

## FoodLAND Project Reveals Nutritional Recommendations for Addressing Malnutrition in Morocco

Over the past four years, the FoodLAND project has worked diligently to address the pressing issue of malnutrition in six African countries in Northern and Eastern regions, namely Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The project's efforts culminate in a comprehensive set of 360 nutritional recommendations that are relevant, suitable and feasible to implement pursuing to combat the diverse forms of malnutrition prevalent in each of these areas, ultimately striving to contribute to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly target 2.2, which calls for the significant reduction of all forms of malnutrition.

Decades of shifts in food systems have led to a concerning rise in specific forms of malnutrition, juxtaposing issues like stunting and wasting with escalating rates of obesity and overweight. In African nations, these challenges manifest uniquely across different regions. For instance, in Morocco, though both undernutrition and overnutrition exist, the rates of undernutrition are reducing whereas those of overweight and obesity are increasing across most stages of the lifecycle. At the younger age of childhood, overnutrition affects more boys than girls and by the age of adolescence henceforth, the prevalence of overnutrition is higher among the women. In adults, obesity is more of an urban and female phenomenon.

These trends underscore an urgent need to align food supply chains with nutrition goals, particularly in ensuring accessibility and affordability of nutritious foods, especially for vulnerable demographics like children and mothers. Indeed, the food situation in Morocco has experienced a profound change in recent decades, due to industrialization, urbanization, economic development and globalization of markets, and in line with demographic and social transitions, induced a quantitative and qualitative variation of household consumption expenditure. Excessive energy intake is common, related to high consumption of cereals and simple sugars, animal-source food and mainly saturated lipids, whereas fruits and vegetables intake as well as the intake of dietary fibre always remain below the international recommendations.

The nutritional recommendations put forward by FoodLAND aim to bridge the gap between existing food behaviours and optimal nutrition. The nutrition working group worked with three key data sources for the development of the recommendations: an extensive desk review carried out for all the African countries involved in the project, surveys conducted in both urban and rural settings, with a specific focus on women with children in their first 1,000 days, and inputs from significant nutrition stakeholders, involved in the validation of the recommendations generated, identification of gaps in those recommendations, and generation of recommendation to close the identified gaps.

### **Promote food diversity and increase awareness on the consequences of unhealthy diets**

The nutritional recommendations the nutrition experts of FoodLAND have elaborated for Morocco focus on two major aims: promoting the diversification of diet and increasing consumer awareness of the health hazards caused by unhealthy eating.



Specifically, the promotion of nutritional good attitude in rural population should be done to raise awareness and recommend diversification of food, especially in rural women population in reproductive age. The proportion of people consuming all five recommended food groups is low on the studied urban populations (34,6%) but is much lower in rural populations.

As for the consequences of living on unhealthy diets, experts highlight the importance of spreading the increase in the rate of non-communicable diseases. Indeed, lifestyle variations coupled with changes in eating habits, in particular excessive consumption of fats, sugary products and catering meals, could present real risk factors for the development of hypertension, obesity, diabetes, dyslipidemia, cardiovascular disease and even certain cancers.

