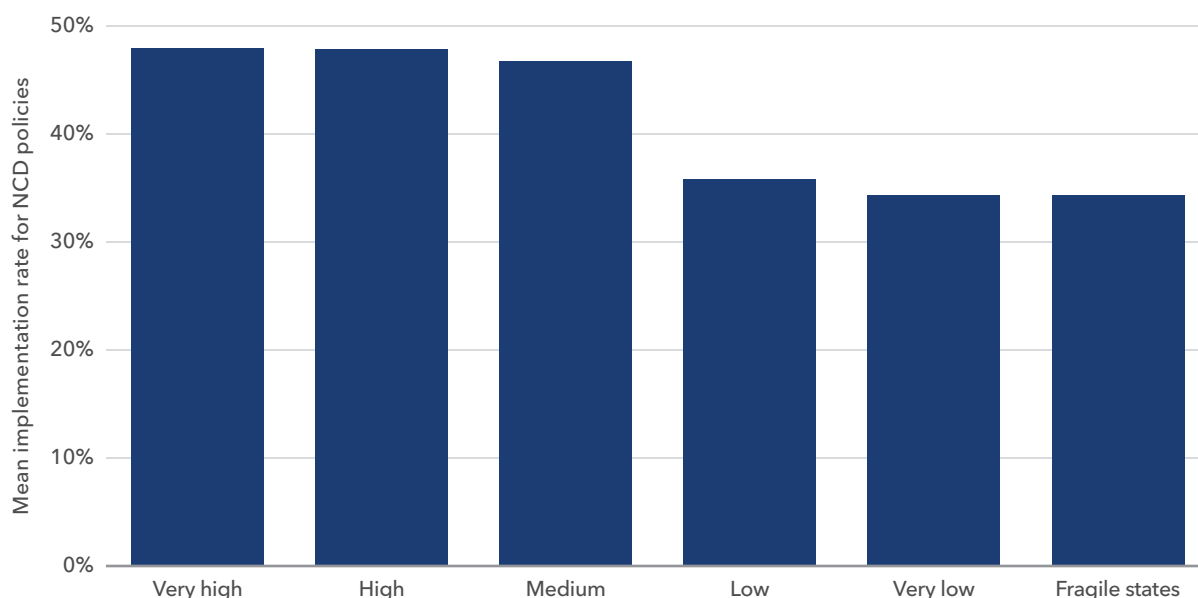
industries have major impacts on the food environment (see Chapter 5) but also generate large numbers of manufacturing and distribution jobs in LMICs,<sup>19</sup> which provide citizens with incomes that help them afford more diverse diets. Trade-offs also exist among nutrition goals, such as when food fortification advocates choose products like sugar or bouillon – a seasoning high in sodium content – as vehicles for industrial fortification, based on consumer behaviors and economic organization. In several cases, this has required ministries of health to have sufficient capacity to convey a complex message to their publics that stresses the value of micronutrient-enriched products while simultaneously discouraging overconsumption of such products.

Third, states need capacity to manage the movement from “easy” to “hard” stages of policy reforms.<sup>20</sup> Easy stages occur when policies have just been put in place, sometimes through “stroke of the pen” decisions and with donor support, and interest groups have yet to identify how their costs and benefits will be affected or threatened. Hard stages emerge over time when impacts are assessed, amendments are needed, donor program support may dwindle, and divisions among interest groups may emerge. The efficacy of SSB taxes, for instance, declines over time if they are not constantly adjusted for inflation to avoid eroding their real value.<sup>21</sup> Regulations and standards must shift as new data emerge about their efficacy and in alignment with changes in regional or global economic bodies and standards. For instance, Chile’s adoption of a comprehensive law in 2016 to mandate restrictions on marketing of ultra-processed foods to children and requiring front-of-package labeling for foods high in sugar, salt, and trans fats reflected recognition that SSB taxes alone were insufficient to tackle obesity<sup>22</sup>; many Latin American countries have now followed suit (see Latin America section). Similarly, a review of almost two decades of large-scale food fortification policies in LMICs reveals that while such programs may initially take off with donor subsidies for vitamin premixes, they are hampered by a lack of sustainability planning, including ensuring continuous quality assurance and control, monitoring, and corrective measures as consumption patterns change over time.<sup>23</sup>

As an example of how state capacity matters, one cross-country analysis of 194 World Health Organization (WHO) member states between 2014 and 2021 uncovered highly variable implementation of the 19 WHO-recommended policies for combatting diet-related NCDs.<sup>24</sup> Policies with the lowest implementation rates were related to unhealthy food, as well as alcohol and tobacco. Figure 1 maps NCD policy implementation vis-à-vis state capacity as measured by the World Bank’s government effectiveness index, highlighting that policy implementation is higher where state capacity is also higher. At the same time, Figure 1 suggests that implementation is not entirely driven by capacity; indeed, a recent study finds that ideological resistance in some high-income countries, as well as powerful corporate financial interests in others, also explains differential levels of implementation.<sup>25</sup>

These issues are equally relevant at the subnational level, especially with respect to cities. Rapid urbanization is often identified as one of the drivers of increasing NCDs in LMICs, as people eat away from home more and prefer ready-to-eat, prepackaged foods or prepared meals that may include excessive oil and sodium.<sup>26</sup> Poorer urban settings in LMICs often experience food safety challenges affecting fresh fruits and vegetables as well as animal-source proteins (see Chapter 7).<sup>27</sup> Ultra-processed foods have filled the demand niche for more convenient, safer foods, but with negative effects on morbidity and mortality. City government responses to address these challenges and promote a shift toward healthier consumption patterns vary considerably across the global South and, like national responses, are contingent on subnational capacity constraints, including policy autonomy in the health and agriculture domains and revenue-raising powers. Integrating the voices of city leaders into national nutrition and health policy discussions is critical to ensure that appropriately targeted interventions are identified across diverse urban locales. One approach for doing so is the Partnership for Healthy Cities, through which mayors from 73 cities across the globe have committed to supporting at least 1 of 14 possible policy options to prevent NCDs and enhance safety.<sup>28</sup> If cities are poised to be important partners in tackling the unique nutrition issues caused by urbanization, it will be important to identify subnational sources of financing, including municipal investment funds and municipal bonds.

**FIGURE 1** Average implementation of 19 WHO-recommended NCD policies by level of state capacity, 2020



**Source:** Data on noncommunicable disease (NCD) policy implementation is from L.N. Allen, S. Wigley, and H. Holmer, “Assessing the Association between Corporate Financial Influence and Implementation of Policies to Tackle Commercial Determinants of Non-Communicable Diseases: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of 172 Countries,” *Social Science & Medicine* 297 (2022): 114825. Fragile states classification is from The Fund for Peace’s Fragile States Index (<https://fragilestatesindex.org>), and capacity is measured from the World Bank’s Data Bank (<https://databank.worldbank.org/>).

**Note:** The NCD policy implementation measure captures 19 policies. Capacity is measured using the World Bank’s government effectiveness index, which refers to “perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.” Capacity-level classifications are based on five equal cut-offs along the metric’s range of values, which span –2.5 to 2.5. “Most fragile states” are those ranked 90 to 100 on the Fragile States Index.

## NAVIGATING CORPORATE INFLUENCE IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

State capacity and political incentives not only affect the degree of successful policy implementation but also shape the nature of engagement between food companies and governments. In settings of weak capacity, as well as those where political elites have close ties to the business community, “Big Food” – the term given to multinational companies producing ultra-processed foods and beverages – is likely to have more leverage. Indeed, corporate influence throughout the food system and particularly in the ultra-processed food sector is well documented.<sup>29</sup> One study identified six strategies used by the food industry to promote its influence, including shaping the narrative, providing financial incentives to politicians, building constituencies with credible professionals and community leaders, threatening legal actions, engaging in policy substitution (that is, proposing self-regulation or voluntary initiatives), and fragmenting or destabilizing industry opponents.<sup>30</sup> Other studies have developed frameworks related to how food industry actors shape preferences and alter the political, knowledge, legal, and extralegal environments to their benefit.<sup>31</sup> In some cases, the influence of business has undermined the policy interventions discussed earlier, such as, for instance, the reduction of taxes on SSBs in Ecuador in 2023, which were originally implemented only in 2016.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, not all corporate actors are behemoth ultra-processed food industries. Many possess multiple motivations beyond profit, and some have led the way in reducing malnutrition where weak state capacity to act is otherwise a major hindrance (see Box 1 on Madagascar). Moreover, improving diets and nutrition through the food system inevitably requires partnerships among governments, researchers, and corporate actors to stimulate innovations in producing, processing, and distributing healthy foods.

## BOX 1 PRIVATE SECTOR PUSH FOR VOLUNTARY FORTIFICATION STANDARDS IN MADAGASCAR

Madagascar has among the highest malnutrition rates in the world, with child stunting prevalence averaging 39.8 percent nationally and more than 45 percent in almost half of the country's 22 regions. A drought in 2021 in the southern part of the country caused almost 2 million people to be declared vulnerable to famine conditions. At the same time, the government is plagued by frequent political volatility, including a crisis from 2009 to 2014 precipitated by a military coup, and weak state capacity. In fact, based on 2022 data from the World Bank's government effectiveness index, the country's percentile rank is 14.6 percent out of a possible 100.

Within this context, private sector and civil society actors have filled an important void. A large-scale food manufacturer, TAF foods, partnered with a civil society association, known as GRET, and the University of Antananarivo to produce a fortified infant flour for children from 6 to 24 months of age. Called Koba Aina ("flour of life"), it is distributed through Nutri'zaza, a social enterprise. The flour is sold at an affordable price of about 400 Malagasy ariary per bag (US\$0.09) and targeted at low-income urban neighborhoods through Nutri'zaza's system of Hotelin-jazely ("restaurants for babies"). Nutri'zaza's sales agents are exclusively women who share best practices with customers about infant and child feeding and monitor babies' growth at no charge to families. In 2019, Nutri'zaza, GRET, and TAF pushed for Madagascar's first voluntary standard for infant flour, leading to the development of Madagascar's own fortified foods logo. One indirect benefit of this initiative is that it strengthened capacity within the Madagascar Standards Agency, which previously lacked any experience with creating a voluntary fortification standard.

**Source:** Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), "The Case of Madagascar: Scaling Up Nutrition Movement In-Depth Country Studies" (Geneva: 2019); Institut National de la Statistique and DHS Program, ICF, "Enquête Démographique et de Santé à Madagascar" (Antananarivo and Rockville, Maryland: 2022); World Bank, "The Urgency of Reforms: Structural Transformation and Better Governance at the Heart of the Strategy to Reduce Poverty," Systematic Country Diagnostic Update for Madagascar (Washington, DC: 2022).

Indeed, investments in R&D and risk-taking by private sector actors have been critical to, for instance, discovering plant- and insect-based alternative proteins that may address nutritional, animal welfare, and environmental concerns simultaneously.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, private sector investments in e-commerce and logistics – catapulted by the COVID-19 pandemic – have increased access to fresh foods for a broader range of consumers in many LMICs who previously were limited by options in their immediate physical neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup> E-commerce in food retail, for instance, grew by more than 100 percent in Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa in 2020 (see Chapter 5).<sup>35</sup>

The fact remains, though, that the food industry holds tremendous power over consumer food choices, with limited public awareness of its intentions and modalities of influence. Several tools to promote transparency and accountability are emerging. From industry itself, there are initiatives like the Zero Hunger Pledge, whereby 43 companies have publicly declared their financial pledges and progress toward meeting Sustainable Development Goal 2 on eradicating hunger and promoting nutrition.<sup>36</sup> In large-scale food fortification, there have been tools such as the micronutrition fortification index in Nigeria, whereby companies annually publicize their efforts toward meeting national fortification mandates based on a standardized template and receive recognition through a prize ceremony intended to create positive peer pressure.<sup>37</sup> At the global level, the nongovernmental organization Feed the Truth developed the Food and Agriculture Corporate Transparency (FACT) index, which tracks how major multinational food companies engage in four activities: corporate spending to affect electoral outcomes; lobbying to influence decisions of officials, legislators, or regulatory agencies; spending to influence scientific studies and institutions; and donating to charitable organizations to gain favor from potential critics. Companies that are engaging in these activities and publicly disclosing them receive better scores on the index because they are at least demonstrating a commitment to transparency.<sup>38</sup>

One finding from the FACT is that the same company may have differing levels of accountability in different countries. As such, there is also potential to use alternative tools, such as the Corporate Financial Influence Index (CFII),<sup>39</sup> to examine the degree to which corporations can use their financial leverage to influence policymaking given a country's legal and institutional setting. Importantly, the CFII tends to be worse in countries with more autocratic systems, suggesting that political regime type may have important associations with transparency over business practices.<sup>40</sup>

## FOSTERING CITIZEN AGENCY IN DECISIONS ABOUT HEALTHY FOODS

While the private and government sectors are key for shaping diets and nutrition policies, citizens play a critical role as well. In recent years, citizen agency has been recognized as a pivotal dimension of food security, along with access, availability, utilization, stability, and sustainability.<sup>41</sup> Agency refers to the ability of different groups and individuals to exert some autonomy over food policy decisions, such as by having equal opportunity to exercise their voice in decision-making structures.

The concept of agency underpins several transnational movements that have emerged in recent years that aim to make food systems more equitable. For instance, the *food sovereignty* movement, which gained ground in the 1990s and then reemerged during the 2007–2009 food price and land grab crises, promotes local control over markets, food cultures, resources, and modalities of production.<sup>42</sup> Reforms to the FAO's Committee on World Food Security in 2009 were partially driven by the importance of incorporating the views of food sovereignty activists into its dialogues and as a means of accountability to civil society through the creation of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism, which facilitates direct engagement of these groups with UN agencies and governments. The People's Summit, held in parallel to the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, was largely driven by those supporting food sovereignty principles.<sup>43</sup>

The *right to food* is often subsumed within the food sovereignty movement but is conceptually distinct. While food sovereignty relies on listening to and respecting "voices from below," the right to food requires action from above, namely the state. Moreover, the right to food draws on a human right recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Within the ICESCR, the right to adequate food is achieved "when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means of procurement."<sup>44</sup> Upholding the right relies on states fulfilling their obligations, including adopting legislative and financial measures to ensure people are protected from hunger and avoiding discrimination in food allocation, including food aid from international actors. Rights approaches signify an important departure in state-citizen relations because they empower citizens to demand social welfare and service provision by mobilizing universal rights recognitions rather than through the programmatic appeals of political parties or via employers.<sup>45</sup> Twenty-nine countries, including LMICs, have explicit constitutional provisions, while another 16 have implicit provisions for the right to food.<sup>46</sup>

Because of their expansive goals, neither movement necessarily prioritizes diets or nutrition; rather, they emphasize adequate food intake and food that respects and reflects local customs, which can sometimes be mobilized to assert individual rights to consume even unhealthy foods.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, obligating a state to uphold the right to food again requires a capable state, citizen awareness of this right (where it exists), and public knowledge about how to access the legal system to compel the state to act – all of which are likely to be most lacking in lower-income countries.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the principles of these movements – people-centered development, rights, and sovereignty – are often embedded to different degrees within hybrid forms of citizen-led or citizen-supported governance structures. Some of these initiatives to support diets and nutrition emerge organically from homegrown enterprises. For instance, in Peru, Lima's food policy roundtables emerged from community soup kitchens that expanded to help the poor during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>48</sup> Others include multistakeholder food platforms that typically bring together civil society with the private sector

and local and national governments to develop a vision for the food system, draft and monitor policies, and help oversee intersectoral cooperation.<sup>49</sup> In contexts of weak state capacity, such platforms can enhance the agency of those directly involved in the food system.<sup>50</sup> Still another approach is to embed such platforms within transnational city networks that revolve around high-level initiatives, such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the C40 Cities initiative, and the CityFood Initiative.<sup>51</sup> Box 2 discusses citizen-led efforts that span these different structures across several Bolivian cities, where they were intended to enhance access to healthy diets in ways that help strengthen local communities.

Although there are some important instances of civil society participation on food safety in more authoritarian settings,<sup>52</sup> the potential for citizen-led engagement in food systems to succeed typically depends on the existence of freedom of expression and association. These have become more constrained globally over the last decade of democratic backsliding, which has coincided with growing restrictions on civil

## BOX 2 BOLIVIA'S CITIZEN-LED FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Bolivia, like many other countries, is currently experiencing a rapid urbanization process that has significant impacts on food systems, diets, food security, and the environment. Despite these challenges, the government has often upheld conventional business practices and investments; in many cases, it does so at the expense of reaching sustainability objectives.

Consequently, citizens and local stakeholders have taken the lead in orchestrating local initiatives to drive strengthened food systems governance, while also promoting the adoption of healthy and sustainable diets. These initiatives encompass a wide spectrum of activities ranging from policy advocacy and food systems research to the expansion of urban agriculture initiatives, the promotion of local food supply chains, the development of agrotourism, and the establishment of the country's first food banks, among others. While these endeavors differ in scale, the sum of these efforts is fueling a thriving food movement committed to ensuring the country's constitutional right to food.

The La Paz Food Security Committee (CMSA-LPZ), established in 2013, has gained national and international recognition for its citizen-led food systems advocacy work. This committee has been instrumental in drafting and instigating the adoption of municipal food security legislation; promoting the integration of food systems approaches into metropolitan development and planning documents; and ensuring the inclusion of food security and food systems in Bolivia's newly developed Urban Agenda. With more than 40 active member organizations, CMSA-LPZ is a diverse and multidisciplinary platform, spearheaded and facilitated by the local organization *Fundación Alternativas* and supported by various international agencies. Its members include representatives from market vendor associations, food entrepreneurs, municipal and departmental authorities, NGOs, academia, local universities, the private sector, and environmental and food activists, among others.

In addition to the policy and advocacy efforts of CMSA-LPZ, other local initiatives are contributing significantly to the creation of local supply chains, the reduction of food waste, the revalorization of local culinary heritage, and awareness building around healthier dietary practices. Notably, in La Paz, *EcoTambo* has emerged as a community-supported organic farmers market, offering both in-person and online purchasing options. This initiative not only stimulates citizen engagement in supporting local agroecological family farmers, but also introduced a traceability system that enables consumers to learn about the origins of their food and the individuals behind its production. Initially launched by the local nonprofit organization *Semilla EcoSocial*, *EcoTambo* has evolved into a self-governing entity led by its female farmer members.

Similarly, in 2017, a group of university students pioneered the country's first food bank, *Banco de Alimentos de Bolivia*, in Cochabamba, one of the country's three major metropolitan areas. This initiative follows global best practices by rescuing surplus food from various sources, including farming associations and supermarkets, which would otherwise go to waste. The rescued food benefits more than 15,000 people. Meanwhile, in Sucre, Bolivia's capital, *Manq'a* is a culinary school and restaurant that embraces a farm-to-table approach in collaboration with local farmers. The core interest of this initiative lies in preserving the nation's culinary heritage and fostering a new generation of food entrepreneurs. Their work has already inspired replicas in other countries in Central and South America. Initially supported by ICCO Cooperation, *Manq'a* has since become an independent local organization.

These collective efforts, from small-scale grassroots projects to metropolitan-area-wide initiatives, underscore the power of community-driven change and the capacity of individuals to influence policy, challenge conventional practices, and reinvigorate culinary heritages.

society groups that disproportionately advocate for rights, including rights to food.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, multi-stakeholder efforts can be vulnerable to shifts in government administrations with different partisan ideologies. Indeed, in several cases, multistakeholder food system strategies and food policy councils in urban locales have seen their momentum curtailed as a result of political turnover in leadership.<sup>54</sup> More generally, multistakeholder platforms have sometimes been accused of power asymmetries in composition or interest articulation, potentially translating into inequalities within the food system,<sup>55</sup> which suggests the need for built-in and frequent mechanisms of self-reflection among members.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous policy levers exist to enhance access to affordable, healthy, and diverse diets, but the enabling governance conditions for adopting and implementing these – across public, private, and civil society stakeholders as well as between national and subnational scales – vary significantly. Indeed, policy choices are much more limited in contexts of constrained state capacity and much more contested where powerful actors lack material or ideological incentives to implement them. Consequently, there are several recommendations for providing a more holistic approach to diet and nutrition interventions.

First, economic analyses of the impacts of fiscal, transfer, regulatory, or investment policies on diet outcomes should be complemented by governance assessments to ensure such interventions are sustainable and scalable from a capacity and political economy perspective. Simple options that result in second-best outcomes for nutrition might be first-best from the viewpoint of feasible implementation. Second, to expand the set of first-best feasible policy options, binding governance constraints need to be identified and tackled. For instance, by uncovering whether insufficient financing, opaque data, corruption among frontline service providers, or demoralization in the bureaucracy are the main hindrance to policy uptake, necessary governance reforms and financial resource mobilization strategies can be identified to build a comprehensive action agenda for diets and nutrition. Third, improved and equitable access to information is a fundamental enabler for improved food systems governance overall.<sup>56</sup> To build accountability to citizens over time, there are opportunities for developing online transparency tools, such as keeping scorecards of the corporate food industry's political influence; monitoring government commitments to nutrition goals; and tracking budgets of nutrition-policy investments.<sup>57</sup> Fourth, grassroots movements are playing a key role in reshaping food landscapes from below and demonstrating the transformative potential of an engaged citizenry. These movements are most likely to flourish when sufficient civic space and committed political leadership also exist. Their growth and embodiment in multistakeholder platforms and food policy councils provide a unique natural experiment to identify when, why, and how they lead to improved nutrition policy decisions, thereby providing the basis for more cumulative learning about these increasingly popular modalities.

These and other potential interventions could ensure that diet and nutrition policies are not only properly targeted to the specific needs of different population groups but also appropriately calibrated to the underlying governance environment.

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