

HOW THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN CAN ADDRESS DRIVERS OF THE DOUBLE BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION

Issue Brief – Oct 2025

Double burden of malnutrition is a crisis – city-level action is needed

- 36% of Cape Town households are severely food insecure
- Average household dietary diversity score is 6/12
- Food insecurity and low dietary diversity are linked to both undernutrition and overweight/obesity
- Nutrition policies have been developed, but more integrated action is needed to address drivers of the DBM

Drivers are complex and interrelated and require multi-sectoral action

In 2024, FoodSAMSA worked with researchers, city and provincial government employees, and NGO representatives in group exercises based on complex systems thinking to develop a model of the drivers of the DBM in Cape Town and to identify potential areas to intervene.

The workshops highlighted six key areas driving the DBM at the community and local policy level:

Governance principles

Multi-stakeholder partnerships, inclusive innovation, transformational leadership, whole-of-government approach

Policy development

Media attention on DBM, dedicated nutrition budgets, agenda setting

Commercial determinants of health

Marketing of unhealthy foods, corporate influence in policymaking

Social and equity awareness

Gender mainstreaming, maternal protection policies, social vulnerability

Access to resources

Safely managed WASH, resource allocation, access to evidence

Food environment domains

Food sensitive urban planning, nutritious food supply from informal sector, costs of staple foods, healthy food accessibility



Priority Actions

Establish coordinated communication

and program sharing structures between government departments related to nutrition drivers to ensure a whole-of-government response.

Integrate

nutrition sensitive considerations into urban design and spatial planning.

Increase dedicated budgets

for nutrition programs including budgets for multi-sectoral, cross-departmental programs.

36%

of Cape Town households are severely food insecure

6/12

Average household dietary diversity score

Implications

Strengthening policy coherence and coordination

Building healthy food environments requires a multi-sectoral, whole-of-government approach that can harmonize mandates across city departments such as health, urban planning, water and sanitation, and environmental management, amongst others. Mandated routine communication channels, data sharing, and aligned program goals facilitates greater evidence-informed decision-making, reduces redundancies, and promotes cost savings and better coordination of services.

Creating healthier urban food environments

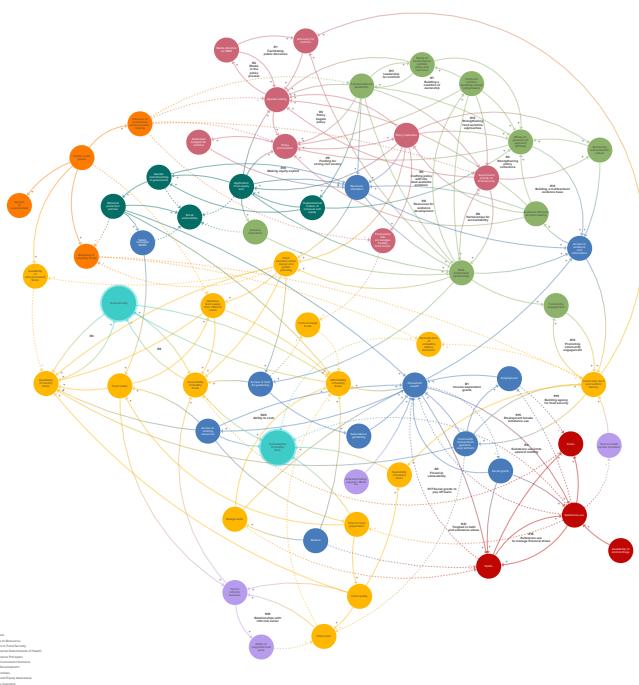
Cape Town can improve the accessibility and affordability of healthy food options by requiring consideration of the impacts on food security when permitting developments and licenses for food outlets and shops. Food-sensitive regulations in spatial planning can curtail the dominance of ultra-processed food retailers, support and integrate informal food business, and diversify food options.

The value of funding for nutrition

Creating healthier food environments within Cape Town is often cited as an unfunded mandate. Dedicated and shared budgets for multi-sectoral nutrition-sensitive policies help distribute responsibility for policy goals and move the city closer to realizing the constitutional Right to Food. Costs for nutrition-sensitive policies (i.e., double-duty actions) provides greater return on investment in improved health outcomes through higher labor earnings, decreased healthcare costs, and reduced premature mortality.

Key findings

- 1 A whole-of-government approach is central to facilitating greater access to evidence and to maintaining nutrition as a key government priority.
- 2 The City can create a more sustainable and integrated urban food system that promotes healthier dietary options through changes in spatial planning.
- 3 Increasing dedicated funding creates greater leverage for nutrition policy action.



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