



NIPN AT A GLANCE

4th Quarter, December 2020

The Bi-Annual NIPN Advisory Committee Meeting Discussed Key Research Questions

The NIPN Advisory committee conducted its second bi-annual meeting on December 8, 2020 at the Ellily Hotel. Dr. Masresha Tessema, Acting Director of Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate (FSNRD) at EPHI, welcomed the participants and reviewed the agreed action points from the previous meeting. Dr. Aregash Samuel, NIPN Coordinator, presented the 2020 NIPN progress updates and its 2021 core plan.

Dr. Meron Girma presented the second set of policy questions (for the NIPN to respond to in 2021) to the AC members and requested their feedback. AC members shared additional but important questions with the NIPN team ranging from inputs into the Food Systems road map, to questions about biofortification to child wasting. It was noted that the NIPN through its research and its large platform, has an important role to play in supporting the country in the reduction of malnutrition and to prepare for the Food Systems Summit to be held in October 2021.

MER SC Virtual Meeting Held on November 12, 2020

The National Nutrition Program Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Steering Committee (MER SC) was established to provide technical support and direction to generate evidence, monitor progress and inform timely decision making for successful implementation of the National Nutrition Program (NNP) and the National Food and Nutrition Policy (NFNP).

The committee consists of representatives of various government and non-government institutions and partners involved in the NNP and NFNP.

The MER SC is chaired by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) and meets quarterly to exchange updates and discuss key agenda points.

On November 12, 2020, the third quarterly MER SC meeting was held virtually using the Microsoft Teams meeting platform. The meeting was opened by Dr. Masresha Tessema, the Acting Director for the FSNRD of EPHI. The meeting was organized around four topics to obtain committee members'



EPHI
Monitoring and
Evaluation Steering
Committee (MER SC)

Virtual meeting hosted by EPHI
November 12, 2020

feedback and inputs. These included:

1. Ethiopia's Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) Strategy and lessons learned so far. Dr. Mulugeta Teamir, Senior NSA Advisor at Federal Ministry of Agriculture presented an overview of the NSA intervention, the impact pathways, the strategy, the implementation plan, major achievements, and challenges.

2. The study on the quality of commercial edible oils, vitamin A stability and transfer of nutrient to food. Mr. Kifle Habte, Researcher at EPHI's FSNRD presented the objectives of this study, how data was collected, the findings and conclusions. **Continue to page 8.**

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Message From The Coordinator



Aregash Samuel (PhD)
Deputy Director of FSNRD
and NIPN Coordinator

What a year 2020 was! It will be remembered as the year we all had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its terrifying consequences.

Whilst we all encountered professional challenges such as working from home without an office setup, electricity and internet outages or dealing with childcare and work at the same time, there was silver linings. Some of us spent less time in Addis traffic and more time working constructively to get things done and spending more time with our families.

2020 was also a year that made the NIPN team think outside of the box. To avoid a backlog in activities, the team embraced what the internet has to offer. Instead of in-country technical assistance visits, the team used Microsoft Teams and Skype for business as platforms to continue receiving online mentorship. The team reverted to online webinars using various platforms which replaced the in-person research seminars. Over 490 people participated in the five of the NIPN virtual webinars since the pandemic hit Ethiopia. This is a tremendous feat and one we are proud of.

Whilst the team had to postpone a few capacity development activities, we continued with a mix of online and in-person trainings, with social distancing, mask wearing

and hand washing highly respected. Over 85 people were reached through the NIPN capacity building interventions this year.

The two bi-annual NIPN Advisory Committee (AC) meetings took place as well as three National Nutrition Program Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Steering Committee (MER SC) meetings (one in-person and two virtual). The team continued to work hard on their respective deliverables and SEVEN research outputs were concluded, reports produced, and results disseminated. Currently the team is working on policy briefs and a manuscript for submission to the Maternal and Child Nutrition Journal.

The metadata repository was set up using *Dataverse*, metadata guidelines, a data repository concept note (to introduce the platform to readers), and files and codebooks developed for nutrition-related datasets. The first dataset documentation will be uploaded in January 2021. The newsletters were sent quarterly and on time and the NIPN website and social media accounts activated and regularly updated. NIPN Ethiopia shared experiences in four NIPN global webinars and shared tools, reports and documents with other NIPN countries. NIPN embarked on the second policy question formulation

cycle to identify key nutrition policy questions to respond to in 2021.

These are, of course, only highlights of our achievements, but clearly COVID-19 did not get us down. It brought out the best in us. 2020 was a great success to the entire NIPN team and our collaborators, IFPRI and C4N. Well done to all!

2021 will be the last year of the NIPN's first cycle and whether or not the NIPN will continue a second cycle in 2022, the team crafted an exciting plan for NIPN's 2021 interventions as well as a sustainability plan beyond 2021. These plans will be submitted to the EU delegation early January and will be shared with the NIPN AC for endorsement. Then, we will be sharing our 2021 vision and plan with all of you!

This year will mark the release of the National Food and Nutrition Strategy and the UN Food Systems Summit (October 2021). The NIPN is looking forward to being part of Ethiopia's plan to drive a clear agenda for food systems and to reduce malnutrition in the country.

Let us capitalize on the momentum we built up last year and make 2021 an exceptional year for the NIPN and the country's nutrition portfolio.

Onward we go! Stay Safe!
Thank you!

"2020 was also a year that made the NIPN team think outside of the box."

NIPN Ethiopia Webinar Recap: Thought-Provoking Perspectives on Child Stunting



The Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the Ethiopia National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN) co-hosted a webinar on “Thought-Provoking Perspectives on Child Stunting” on 18 November 2020.

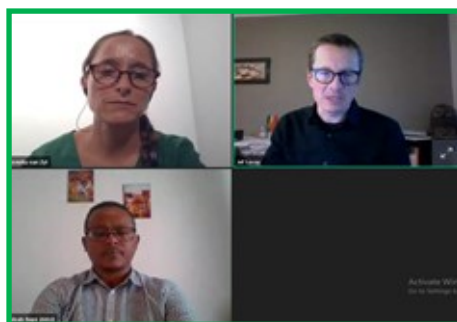
Cornelia van Zyl, Senior Technical and Policy Advisor at IFPRI was the moderator of the event and Dr. Aregash Samuel, the NIPN Coordinator, provided the opening remarks.

The past decade has seen unprecedented attention going to undernutrition. Drastically reducing child stunting has become a global development objective. The focus on linear growth retardation and stunting led to successful advocacy for nutrition but also revealed confusion and misunderstanding about the meaning of these terms among researchers, donors, and agencies active in nutrition.

The webinar aimed at demystifying the confusion. Dr. Jef Leroy, Senior Research Fellow in IFPRI’s Poverty, Health and Nutrition Division, presented the study, “[Perspective: What Does Stunting Really Mean? A Critical Review of the Evidence](#)”, a critical review of the literature which challenges current views on the consequences of linear growth retardation and stunting. Dr. Leroy argued that while linear growth and

stunting are very strongly associated with several problems including delayed child development and reduced work capacity in adult life, stunting does not cause these problems but the deficient environment in which children grow up, does. Dr Leroy differentiates two distinct uses of stunting. First, as stunting can lead to difficult childbirth and poor birth outcomes, it is an outcome of interest in and of itself. Second, stunting is a marker of a deficient environment and it predicts future problems.

Dr. Leroy considered stunting as a good marker to measure child nutritional status at global and population level, to compare data across regions and countries and to measure progress. However, he recommends other metrics and approaches to be used to directly address the underlying causes of undernutrition at program and policy levels, rather than reverting to ‘stunting’ to do so.



Dr Kaleab Baye, Associate Professor at the Center for Food Science and Nutrition, Addis Ababa University (AAU), presented the study “[Evaluation of Linear Growth at Higher Altitude](#)”, an analysis of data from nearly 1 million children in 59 low- and middle-income countries.

The study shares insights into the association between child growth faltering and residence at high

altitude.

Dr. Baye discussed key findings, including the potential mechanisms—such as lack of oxygen in the prenatal period—that drive higher rates of growth faltering for children at higher altitude compared to those at lower altitude. He did not recommend, however, a downward adjustment of the child growth standards, but rather stressed the importance to conduct more research to identify interventions and healthcare guidance to support pregnancies at higher altitude.

The webinar brought together 63 participants from different sectors, including policymakers, academia, development partners and non-governmental organizations, to discuss the evidence and policy implications for Ethiopia.

To access the webinar recording, the presentations, the summary of the Q&A session, please consult the NIPN Ethiopia website or open the hyperlink [HERE](#).

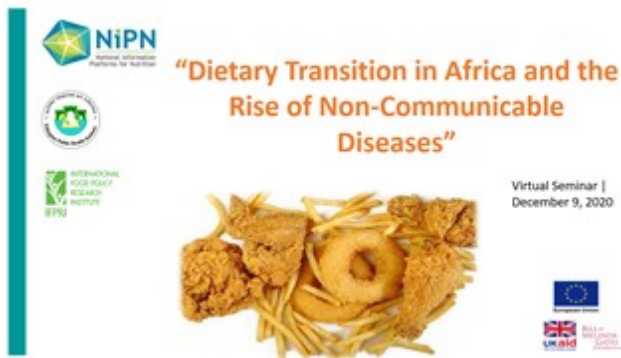
In case you cannot get enough of this...



Thank you!



A Brief Analysis of the NIPN Webinar - “Dietary Transition in Africa and the Rise of Non-Communicable Diseases”



The fifth NIPN virtual webinar entitled “Dietary Transition in Africa and the Rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)”, co-organized by EPHI and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was held on December 9, 2020.

Dr. Olusola F. Sotunde, a trained nutritionist, a registered dietitian, and the Senior Technical Advisor for Nutrition and Health at Beth Davis International, delivered the presentation. She explained the nutrition transition and that the shift in dietary consumption and energy expenditure coincide with economic, demographic, and epidemiological changes. She noted key drivers of dietary transition, including population growth, urbanization, globalization of food distribution system, food processing and the fast-food industry, global income growth, and an ageing population.

Dr. Olusola presented dietary patterns and shared evidence of the trends in per capita packaged food sales in Africa, in energy purchased from sugar-sweetened beverages and age-standardized intake of dietary factors among adults aged 25 years or older at the global and regional level. She focused on factors in urban African food environments that influence dietary behaviors and the role of dietary transition on the rise in NCDs in Africa.

Among the recommendations, she mentioned the need to implement global food and health policies to, for instance, promote the domestic production and global consumption of healthier food, the significance of nutrition education (including social behavior change communication) to promote healthy diets (more fruits and vegetables and less ultra-processed foods) and applying practical public health interventions aimed at healthier lifestyles.

Two panelists shared their reflections on the keynote presentation.

Dr. Meron Girma, Senior Public Health Analyst, EPHI/ NIPN noted that dietary habits are changing, and obesity and overweight are increasing in urban areas in Ethiopia and that several factors contribute to the dietary transition, including economic growth and improvement in living standards.

A research by IFPRI showed that calorie intake is increasing, carbohydrate is a major contributor to daily diets, and consumption of processed foods are higher in urban than in rural areas. On the other hand, consumption of sugar-sweetened beverage daily intake in Ethiopia is low. She explained that there is no standard dietary tool to measure the changing diet and that such a tool is highly recommended.

Dr. Mussie G/Michael, Public Health expert, NCD Team, Disease Prevention and Control Directorate of the Ministry of Health (MOH), explained the health-related complications linked to NCDs; in 2016, 52% of all deaths in Ethiopia were due to NCDs with cardiovascular disease as the leading cause of death. He presented risk factors for NCDs including high salt intake and low vegetable and fruit consumption.

Dr. Mussie stressed the importance of public awareness and promoting healthy diets, the significant role of nutritionists to promote nutrition education, underlined the importance of developing dietary guidelines and liaising with the Ministry of Education to promote healthy diets in schools.

The virtual webinar was attended by 40 participants from government and non-government, research and academic institutions.

To access the presentations, please consult the event page by opening this [hyperlink](#).



Dietary Transition in Africa and the Rise in Non-Communicable Diseases

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Validation of Qualitative Dietary Intake Measurement Methods against the Reference Quantitative Weighed Food Record to Measure Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women in Ethiopia

Contributed by Dilnesaw Zerfu and Tsedey Moges

Monotonous diets are a serious problem among resource limited communities in the developing world. In those settings diets are predominantly starchy staples and often may contain few or no animal source foods with limited seasonal fruits and vegetables. Several dietary data collection methods are applied to assess the food and beverages in detail that an individual consumed within 24 hours.

Among the dietary assessment methods, open and list-based 24-hour dietary recall approaches are widely used to measure the minimum dietary diversity for women of reproductive age (MDD-W) as proxy micronutrient adequacy indicators. The two proxy data collection methods are widely used in many countries and combined with large population health and/or nutrition surveys since the tools are simple to fit into other survey questionnaires, require minimal training and less resources to collect dietary data. But no study has assessed the validity of these two proxy methods against weighed food records (WFR) in Ethiopian settings.

This study aimed to assess the measurement agreement of the open 24-hour recall and list-based 24-hour recall methods compared to the quantitative WFR, which is recognized as reference method.

We employed a cross sectional survey design as part of the multi-country study for the Ethiopian component, to contribute to the global effort to validate the two proxy data collection tools. In this validation study, 431 non-pregnant women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) participated from the North shewa and South wollo zones of the Amhara regional state of Ethiopia.

This study revealed that the women's diet heavily relied on three food groups only, namely cereals and white tubers, legumes and other vegetables. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in estimating proportions of women who reached MDD as reported by open recall (12%) and list-based recall (16%) compared with WFR (8%).



Nutrient rich food such as milk and milk products, meat, dark green leafy vegetables and vitamin A-rich fruits were rarely consumed and they were the main source for the food group misclassification. Moreover, this study provides statistical evidence that list-based and open recall methods overestimated women achieving MDD-W compared to WFR.

Our study also showed that there was moderate agreement between the proxy methods and the quantitative WFR method. Furthermore, the survey team witnessed the list-based approach was simple, direct and requires shorter time during interviews than the effort needed for open recall. Therefore, we should consider the potential tradeoffs between cost, accuracy and simplicity when operationalizing the different MDD-W data collection approaches.

For more information, please access the publication from the link <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7400839/>

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Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women of Reproductive Age (MDD-W) Data Collection: Validity of the List-Based and Open Recall Methods as Compared to Weighed Food Record

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Public Relations Officers and Journalists Trained on Nutrition Research, Communications and Reporting

On 11 and 12 December 2020, 35 Public Relation (PR) officers and journalists attended a training in Bishoftu on “*the role of media in communicating research findings to the wider public*”, organized by EPHI/NIPN in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Dr. Aregash Samuel, the NIPN coordinator, opened the training and explained the existing gap between disseminating research findings to the wider public and decision makers and engaging the media to more effectively do so.



She noted the strong and direct correlation between nutrition and health and shared scientific evidence showing the link between stunting and brain growth. She noted that nutrition advocacy is a key issue which requires it to be prioritized by PR officers and journalists and encouraged stronger collaboration to fill the current gap in disseminating research findings.

Ato Dano Endalu, Assistant Professor of Communication and Lecturer at Ambo University in Ethiopia, conducted the training. He explained the differences between scientific reporting and event reporting and between the media and researchers’ focus and need. For instance, the media focuses mostly on specific results whereas researchers focus on the methodology of the research, the findings, and recommendations emanating from the research.

One of the factors that hinder journalists from reporting on research is the research jargon or technical language, the graphs and figures which are often difficult to understand. This in turn, makes it even harder for journalists to produce simple and plain explanatory news or articles based on the research.

A lively discussion ensued on the challenges of scientific research reporting. The most significant observations included: little to no use of local language in research reports, the lack of specialized PR officers or media professional in scientific fields, conflicting research findings

on the same research topics shared with the media, researchers’ fear of conducting media interviews, and the lack of a joint platform to exchange information.

Participants weighed in on the importance of establishing close relationships and regular collaboration between researchers, PR and media professionals and of creating a platform to exchange information.

This training provided an opportunity to identify challenges in communicating research to non-expert audiences and to propose recommendations for future collaboration. During the training, different types of communication channels were discussed that enabled the trainees to think differently and to use different traditional and digital media to share research findings to non-expert audience and decision makers.



A total of 35 participants attended the training, including 25 PR heads and officers from government ministries, Addis Ababa and Regional Health Bureaus, Regional Public Health Institutes, EPHI and the NIPN, and 10 journalists from renowned private and government media and News institutions.

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NIPN Ethiopia](#)

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The Ethio-Diet Project – A Progress Update

Contributed by Tesfaye Hailu and Dawit Alemayehu

The Ethio-Diet project aims to develop the Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG) and Healthy Eating Index (HEI) for Ethiopia. This four year project (2017 –2021), is financially and technically supported by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and is one of the initiatives of the Food Systems for a Healthier Diet flagship project led by Wageningen University and Research (WUR).

The key implementers of this project are the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), WUR and FAO. The project started in June 2017 by establishing a FBDG national technical working group (TWG). Training on the FBDG development process was given to the TWG members by EPHI together with WUR and FAO. During this training, the TWG members identified relevant topics to generate evidence for the development of FBDG messages.



Second FBDG development workshop, EPHI training center, Addis Ababa

Since the start of the project, systematic reviews and secondary data analyses were conducted on five selected topics, technical recommendations were made, 11 public FBDG messages developed, tips for the messages included, food graphics were designed based on the messages and information collected from consumers.

EPHI together with WUR conducted repeated 24-hour recall dietary assessments from 500 households to translate the public message into daily food choices using diet optimization. The fieldwork started by theoretical and practical training (eight days) for data collectors on topics including 24-hour recall dietary data collection, anthropometric and body composition measurements, socio-demographics, diet quality, and data collection techniques. Between November and December 2019, data was collected in four regions (Amhara, Oromia, Southern

Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region and Tigray) in rural communities and one city administration (Addis Ababa). The study team cleaned the data, prepared the food composition table and conversion factors for every ingredient in all the dishes.



Training of data collectors, EPHI training center, Addis Ababa

The team is currently working on data analysis and report writing and aimed to complete the study report by the end December 2020. In addition, a model will be developed to identify the optimal diet for women of reproductive age. Thereafter, based on this model, optimal diets for other population groups such as children, adolescent and adult will also be developed.

Testing the understanding, practicality, cultural appropriateness and acceptability of the messages and food graphics is an important component of the FBDG development process. To do so, a qualitative study was designed in August 2020 and EPHI conducted seven focus group discussions and 30 key informant interviews with consumers (women of reproductive age), high-level nutrition experts, health extension workers and agriculture extension workers. Based on the inputs from study participants, messages and graphics of the FBDG will be readjusted. The qualitative study report will be finalized by the end of January 2021.

Under this initiative, Ethiopia will have a new and its first Food-Based Dietary Guidelines by 2021. Thereafter, the Healthy Eating Index (a tool to check adherence to the FBDG) will be developed and validated using the diet optimization study results and another dietary intake dataset.

Eat healthy, live long, live strong!

MER SC Virtual Meeting ... Continued from page 1

3. Nutrition data mapping for Ethiopia. Dr. Meron Girma, Public Health Analyst at EPHI/NIPN, presented the nutrition data mapping for Ethiopia, which was conducted to assess the availability and accessibility of data for selected nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive indicators among national nutrition actors. She presented the methods used for the data mapping and discussed the key findings on the availability of data for NNP II with conclusions and recommendations.

4. The National Food and Nutrition Strategy. Mr. Tarekegn Negese, Nutrition M&E Specialist at the MOH, presented an update of the progress of the National Food and Nutrition Strategy (NFNS).

A lively discussion followed the presentations. The meeting was attended by 35 MER SC members from different sectors working on nutrition.

“The Best Ways to Communicate Research Findings with Policy and Decision Makers”

On November 4, 2020, the NIPN organized a training facilitated by the IFPRI on the best ways to communicate research findings to policy and decision makers.

It was an interesting training, and the first of its kind. It brought together 19 researchers from different institutions (Policy Studies Institute, EIAR, EPHI and IFPRI). They were socially distanced at tables and wearing masks. The lead trainers, an IFPRI collaborator (Dr. Rebecca Pradeilles) based in the UK and IFPRI staff (Chris Rue) based in the US, and researchers, both Ethiopian (Dr. Masresha Tessema from the FSNRD, Dr. Kaleab Baye from Addis Ababa University) and abroad (Dr. Haris Gazdar from the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR) in Pakistan) joined the training virtually using Microsoft Teams or through a recording (Dr. Haris). Dr. Ferew Lemma, Senior Advisor for the State Minister, MOH, as lead decision influencer, joined the team in-person.

The training was a very interactive one and covered topics such as how to influence policy makers, the content of a strong and useful policy briefs and the design and layout of policy briefs.

Participants learned from researchers how they influence policymakers and convey their research findings; on what they felt worked well to have their messages heard and what were some of the pitfalls in them trying to do so. Learning from mistakes is as important as learning from what works.

Dr. Ferew provided the participants with advice on what works for policy makers, how best to engage with policymakers, the timing of engagement and which avenues to take.

The participants asked many questions and made pertinent suggestions throughout the training. COVID-19, did not get the team down, but gave them the opportunity to be innovative in their drive to continue their work!



Communicating evidence with policy and decision makers training, November 2020



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