

## Healthy Lives from Sustainable Food Systems October 2022

### The SHIFT Framework for Health Equity in Food Environment Transformations

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#### Brief background

The global population is struggling with malnutrition in unprecedented ways. Co-existing problems of underweight, overweight, and micro-nutrient deficiencies are interacting with climate change, conflicts and other human and planetary factors that challenge health. A transformative change in our food environment is urgently needed to improve human and planetary health and well-being and to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1-3</sup>, particularly the SDGs directly related to nutrition, which include zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5), planetary health and the revitalization of the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG4, SDG17)<sup>4</sup>. Food environments are of vital importance if we are to achieve these SDGs. This brief aims to assist technical staff, such as programme developers and managers working on achieving the SDG goals.

Currently, one in nine people – 820 million worldwide – are hungry or undernourished<sup>5</sup>, and simultaneously, one-third of the world's adult population is overweight or obese<sup>6</sup>. In addition, there is an unequal burden of disease incidence, morbidity, mortality, survival, and quality of life between subgroups that is related to the food environment. Food environments are intricately connected to the health and economic development of countries. Investing in interventions to improve food environments for human health can therefore yield co-benefits for sustainable development. Transforming local food environments with such actions contributes to the food system transformation needed for improved planetary (e.g., climate change and pollution) and human health globally. A key success factor in this transformation is identifying the agents and factors with the greatest relative impact on facilitating change, premised on sustainable and equitable practices in local contexts.

The SHIFT Framework was developed by an international team of researchers committed to assisting technical staff, such as programme developers and managers, in improving health and nutrition equity. The Framework seeks to mobilize

high-level commitment and promote coordinated multi-stakeholder processes throughout, including the review of progress and sharing of lessons learnt. This process complements existing initiatives and actions addressing malnutrition and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, such as the WHO Global Noncommunicable Diseases Action Plan, Double Duty Actions, Global Nutrition Reports, and the Healthy Food Index. The SHIFT Framework consists of four steps: Step 1 is to Map, Step 2 is to Engage, Step 3 is to Transform, and Step 4 is to Monitor. For each step, there is a yes or no question for deciding what action to take and/or the next step to follow to move forward in the process. The Framework is based on a Theory of Change (ToC) focusing on the intersection between the food environment and human behaviour using an equity focus. The SHIFT ToC consists of a series of interconnected and interrelated steps that are grouped into three phases. Equity is the main focus, and it can be approached by targeting certain settings, such as schools, workplaces, or community hubs, or by targeting specific vulnerable groups for transformative action.

#### Approach

In this workshop, the SHIFT Framework was introduced and discussed using case examples. The Framework assists technical staff through a 4-step process and a compendium of good practices to develop context-relevant and equity-focused food environment transformation strategies. It comes in the form of an interactive pdf and an interactive website to guide users through the process.

The workshop had 28 registered participants, including individuals from academia, the World Health Organization and other non-governmental organizations. It commenced with a welcome from the workshop lead, Meena Daivadanam, and workshop moderator, Mathilde Sengoelge.

Dr Francesco Branca, Director, Nutrition and Food Safety, WHO, opened the workshop while Meena Daivadanam

provided an overview of the SHIFT Framework to help participants better understand the tool, prior to discussion. Two case studies were presented, one from Tanzania and one from Australia. Oscar Mukasa, researcher from the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC), shared their results from pilot testing the SHIFT Framework in the Tanzania context. Dheepa Jeyapalan, Manager, Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems at Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), spoke from a retrospective perspective on what the tool may or may not have contributed to their process of implementing food hubs among adolescents in Victoria, Australia.

The workshop was organized in a world café format. There were four stations, and each represented one step in the SHIFT Framework. The idea of the world café format was for the participants to rotate every 15 minutes to the next station, allowing them to discuss each step in detail and provide constructive comments for further improvement of the Framework. Each station had a facilitator and a rapporteur to provide an introduction to the step and a brief summary of the discussions of the previous group. This allowed for building on previous rounds with each rotation.

## Recommendations

During the workshop, the discussions focused on how to improve the equity aspects of the tool. These are summarized below, both overall as well as for each step of the SHIFT framework.

### Overall recommendations

- Clarify the focus on food environment and how this relates to diets or nutrition and consistently align the language of the whole Framework with the main focus. We also need to define and operationalize equity aspects that the tool would address with respect to the food environment. What do we mean by equity and which aspects of equity are addressed?
- Need to clarify how a bottom-up perspective, especially focusing on qualitative lived experiences, will be integrated throughout the Framework.
- The Framework needs to be context specific or clarify how it will enable context-specific strategies, because regardless of where you are, it will be different from place to place, and a cultural aspect needs to be considered.
- How can we mainstream the Framework? How do we ensure that THIS is the tool that will be at the frontline and used as a toolbox for transformation of food environments?
- Make the tool more flexible, especially its visible format – perhaps it should be circular, making it easy to see how we can go back and forth between the steps. This would also show that the Framework and the envisaged process are not linear. The SHIFT Framework should also be availa-

ble in different languages to avoid communication barriers.

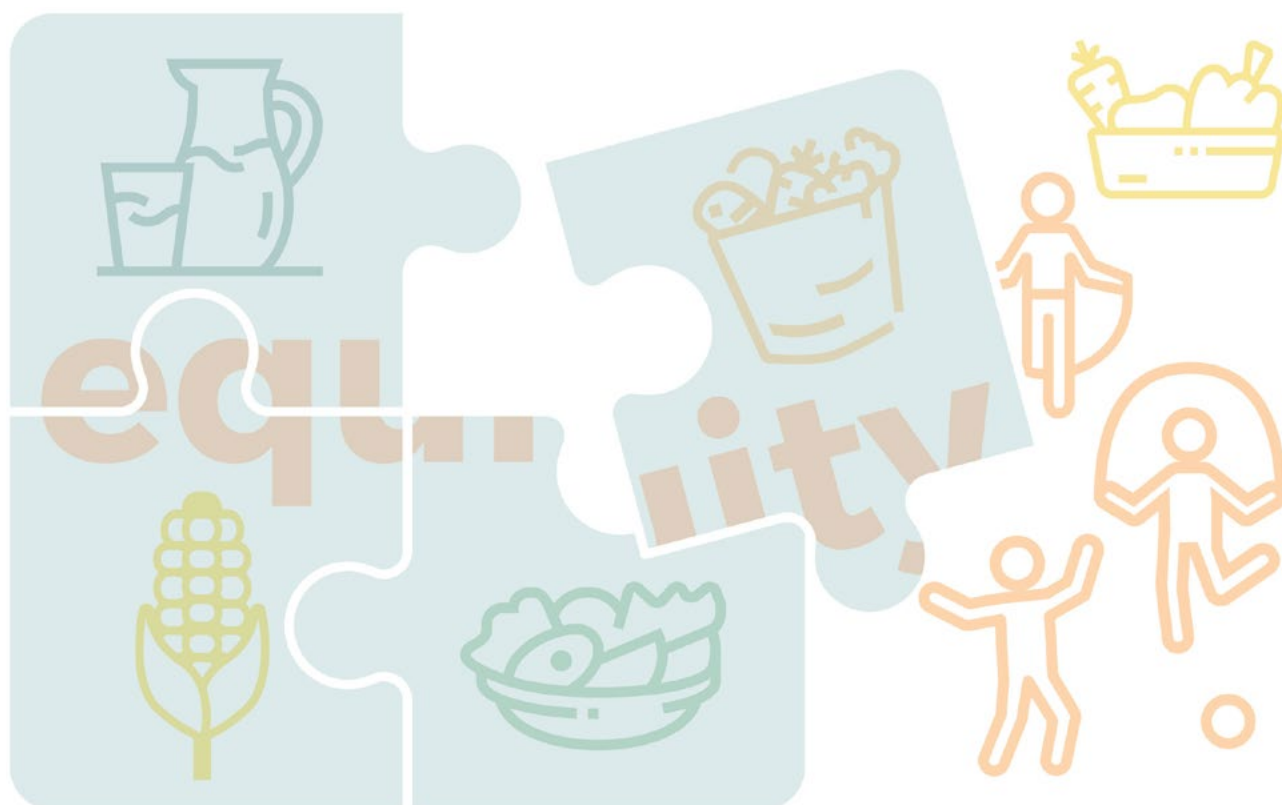
- The Framework is currently created for a high-level approach, but we need a tool for all levels, including both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Consider how this can be addressed.

### Step 1: Map

- Have a bottom-up approach at the mapping stage, to map the equity gaps within the food environment with technical staff gathering information directly from the communities.
- Establish criteria for or a clear definition of disadvantaged communities to allow better identification of disadvantaged groups and to map out gaps accurately based on the inequities present.
- Identify indicators specific to food environments and food environment interactions to measure the inequities – these should depend on the impact each community wants to achieve.
- Focus on identifying equity gaps within the food environment, including acquisition and consumption stages, to touch on intersections with the food system as a whole.
- Take a more bottom-up and participatory approach when mapping, as disadvantaged communities may not agree with technical staff's views on issues and equity gaps.
- Include additional tools, such as guidelines or appendix material, that are supplementary to the SHIFT Framework to explain methods or aspects that require more detailed clarification.
- Identify the driving factors of the stakeholders in the mapping stage – to assess the level of commitment of the key actors. Stakeholder analysis and grassroots assessment therefore need to be accomplished prior to the mapping step.

### Step 2: Engage

- Clarify that stakeholders are not a single group; they will differ depending on the target group and the identified gaps that need to be addressed. Clarify who we want to work with. Do we work with the people creating the problem or the people helping with solutions? Who are we engaging? Who is involved in tackling or contributing to the existing problems? Create guiding questions or examples focused on how to identify which partners are needed and how to engage them. A stakeholder analysis would be a key step in guiding this process.
- Nutrition cuts across everything, which also means that many stakeholders should be involved. How do we ensure that they are coordinated and can use their mandates in “the best” ways possible? To be able to work with stakeholders across the system, we need a system that allows that. Commitment from stakeholders, including financial commitment, needs to be an explicit step. Financing needs to be secured earlier using a long-term plan.



- Important to clarify what kind of engagement we want from different stakeholders and how we can engage them. Will it be a consultation, participation, or co-design and what is needed for different types of engagement; what are the implications of each?

### Step 3: Transform

- Provide more guidance on the project-specific process of goal setting. This will also enable a common understanding of expected outcomes and commitment needed for the same. A 'commitment' step should be added to the Framework to signify both moral and financial commitment to the planned activities. This is especially critical before the 'transform' stage.
- Add finance and resources in all stages of the SHIFT Framework, instead of only in the engage phase, as is the case now. This is of great relevance to the 'transform' stage which, will require financial and human resources. The idea of a block budget was brought up, meaning freedom to use money based on need. This needs to be considered and some guidance provided.
- Focus on participatory approaches, using lived experiences, so that interventions are co-created. However, the relationship between participatory approaches and equity needs to be evaluated and considered.

### Step 4: Monitor

- Evaluate and monitor both the process and the outcome. Throughout the process, we must be transparent with the donors about the challenges along the way – challenges that may impact expected outcomes. Possible additional financial requirement needs must be predicted, communicated and pre-planned.
- Important to appreciate the context and integrate the needs of community members. There is a need for increased integration within community settings and community-level organizations. Acceptability may be improved by reaching people within settings they already engage with and feel more comfortable in, thereby improving access.
- Increased involvement of political figures and, if possible, their support for the project(s) would be critical, as such projects require government-level commitment, including resources.
- Adopt technology for efficient reporting and evaluation wherever possible. Use case studies and stories of other projects as examples to guide such endeavours.

These recommendations will be discussed by the authors and further steps to modify and improve the tool will be formulated, including testing of the tool in different settings.

## References

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This brief is one in a series of nine policy briefs produced as an outcome of the 2022 Uppsala Health Summit “Healthy Lives from Sustainable Food Systems.” Uppsala Health Summit is an international arena for dialogue, exploring possibilities and implementation challenges associated with advancement in medicine and public health. You can find the entire series of briefs and more information about Uppsala Health Summit at [www.uppsalahealthsummit.se](http://www.uppsalahealthsummit.se).

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