

# DOUBLE BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Need to close the gap in food & nutrition policy

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## The double burden of malnutrition is a crisis

- Nearly 12% of the population experiences chronic hunger, with stunting among children under 5 years remaining stagnant at 27%
- High prevalence of overweight / obesity among adult women (68%), men (31%), and adolescents (21%), with a concomitant high burden of diabetes and hypertension
- Comprehensive food and public nutrition policies have been developed but are insufficient to address this double burden of malnutrition

## Gaps in food and nutrition policy

In 2023/2024 FoodSAMSA conducted an assessment of food and nutrition policy in South Africa, revealing the following gaps in food and nutrition policy:

Restriction of food marketing targeted at children in schools and in print and online media

Regulation of the retail food sector, in particular zoning laws

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Public funding for population nutrition

Platforms for interaction between government, civil society, and the commercial sector

Intersectoral / Health-in-All policies



### Priority Actions

#### Regulate the promotion,

sponsorship and advertisement of unhealthy food and drinks directed at children.

#### Increase

the sugar-sweetened beverage taxation to 20%.

#### Develop and implement

policies to regulate relationships with and influence of commercial actors.

**12%**

of the population experiences chronic hunger

**27%**

of children under 5 years experience stunting

**68%**

prevalence of overweight/obesity among adult women

**31%**

adult men

**21%**

adolescents



# Implications

## Healthy starts for children

Clear and enforceable regulations on foods sold and marketed to children in the school environment will promote healthier food choices and reduce exposure to unhealthy food marketing. The school years are a critical period of development for promoting lifelong healthy dietary behaviors. Children are a vulnerable population and spend most of their waking hours in school. Therefore, school needs to be a safe and health-promoting environment.

## Increased public revenue and lower healthcare costs

Unhealthy food consumption often displaces consumption of healthier foods and is associated with higher prevalence of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and hypertension. The economic impact of reducing rates of obesity and NCDs on healthcare costs and loss of productive life years can be significant, especially for lower income populations. Implementing /increasing taxes on unhealthy foods, for instance on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), raises public revenue and can in turn be used to fund health promotion programs, thereby preventing millions of obesity-related healthcare costs.

## Systems approach to governance

Mandating a health impact assessment as part of socioeconomic assessments in policy development reduces fragmentation and offers a platform for intersectoral governance. This enables a systems approach that preemptively accounts for potential negative /positive externalities, thereby creating stronger and more coherent policies that reduce policy overlap, promote more efficient use of resources and reduce costs.

### Food labelling

Ingredient list and nutrient declaration	High
Nutrition	High
FOP labels	High
Menu labelling	Low

### Food marketing

Restrictions in broadcast media	Medium
Restrictions in digital media	Low
Restrictions in other media (outdoor etc.)	Low
Restrictions where children gather	Low
Restrictions on food packaging	Medium

### Food prices

Minimize taxes on healthy foods	Medium
Increase taxes on unhealthy foods	Medium
Subsidies favour healthy foods	Medium
Income support progs. for healthy food	Low

### Funding

Population nutrition budget	Low
Government funded research	Low
Health promotion agency	Low

### Food provision

Healthy policies in schools	Medium
Healthy policies in other public settings	Medium
Support systems for the public sector	Medium
Support system for private companies	Medium
Provisions for breastfeeding	Medium
Access to WASH in public spaces	Low

### Food in retail

Zoning laws limit unhealthy restaurants	Low
Zoning laws encourage F&V outlets	Low
Support systems for food stores	Low
Support systems for informal retailers	Low
Support systems for restaurants	Low

### Platforms & interactions

Coordination across government	Medium
Government and commercial sector	Low
Government and civil society	Low
System-based approach	Low

### Health in policies

Coherences	Medium
Health impact assessments (HIAs)	Low

Extent of implementation: High Medium Low

Results from 2023/2024 policy implementation assessment.

High = 60-80%, Medium = 40-60%, Low = <40%

Source: FoodSAMSA 2024

## Key findings

- 1 Guidelines regarding the foods sold at tuck shops around school are limited and implemented on a voluntary basis.
- 2 Taxation on sugar-Sweetened beverages (SSB) has been implemented, but far below the level recommended by national and international experts.
- 3 Health impact assessments are not routinely done during policy development.

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