

New Nutrition Research Project Launched by the FSNRD

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NIPN Ethiopia – Knowledge/ Information Outputs

In August 2021, at the Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa, the Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate (FSNRD) at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), in collaboration with the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) launched a project called "Leveraging Systems Approach for Healthier and Sustainable Diet Policy in Ethiopia".

The main objective of the project is to analyze the degree to which the food system in Ethiopia is supporting the delivery of protective and healthy food (PHF), relative to unhealthy food, to low income and vulnerable people, and inform policy action that improves access to affordable PHF sustainably considering gender equity.

The research will cover an institutional analysis and evaluation on the role and involvement of nutrition actors on the implementation of the current food and nutrition policy which aspires to establish a system for healthy diets in Ethiopia; on the food production subsystem and issues such as the amount, variety

and seasonality of food; on the transportation, food value chain, and the role of and linkages with food actors.

Finally, the research will provide an analysis of healthy and nutritious foods and will provide recommendations to program implementers, policy and decision makers.

This three-year research project is funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for a total of one million Canadian dollars. It will be conducted by EPHI and PSI with the support from the McGill University in Canada and Wageningen University in the Netherlands.



Photo credit: C. Robinson/CIMMYT

The MER SC Meets to Discuss Important Nutrition M&E Issues



The quarterly workshop of the National Food and Nutrition Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Steering Committee (MER SC) was held on August 12, 2021 in Adama. The meeting featured in-person attendees and those connecting virtually via MS Teams.

Dr. Aregash Samuel, researcher at EPHI and NIPN Coordinator welcomed the participants. She encouraged everyone to participate actively throughout the meeting.

The meeting was organized around key agenda topics and included:

- Presentation from the Ministry of Health on the Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) launch and the joint planning for 2021 or the 2014 Ethiopian Calendar year.
- Status update of the FNS baseline survey.
- Overview of Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)-Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate (FSNRD) output and community outreach program.
- Impact of Seqota Declaration Innovation Phase implementation: considerations for the expansion phase.
- Harmonizing the multisector nutrition scorecard with the FNS.

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Message From The Coordinator



*Aregash Samuel, PhD,
Researcher at EPHI and
NIPN Coordinator*

“One of the key events planned for this year (2014), is the National Nutrition Conference (NNC) 2021.”

The Ethiopian New Year, 2021, started on September 11, 2021. Ethiopia is known to have its unique calendar, numbers and alphabets in addition to its extraordinary feat of never having been colonized by any country.

As we all know, the Ethiopian 2013 year was very challenging and our country endured stressful situations. However, we are here with strong hope of peace and stability.

In the past Ethiopian year 2013, significant and noteworthy events took place. One of them was the launch of the National Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS), which operationalizes the 2018 National Food and Nutrition Policy. The ten-year multisectoral food and nutrition joint action plan as well as the Ethiopia Food System Position Paper, Road Map and Game Changers, were also important milestones.

The National Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) baseline

survey started, data collectors were trained, and data collection is ongoing. The NIPN team has been highly involved in this important survey and will remain engaged throughout the data analysis phase.

One of the key events planned for this year (2014), is the National Nutrition Conference (NNC) 2021. The Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) and the NIPN Ethiopia are the lead organizers of the conference with preparations proceeding expeditiously. The team started receiving abstracts from different applicants and hopes to receive many more by the end of September 2021. The conference will also have an attractive feature which includes an innovative “food products contest”, which aims to create links between innovators and the industry/manufacturers in order to introduce new products to the market .

COVID-19 remains a health threat globally and we, in Ethi-

opia, recognize the possible risk of a “third wave”. Daily COVID-19 status updates show that new cases and deaths are increasing at an alarming rate. As Ethiopian are well known for different social, cultural, and religious gatherings and festivals, I would like to humbly request all of us to take proper precautions during such events. As Her Excellency, the Minister of Health, Dr. Lia Tadesse confirmed, the arrival of Delta variant in Ethiopia, which means we need to be constantly and extra careful.

Despite all the challenges and setbacks, we still are filled with hope that peace, stability and serenity will be restored to our country.

May the Ethiopian New year bring everything good in your lives. Happy New year!

“ENKUTATASH”!
Stay Safe and Healthy!

Continue from Page 1 Quarterly MER SC Workshop Discussed Various

- Sustainable Undernutrition Reduction in Ethiopia (SURE) Coverage Survey by EPHI
- Discussion on the revision of MER SC Terms of Reference

The presentations were followed by lively discussions, and question and answer sessions. Some key discussion points included the need for stronger follow up on actions; the monitoring role of EPHI and of the MER SC engagement, identifying and aligning food and nutrition indicators, having a joint annual M&E plan based on sectors’ plans and demands.

Questions raised included: What monitoring role should the MER SC play? What, how and when to do so? From the discussions, it became clear that there is an important role for the MER SC within the national food and nutrition governance structure. The overall structure, accountability and reporting of the new Food and Nutrition Strategy still needs to be clarified and overall, improved among the sectors.

To access the presentations from the MER SC, please click [HERE](#).



The Fruits and Vegetable Value Chain in Ethiopia: Transformation, Prices, and Implications for Consumption and Nutrition



Photo credit: Africa Freedom Network

Co-Organized by the National Information Platform for Nutrition (NIPN), the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)'s Strategy Support Program (ESSP), a webinar was conducted on August 18, 2021 on the topic "The Fruits and Vegetable Value Chain in Ethiopia: Transformation, Prices, and Implications for Consumption and Nutrition"

Introduction: Dr. Aregash Samuel, Researcher, at the Food Science and Nutrition Research Directorate at EPHI and the NIPN National Coordinator

Moderator: Cornelia van Zyl, Senior Technical and Policy Advisor at IFPRI for the NIPN

Presenters: **Dr. Fantu Nisrane Bachewe**, Research Coordinator in IFPRI's ESSP. **Dr. Bart Minten**, Senior Research Fellow in IFPRI's Development Strategy and Governance Division.

What are the trends in price variations of fruits and vegetables in Ethiopia? And what are the implications on people's diets? What is the current situation in Ethiopia as it relates to emerging medium-scale tenant farming and the COVID-19 disruption?

These questions are cardinal given the importance of prices for consumption decisions for important nutritious crops.

The first speaker, Dr Fantu Bachewe, discussed findings from large-scale retail and producer price datasets, and price behavior of fruits and vegetables in Ethiopia over the last 15 years (2005 - 2019).

The analysis noted that prices for fruits and vegetables rapidly increased compared to cereals and were more expensive than 15 years ago. Price rises were due to increased marketing margins and significant seasonality in vegetable prices. In addition, there was significant spatial price variation in the country.

The second speaker, Dr Bart Minten, shared findings from a study on the rapid expansion of intensive vegetable cultivation in the central Rift Valley in Ethiopia. Almost 60% of the irrigated area is cultivated by medium-scale tenant farmers relying on short-term rental contracts. These gig economies, characterized by flexible contract arrangements implemented by outside contractors and which are fueling sophisticated sectors in developed countries, are also important in commercial agrarian settings in Ethiopia. For instance, the commercial vegetable cluster in the central Rift Valley in Ethiopia is worth \$200 million per year, which is close to the value of the much-heralded flower exports from Ethiopia.

Both speakers emphasized the policy implications on both these studies and made strong and candid policy recommendations for Ethiopia. These timely and interesting presentations were followed by a lively question and answer (Q&A) session.

The webinar brought together 86 participants from different sectors, including policymakers, academia, researchers, development partners and NGOs, and discussed the evidence and program implications for Ethiopia.

To access the **webinar** presentations, please click [HERE](#) and for the summary of the Q&A session, [HERE](#).



What is Driving the Rise in Overweight, Obesity and Nutrition-related Non Communicable Diseases in Ethiopia: A NIPN Analysis

Contributed By Meron Girma(PhD)

Close to 2 billion adults worldwide are obese (body mass index ≥ 30 kg/m²) and rates of obesity have nearly tripled over the last half-century (1). Overweight/obesity are major risk factors for Nutrition Related Non-Communicable Diseases (NR-NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease and hypertension (2). NCDs account for 70% of all global deaths annually.

In Ethiopia, the prevalence of overweight/obesity and associated NCDs have been increasing considerably in the past decade (4-8). This increase is especially prominent among urban dwellers and those with high socioeconomic status. Furthermore, with improvements in access to health services NCDs have replaced communicable diseases as leading causes of mortality. Cardiovascular diseases were the number one cause of mortality in Ethiopia in 2017 (9). Evidence regarding the magnitude of NR-NCD burden, temporal trends, and modifiable factors associated with NR-NCDs is needed to identify priority interventions and targets groups to mitigate the rising burden of these conditions.



Accordingly, our analysis aimed to 1) describe trends in the prevalence of overweight/obesity and associated factors among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) in Ethiopia between 2000-2016 using data from the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), and 2) to assess modifiable factors associated with hypertension and prediabetes/diabetes among males and females in Ethiopia using data from the Ethiopia STEP wise approach to Surveillance (STEPS) Non-communicable Disease Risk Factors survey (NCD STEPS, 2015).

Our findings show that there is a significant increase in overweight/obesity particularly among urban women (an increase from 11% in 2000 to 21% in 2016). A rise in wealth was the main driver of the change in the prevalence of overweight/obesity between 2000 and 2016. An increase in wealth accounted for 62% and 63% of the increase in rural and urban women, respectively. Education was protective among urban women, with increased educational attainment contributing to a 16% decline in the prevalence of overweight/obesity.

Additional contributors to the rise in overweight/obesity prevalence were engagement in less strenuous work such as non-agricultural work, and screen time. The analysis of modifiable factors showed that body mass index and waist circumference were the main factors that were positively associated with hypertension and prediabetes/diabetes in both males and females. In contrast, an increase in educational attainment was negatively associated with hypertension and prediabetes/diabetes in both sexes. While residing in an urban setting was positively associated with hypertension in both sexes, it was only associated with prediabetes/diabetes in males. Males and females in pastoralist areas were less likely to present with prediabetes/diabetes compared to their agrarian counterparts. Physical activity was negatively associated with prediabetes/diabetes among females only. We also observed that fruit and vegetable intake was low, with only 5% of males and females consuming the recommended five or more servings daily. Additionally, 96% consumed more than the recommended 5g of salt per day. None of these diet-related factors were associated with hypertension and prediabetes/diabetes, which was likely due to the lack of variability in the data. Our findings highlight the need to implement interventions that promote healthy eating and increase physical activity to control the rise of overweight/obesity and NR- NCDs.

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Has Ethiopia Missed or Ignored Preconception Care?



Contributed by *Kedir Teji Roba, PhD, Associate Professor of Human Nutrition
Haramaya University College of Health and Medical Sciences, Ethiopia*



Introduction: Preconception care or pre-pregnancy care is the “provision of biomedical, behavioral and social health interventions to couples (a woman and her partner) before conception aimed at improving their health status, and reducing risky behaviors, and individual and environmental factors that could contribute to poor maternal and child health outcomes”[1]. The WHO identified thirteen health problems during pre-pregnancy and evidence-based interventions to mitigate their risks. These range from nutritional conditions, vaccine preventable diseases, environmental health, to infertility/subfertility, mental health, and substance abuse. The WHO also identified eight high-impact evidence-based pre-pregnancy nutrition interventions for mothers and newborns. These include screening

for anemia, and iron and folic acid supplementation, monitoring nutritional status, and energy and nutrient-dense food supplementation, provision of nutrition education and counselling, screening and management of diabetes, promoting exercise and using iodized salt [2,3].

The time to establish a state of optimal health and nutrition is before conception. Studies indicated that it is easier and more efficient to build up iron stores before the occurrence of pregnancy than during pregnancy. Approximately eight to ten days after an ovum is fertilized, it implants into the uterine wall. Then, within the first month after conception, the developing embryo will multiply from a single cell to millions of cells, so that the basic structures of organs will have formed, and the blueprint for future growth and development will be formed. All this often happens before women may know they are pregnant or attend a prenatal clinic. Studies indicated that there is 50% increase in demand for folate, zinc, and iron [2, 5]. Mothers with iron deficiency before pregnancy have been shown to increase the risk of iron deficiency/anemia during pregnancy and infants born to those mothers will have low stores of iron in the body and/or born preterm [6].

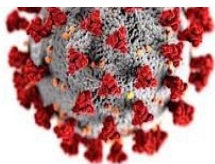
Why preconception? Among the 2010 nutrition objectives for the preconception period, are those focused on reducing iron deficiency among females of child bearing age, reducing the incidence of spinal bifida and other Neural-Tube Defects (NTDs), and birth defects [7]. However, these packages of services were not applied in Ethiopia except for the provision of folic acid and iron supplementation to all pregnant mothers at around twelve weeks. At end of first trimester, this is the time where most of the neurological, heart, eye and other basic organs develop, and complications often occur before this period [6]. The provision of iron and folate after 12 weeks may help mothers and infants but is not sufficient enough to avert all complications including NTDs.

When to intervene? Insufficient folate intake during preconception increases the risk of embryonic development of NTDs. These defects occurred within 21 to 27 days after conception, that is before many women even know they are pregnant, and well before prenatal care begins [8]. About 70% of cases of NTDs can be prevented by consumption of adequate folate before and during very early pregnancy [6]. It is recommended that women who may become pregnant should consume 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate, take no more than 5000 IU of vitamin A source foods from supplements daily, and limit or omit alcohol containing beverages and smoking [4].

Conclusion: There is increasing evidence that extending preconception care increases the wellbeing of maternal health and newborn care and improves subsequent pregnancy and child health. The Federal Ministry of Health should develop guidelines and strategies on how to integrate preconception care into the existing routine health services in addition to the current antenatal care services in Ethiopia.

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Attention!! COVID-19 is Increasing at an Alarming Rate!!



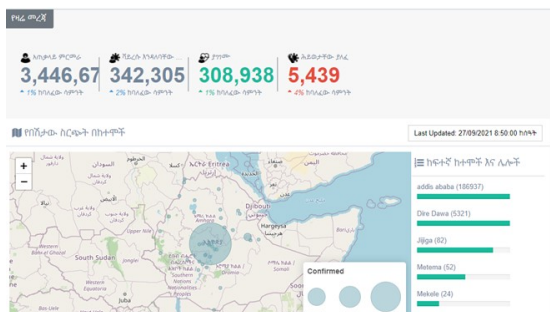
In the first week of August, the COVID-19 Delta variant was confirmed in Ethiopia. Since then, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) reported increasing numbers of new COVID-19 cases and alarming death rates as it is clearly shown in the weekly report below.

Week	# people tested	# tested positive	# deaths	# home-based treatment
Aug 30 - Sept 5	52,290	8,867	119	9,123
Sept 6-12	47,445	8,120	166	8,303
Sept 13 - 19	60,738	9,857	201	9,360

Since the COVID Breakout

Total Tested: 3,474,018
 Positives: 345,674
 Deaths: 5,582
 Recoveries: 312,806
 Vaccinated: 2,853,785

Approximately 10% of people tested for COVID-19 tested positive. Deaths account for only 1.5% of those tested positive. Testing numbers remain low in Ethiopia. Vaccination rates have been very low. Only 2.5% of the total population received the first dose. The number of new COVID-19 cases are very high in the capital city, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa as can be gleaned from the figure below.



As the third wave is hitting Ethiopia, H.E. the Minister of Health, Dr. Lia Tadesse, called for the mandatory application of COVID-19 preventive measures. She strongly advised that utmost care should be taken to minimize the spread of the pandemic and as a response to “prevention fatigue” across the country. As such, the MOH revised the previous 30/2013 directive with code 803/2013 to better reinforce prevention and control activities. The directive can be found on EPHI’s website at <https://ephi.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Covid-directive-Copy.pdf>.

The National Nutrition Conference (NNC) Preparation Is Ongoing

The EPHI/NIPN is coordinating a National Nutrition Conference which is planned for November 2021. The three subcommittees are working hard to make this conference a success. So far, in August, the call for abstract has been shared publicly, with universities, research institutions, sectoral ministries, and with national and international nutrition actors.

The organizing committee has received many abstracts and will start screening soon, and to accommodate more abstracts, the committee has extended the deadline for submissions to the 30th of September.

As a side event, the conference will also have an attractive feature which includes an innovative “food products contest”, which aims to create links between innovators and the industry/manufacturers in order to introduce new products to the market. And many submissions are coming in for this section too.



The EPHI IT and NIPN teams received technical support from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), as part of the IFPRI Ethiopia NIPN Technical Assistance project funded by the European Union. This technical support trip was facilitated by Cornelia van Zyl, the Senior Technical and Policy Advisor at IFPRI. Mulugeta Bayeh the Web Communications Manager at IFPRI in Washington D.C. carried out the technical support visit from August 26 to September 20, 2021. Mulugeta trained the IT Officer to update the Drupal content management system to the latest version. This was the first time the system was updated since the launch of the website in 2018, which means the site is now safe and secure. In addition, Mulugeta supported the EPHI IT officer to upgrade the ‘look and feel’ of the website and worked with the NIPN and IFPRI teams to agree on the restructuring of the website. He also added a ‘sign up’ button for readers to sign up for the NIPN at a Glance newsletter and any related information sharing. Mulugeta trained the NIPN Communications officer on how to use ‘mailchimp’ to establish an online newsletter and incorporated almost 500 email contacts into the NIPN ‘mailchimp’ directory. *Watch this space — the next quarterly newsletter will be coming out ONLINE !!*

Finally, Mulugeta provided the EPHI IT and Communications Officer with on-the-job training on their roles and responsibilities related to the website, the work flow and more specifically, worked with the NIPN Communications Officer on the “pipeline” for events, news and information to be shared via the NIPN website and social media accounts. Mulugeta also developed key training manuals for use by the NIPN team.

EPHI, FSNRD Director, Dr. Masresha Tessema, acknowledged the technical support from IFPRI and handed over gifts and an appreciation letter to Ato Mulugeta. The EPHI IT and NIPN teams highly appreciated the support given by IFPRI and thanked the IFPRI team.



Updates on Ethiopia’s Food System Transformation and the United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS)



Food Systems Summit 2021

Since last year, Ethiopia has been preparing for the UNFSS which was held on 23rd September 2021. The UNFSS website “[Member State Dialogue Convenors and Pathways](#)” hosts information on all the countries’ position statements, game changers, and plans. Documents to review by clicking opening the hyperlinks on the website include:

- 1) [Vision 2030 Transforming Ethiopian Food Systems—Food Systems Pathway, Commitment and Position Statement](#)
- 2) [Vision 2030 Transforming Ethiopian Food Systems—A synthesis report Game Changing Solutions to Transform Ethiopia’s Food System](#)
- 3) [Ethiopia Food System Conceptual Framework using the Theory of Change](#)
- 4) [Oumer Hussein Oba—Minister of Agriculture’s Ministerial statement.](#)

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)’s [webpage](#) also contains information on the Ethiopia Food System (EFS) Background Paper and the EFS briefing note.



For the NIPN program to be sustained, it is important to strengthen existing systems, to produce guidelines, strategies and to document processes, procedures, and approaches to serve as reference and guidance documents for use by NIPN members, researchers and key NIPN stakeholders. For the NIPN project-related knowledge outputs include plans and strategic documentation, guidelines, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and check lists, process and procedure documentation. Whilst project-related knowledge outputs are continuously being developed and posted on the NIPN website (see [HERE](#)). The list below provides a snapshot of some of the documents developed thus far.

Title

Description

Plans and Strategic Documents

The NIPN’s Sustainability Plan



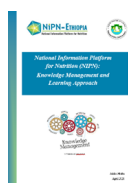
This plan is prepared as a road map to guide the continuity of NIPN beyond the project period and ensure long-lasting impact in the nutrition sector. It specifically describes NIPN’s interventions which foster sustainability, the future plans for the sustained use of the NIPN and its services, and the NIPN’s fundraising plan to diversify its funding portfolio.

The NIPN’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan



This NIPN M&E Plan forms part of the implementation and project management of the NIPN. It describes the NIPN’s results framework, its intervention logic and theory of change, the M&E processes, the team, the data quality, and flow, data sources, collection, management, analysis, and reporting. It also provides an overview of the M&E matrix with indicators, targets, and means of verification.

The NIPN’s Knowledge Management and Learning Approach



The NIPN’s “NIPN Knowledge Management Approach” describes how the NIPN creates, captures, manages, and uses its information and knowledge to benefit the team, decision makers, and NIPN stakeholders. *(Document not yet released.)*

The NIPN’s Communication Strategy



The strategy describes the relevant communication challenges, maps out the NIPN activities which require communication, links those activities to specific audiences, defines the key messages and proposes the different communication channels for each audience.

Guidelines, SOPs, and Checklists

The Guideline for Rapid Literature Reviews



This document provides guidance on how to conduct good quality rapid literature reviews and was developed to respond to a capacity gap and to support the policy question formulation processes. Rapid literature reviews are useful to identify global evidence and to guide national policy analysis; it can help to refine policy questions or can even help answer some policy questions. It is expected to be used by NIPN colleagues, partners, and researchers.

Title

Description

The NIPN’s Data Repository Guidelines

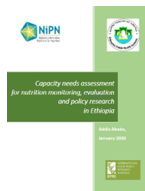


Guidelines, SOPs, and Checklists

The guideline provides a description of the NIPN Data Repository and explains the process and procedures used by the NIPN team to include information on the data repository. For each multisectoral dataset, the team develops a metadata description of the data set (following a specific outline) and a codebook for the dataset. The NIPN team also includes relevant documents related to the dataset such as the survey questionnaire, and any publications or officially released reports related to the dataset. Lastly, the data repository includes several mandatory and optional fields which the NIPN team completes offline before the information is published.

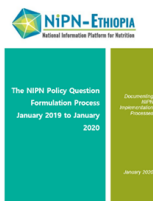
Processes and Procedures

The NIPN’s Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) Report



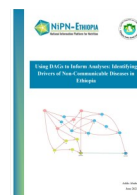
The CNA was conducted to identify needs and recommend strategies to strengthen capacities for nutrition M&E, policy research, data, and knowledge sharing. Seventeen government institutions were targeted with this assessment and based on the gaps identified, recommendations were made and a capacity strengthening plan developed.

The NIPN’s Policy Question Formulation (PQF) Process



As part of the NIPN project cycle, a PQF process takes place to help government ministries and the NIPN identify key nutrition policy questions which need to be answered to inform policy revisions, strategy development and program implementation. This PQF report, describes the process NIPN undertook to identify the nutrition policy questions, to validate them through the two committees (NIPN AC and the MER SC), and includes lessons learned and recommendations.

Using Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs) to Inform Analyses



To respond to one of the research questions (What are the drivers of NCDs i.e., overweight/obesity, hypertension, and diabetes in Ethiopia?), NIPN embarked on a new approach for data analysis. The approach uses causal path diagrams otherwise known as ‘directed acyclic graphs’ (DAGs) which have been constructed as part of the methodological framework underpinning the analysis. This approach was used by the NIPN data analysis team.

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